

## **Royal Contract 401**

### **Chapter 401 - Won The Biggest Prize**

"Alex! Finally, you made it," Evan shouted beyond the noise that echoed in the room. "I thought you would make some lame excuse again." He clapped his friend on the shoulders as greetings.

It had been a while since the group was complete again. Alex and Marcus were usually too busy to join them on their night outs. Or Alex was with Dani, being the perfect boyfriend.

Evan swore that he was not ready for that kind of life or any commitment of that sort. He was happy to be single, to have complete control of his life without thinking of another one.

"If you ask me, I would have stayed at home rather than be here, but I do miss my friends." He responded, sitting next to his other friends.

He had long given up clubbing and acting like a man without responsibilities, even before he met his fiancée. But now that he was about to get married, he was ready to give up his bachelor's life.

"We are glad that you still remember us. We thought that you had drowned under the skirt of your fiancée." Evan continued his clowning around.

He could not help it. He missed his friend, who had stopped seeing much of them since Alex found what he called the one. He would make fun of him until he realized what he was missing.

"Funny, Evan. But, are we here to make idle chats or drink and have fun?" Alex grabbed the drink that David handed to him.

"Come on, Evan, lighten up." David admonished his other friend. "Hey, it is nice to have you join us again." He turned to Alex, raising his glass to him.

He was glad to see his friend, looking great despite the stress and pressures of his current responsibilities, and then add to that the preparation of his wedding.

"Are you ready for your coming wedding?" Marcus interjected as he placed down his empty glass on the table.

Although he and his friend had worked closely together in the company, bonding moments were limited to drinking coffee with clients or a glass of scotch after a long day.

They rarely talked much about their personal lives except for a few words here and there. Nothing too in-depth. But Marcus was glad that they were here now, having a few laughs with their friends.

"Who would have thought that you would marry her for love? Remember, this all started as an agreement." David stated the fact of the matter.

He still remembered that he was the one who drew the contract that led to this foreseeable union. He envied his friend for jumping with both his eyes open into this relationship.

Somehow, it made him think about his choices in life. He needed to rethink his plans for the future. He was starting to believe that settling down was not such a bad thing.

"Absolutely. I am sure that I am ready." Alex expressed his determination to go through with the wedding, not because of the initial reason why he asked Dani her hand.

But because he knew he could never live without her. She had become everything to him. The very reason why he rose every morning from his sleep.

She had become his motivation to strive harder to reach his dreams. Without her, his life and what he worked hard for would be meaningless.

"Well, I guess you will agree with us when we say that you lost in our bet." Evan looked at him, reminding him of their agreement. "Although, I was hoping that I would lose."

He shook his head, not liking the idea that one of them was finally leaving them for a different life. As the youngest one in the group, he was not ready to let go of what they had. He did not want things to change between them, not just yet.

He also noticed that David was starting to follow in Alex's footsteps. He saw the sign that David was getting into a committed relationship with Rosella.

Although Marcus remained single, he seemed to have changed too. He rarely went out with him or David since he broke up with Jacky. Evan was afraid that he might eventually end up alone one day.

"I guess it is time for me to pay up," Alex stated as he remembered their agreement.

He had forgotten about the other contract he entered with his friend when he decided to offer a fake marriage to Dani. But it did not matter. That contract was not relevant to his situation.

He would pay everything he owed to his friend without blinking an eye. What mattered to him was the woman he was about to marry and the new contract that they were about to sign soon.

"You know you don't have to pay," David said, knowing that it was just a silly game that they played.

He knew that everyone would agree with his statement that there was no reason to honor their arrangement. It could be their advance wedding gift to their friend.

"Yes, I agree." Marcus seconded his friend's declaration. Evan readily acquiesced, too, knowing that the majority had already decided.

He would support his friend with his decision. He did agree that Alex had made the right decision to marry Dani. He had grown to like her as a friend and as an equal partner of his friend.

He could not help but feel slightly sad that he had lost his best buddy to her. But in return, he had gained a new friend in her. So, it was good to say that, in conclusion, it was still a fair trade.

"No, I insist that I should pay. We can never break our rules. Even if I get married, or any one of us does, we still have to continue our friendship and our tradition." Alex stated in front of his friends.

Money was just an object to them, but it was the principle of their friendship that he valued. He could not let go of that even if he tackled on a new path.

He would never forget his friends who had helped him reach his goals. They had been the instrument in his success. He would never turn his back on them.

"I would agree with that." Evan was the first to respond, glad to hear what his friend proclaimed.

He immediately ordered another set of drinks, enjoying probably the very few last moments he would be spending with his friend while he was single.

"Well, I guess we should raise our drinks to our friendship," David said as he extended his hand to the group.

He would like to toss to the friendship they had formed through the years of knowing each other. They had been through some rough times but many great years of fun and exciting adventures together.

"This is to your wedding." Marcus also raised his glass in the air. He wanted to wish his friend luck in the new path that he was about to take.

He suddenly envied his friend for finding what he most valued the most. Alex might have lost the bet.. But still, in the end, he was glad that Alex still won the biggest prize.

## **Chapter 402 - Planning And Compromise**

He walked into the apartment, noticing a noise coming from the living room. "Dani, I am home." He called to her, notifying her of his presence.

But, she did not respond as the sound remained consistent with the buzz coming from the tv screen. He walked towards her, discovering that she was sound asleep. She looked so peaceful, seeming to have no worries.

He remembered the last time he caught her talking in her sleep. He learned that she had dreamt of living with him in her ideal house. She could not wait to be married to him and create their home.

He knelt beside her, staring at her closed eyes. He could still remember the first time they were in this position. It was a memory in his mind that he would never forget.

He pushed the hair that slightly covered her eyes and then ran his hands through her slightly curly hair. He always loved the way it felt when it slid along his fingers, feeling its silky softness.

Then, his eyes shifted back to her luscious, red lips. Her face was bare of any makeup, showing her innocent and natural look. She was already perfect at the moment.

"I love you." He whispered near her face. It was as if she could hear his words. Her lips stretched into a smile. He wondered if it was due to what he said, or she might be dreaming again.

She stirred a little, straightening her body a bit until she found a more comfortable position again. She was still unaware that she was not alone anymore as she returned to blissful sleep.

He smiled at the scene, simply enjoying watching her. He kept his gaze on her face, looking forward to waking up with her every morning for the rest of their lives.

This time, he moved from his position, turning the movie off. Then, he turned, ready to carry Dani back to their room. But before he could lift her in his arms, she opened her eyes.

"Hey, what time is it?" She asked when she felt his touch on her skin. She was instantly awake, slightly startled to discover his presence.

She did not even notice that he had already arrived. Her eyes quickly adjusted to the light in the room as she shifted in her position. "When did you get home?"

The last thing she remembered was watching a movie in the living room while waiting for him to come home. She must be tired, not realizing it, eventually dozing off on the fluffy cushion.

"Just a few minutes ago. Sorry, I am a bit late. The guys would not let me leave early." He planned to have a couple of drinks with his buddies and then come home early.

But, Evan would not have it. He insisted that he joined them a bit longer this time since he was getting married anyway soon. Who knew when they would be able to do this again or if he would ever join them again.

"That is ok. I am happy that you were able to have fun with your friends. You deserve a little break from all the work you had been doing." She assured him that he had nothing to worry about the situation.

She understood his situation. She encouraged him to relax and spend time with his friends, even once in a while. She did not want him to think that just because he was getting married to her. He had to change his ways.

"I did have fun with them. It would have been nice if you could have joined us." He told her as he sat down beside her, cradling her in his arms. Then, he kissed her at the top of her head.

Since they had been together, he never enjoyed doing anything without her by his side. When he was away from her, all he could think about was to get back to her.

"That is so sweet. But it is ok if we enjoy some time apart." She assured him that she did not mind if he had fun without her.

In truth, it was her idea that he should go out and enjoy a boy's night out. She convinced David to invite their group for a drink. She noticed the burden that Alex had carried on his shoulders. Ever since her father handed him the company, he barely had time for himself. She barely remembered the last time Alex did see his friends.

He almost dedicated his time to his job or devoted it to her. She felt guilty that she had monopolized his every waking hour. She believed it was time for her to do something for him in return.

"Anyway, what about we talk about our wedding?" He suggested, feeling he should at least show interest in it since he barely contributed to the preparation.

"What about it?" She asked, excited to talk about anything that involved their wedding.

She could not wait for their wedding day. She could almost see herself in her beautiful white gown. Then, spending the rest of her days with the man she loved.

"Well, it is actually about the afterward." He realized that with all the things happening in their lives. They had never discussed anything else, especially what she would like for their future.

He did not want to plan by himself. As his wife, he wanted her to have an equal share in the decision-making. He would like to get her opinion on everything that might affect her life.

"Yes, I think we should talk about it." She agreed with him, thinking it was an urgent discussion they should prioritize.

They had focused on the wedding that the other issues surrounding their marriage were left unattended.

She realized that they did not even think of their living arrangement after the wedding. The only thing that they agreed upon was the number of kids they planned to have.

She also believed that there was more to marriage than a beautiful wedding.. It needed a lot of planning and compromise to make it work.

### **Chapter 403 - Running For The Hills**

He stood by the stove, frying some eggs for breakfast and preparing a pot of coffee on the side. He would like to surprise his wife before she woke up with a delicious breakfast.

He sensed a commotion on the other side of the apartment. He could hear someone moving around in the living room. He quickly set aside the pan, not trusting to leave it on the fire. He did not want the eggs to end up burnt by the time he returned.

When he reached the other room, he saw two large suitcases on the side of the sofa. He wondered what they were for, but he could already guess.

"Tyra, what is going on? Where are you going?" He looked at her, confused with the scene in front of him. He finally asked when Tyra moved towards the room, carrying another large bag.

He was not aware that she had any plans to travel, still puzzled with what was going on with her. He always thought that she planned to stay with him for the duration of their arrangement.

Somewhat he suddenly felt a bit disappointed that she was leaving. But he still denied any feelings for her. He just felt a connection with her because they had something in common.

They both ran away from their past, using their union as a way to move forward to the future. It was an arrangement for a common goal, nothing more. Finding friendship amid their contract was just a bonus.

"I am sorry, Troy. I did not want to do this to you on short notice, but I have a job offer." She quickly related to him the call she had received that morning.

When he did not respond right away, she continued to explain to him her situation. "I have to leave on the next flight to Paris." She finished before he could say another word.

She had been on leave for some time from her career as she tried to reassess her decisions in life. But receiving a call this morning gave her an excuse to move out of the house.

She was unsure why she suddenly felt the need to create a space between her and her fake husband. The apartment was more than big enough for the both of them, but she still felt suffocated.

Then, she kept telling herself she only wanted to get back to her job. If she wanted to be on top again, she would have to work doubly hard to reach her former supermodel status.

"Oh! That sounds great." He was surprised about her news, but he knew he could not stop her. "But, do you have to leave so soon?" He stopped behind the sofa and rested his hands on its backrest, continuing to watch her reaction.

It was for the betterment of her career. It would be good for her to get back on her feet and start working again. Troy was glad that she received another offer.

He believed, like him, getting busy would help them achieve their goals. Then, it would also, at the same time, heal their broken hearts.

"Yes, it is a good opportunity for my come back to the modeling industry. The offer was too good to pass up." She stated as she moved to sit down on the lone chair.

She was at least not lying about that. She did believe it would be good for her to return to the job that she loved. It was the only time that she could feel free to be herself.

"Well, if you think that would be best for you. Then, go for it. Don't let me stop you from pursuing your passion." He recommended to her, knowing the feeling of doing what he loved because it made him happy.

"Thanks for trying to understand." She tilted her head so that she could look at his face.

She could not read whatever was going through his mind as his eyes danced in the bright light. However, she could feel her heart was in pain.

It was as if something was squeezing it from inside of her. She did not understand why her body was reacting in such a manner.

It was as if she was experiencing another heartbreak. She declined her conclusion and questioned how she acted, But circumstances told her that it was no different. But it could not be since she was not in love with him, not even one bit.

She did respect and trust him even if they had recently just met. In her book, time and long relationship was not the only basis for friendship.

She found him as a genuine person and a good friend. She believed that it would be hard for her to find another man like him. She was lucky to bump into him.

"Well, it is the least I can do." He said, accepting that there was nothing else he could do. She was not a prisoner in this marriage, and she was free to come and go as she pleased.

But it did not mean that he would be happy to see her go. But he could hope that she would decide to keep their marriage during the period they agreed upon and return home after her job contract.

"Do you want me to drive you to the airport?" He asked since pretending to be her doting husband was part of his obligation. They did not sign a binding contract. It was more of a verbal agreement.

But they both knew that they would honor it even without papers involved. Their words, especially Troy was as good as if they had an ironclad contract. He would never break it.

Although he sometimes questioned his ability to think and if that was a wise decision, he still did not see anything wrong with it. On the contrary, he believed it was the right thing to do.

He would not lose anything if this marriage failed. While on Tyra's side, he did not find anything wrong since he only wanted to help. But overall, his reasons for doing it remained a mystery to him.

"By the way, I cooked breakfast. Maybe you would want to eat first before leaving." He offered, remembering the eggs he was cooking.

He did not see any point in wasting the food he had already prepared. It was as if it would take that long to have breakfast with him. Besides, he did not want Tyra to travel on an empty stomach.

"I still have an hour before I have to leave, so breakfast seems to be a good idea." She did feel her stomach rumbling. "And I accept your offer for a ride."

She did not see any point in hurrying up or anything wrong about eating breakfast with the man she called now as her husband. Besides, she was bound to return to this house to fulfill her part of the bargain.

She would only be gone for a month.. She understood that it would be more than enough time to sort out her life without having any distractions. What was one more time spent in his company before she started running for the hills?

#### **Chapter 404 - Imminent Threat**

"What is your progress?" The voice on the other line of the screen stated, making the other person think of what to answer.

"Sir, we are right on schedule. But, we think there will be a problem with the execution of the plans. We are now working on smoothening it out." The man replied to the unknown caller.

He had accepted a new job where he and his team received a surmountable amount of money for their services. He prided himself on his work and professionalism.

He made sure that the skills of his men were above par with the rest of his competition, making them one of the best in this chosen trade.

"Send me the details of the problem and your suggestions on how to resolve the situation." He instructed the man he hired to do the job he wished done.

He did not want anything to screw the job. He assigned one of the best men on the field, wanting to make sure that his wishes would materialize.

"Right away, Sir." The man once again ensured his new client that he was working hard on it.

He had created a name for himself in this business due to his dedication to perfecting his craft. He trained for this job his entire life, so nothing should stop him from accomplishing his task.

He also expected the same quality of perfection from every man he hired to work for him. Each man had to undergo rigorous training and approach each situation with a quick mind and excellent strategic thinking.

"I expect a lot from you. Don't let me down." The client expressed his opinion on the matter, with a hint of warning in his tone.

This team had made a name for themselves, making him believe that they were capable of achieving the objective of their mission. But their services did come with a high price.

"Yes, Sir. You can count on us." The man on the other line responded with affirmation. "Our men are also working on gathering more information regarding the wedding."

He had heard that many rumors were circulating about the wedding. Different scenarios were coming up in the social scenes, making people speculate, all possible outcomes of the wedding.

Although he could do this job even in his sleep, he still did not want to take any chances. Anything could blindside him and turn

a positive outcome upside down.

"Make sure that we have all the details, and then update me. I would not want anything to slip through our fingers." The unknown caller insisted, thinking of the time he had already spent working on his plans.

He would not allow all his efforts to go to waste. He was not ready to accept failure, not yet when he could still do something about it. The call ended with a few more instructions coming from him.

He could not allow anything that could ruin their plans. He was paying him a great deal of money. He did not want to be disappointed. He demanded results for what he paid.

In another scene, another call was taking place. The phone started ringing, alerting the owner of an incoming call. He quickly snatched the phone that sat on the surface table and pressed the answer button.

"Yes, Dad. What is it?" He still asked, even if he already knew why he was calling.

He had heard of the rumors that were circulating in his hometown. Despite not having any concrete proof of its authenticity, he would not ignore the warning signs that his instincts were telling him.

"Alex." He acknowledged his son before continuing. "I called because our investigators still could not find anything substantial that would indicate that the threat is real."

As the head of the Council of Elders, it was his obligation to uphold the peace and order in the entire nation. Anything that would threaten that had to be dealt with accordingly.

As a father, he would do everything in his power to protect him, even if he had to use all the resources of the kingdom to find the culprit.

"Let me help. I can send some of my investigators to help find out the truth behind the news." Alex wished that they were wrong.

He hoped that it was just a rumor made by people who had nothing to do but create havoc on other people's lives. It would be simpler, and he would have nothing to fear for his fiancée's life.

"Just give me a few more hours to set it up." He continued, not wanting to take any chances.



He would rather overreact to the matter than play complacent to the possible danger. He could not let anything happen to their wedding, especially his future wife.

"Fine." The duke finally conceded, knowing that every help was more than welcome.

A wedding event in the kingdom was not an easy task to accomplish. Moreover, if the one getting married was part of the immediate royal family.

"How about Dani? How is she?" The duke asked, concerned that these rumors might be affecting her mental state. It might cause more pressure not only from the wedding but the threat too.

"She is fine, Dad." He assured his father that everything in his end was running smoothly.

He was more than glad that lately, Dani was more cooperative with his suggestions, especially when it involved her safety.

She had finally stopped herself from fighting him in his every turn to protect her.

"I am glad to hear that." The duke said before ending the call.

He would like to see his son and his fiance soon. But due to the wedding preparations, it had been a challenge to do so. Even Katherine was dying to have a glimpse of them.

He finished the call with a determined note in his tone. He would make sure that his son would have the best wedding in history. Nothing would be able to stop the ceremony from happening.

In another part of the town, a meeting was happening. A few people gathered inside the room, where a man presided over the gathering.

"Are you sure about the threat to my daughter's wedding?" He questioned the report he just received today. He wondered if Alex already knew about the rumors but kept it from him.

He did not mind if he hid the news from him. He could already tell that his wife might have something to with that. He could not blame them for thinking of his health condition.

He did not doubt Alex's loyalty to his daughter. He was sure if he knew about this, he was already on top of the situation. Alex would make sure that his daughter would always be safe with his family.

"Yes, but I still have no concrete proof of the plans and the motive." The investigator notified him as he rubbed his chin, thinking of his next move. "We are still gathering intel on the matter, Mr. Hamilton."

He had heard from a reliable source that an unknown wealthy man contracted mercenaries to create a mess in the kingdom, especially on the wedding day.

But he was still searching for concrete evidence to support the claim. As of now, everything was just mere hearsay. No one or nothing yet could pinpoint the source of the rumor.

"Then, update me with anything that you will come up with," Ethan ordered his man.

He had protected his daughter from harm during her entire life, now was not the time to fail. He could see how much marrying Alex meant to his daughter. He would make sure that it would happen without a hitch.

Besides, he did like Alex to be his son-in-law. He would not let anything that would jeopardize that from happening. He might not be in a position of power anymore, but he still had many connections.

"What is the meaning of this?" A woman's voice echoed in the room, making Ethan look in her direction.

He could see the anger in her eyes but mixed with concern. He understood what she was going through, but she needed to realize that he could not just sit and watch in this case.

He had to help in controlling the situation. It was their daughter's life at stake, and he would not allow anyone to harm her in any way.

"Don't be mad, Laura. I just received a piece of disturbing news." He was not about to lie about this to his wife.

His wife might be overprotective of his health, but when it came to their daughter. He knew that she would understand why he was doing this.

"What is it?" She suddenly sounded alarmed as she continued towards the center of the room until she stood beside his chair.

She waited for him to answer her, but she could already sense that it had something to do with her child. Call it mother's instinct, but she could tell from the look in his eyes that there was something wrong.

"It had something to do with the wedding." He related to his wife what he had learned so far. It was nothing much yet, but he would make sure to get to the bottom of the matter.

He might have kept thousands of secrets from his wife regarding the business or anything to protect her. But he never did keep anything from her about their daughter.

He believed that as his partner in raising their only child. She deserved to know everything that was happening with her.. That included the imminent threat to Dani's wedding.

#### **Chapter 405 - Only One Thing Or One Man**

"Jacky, I promise. I will meet you there tomorrow." Dani remembered swearing to her last night before she left her in the office to be alone to finish her work.

Jacky wanted an affirmation that she would not ditch her and their friends tomorrow on their date. She even offered to fetch her, so she could have some guarantee that she would arrive on time.

But she declined the idea, only vowing that she would not forget and be on time. Although her words were not exactly reassuring. There were several instances where she had forgotten about her commitment to her friends due to work.

"Did you forget something?" She shouted when she heard a movement just outside her door. She automatically thought it was Jacky returning to get something or remind her again of their plans.

She did not even look up from the files she was working on, already convinced that Jacky would show up in her office any minute now.

"I hope I am not disturbing you." A manly voice uttered in the silence, the sound reverberating in the four corners of her room.

She quickly looked up to see the unexpected visitor, finding a man standing by the doorway. Although the tone sounded familiar, she was still slightly startled, not expecting any other company.

"Hi, Gerald." She quickly greeted, recovering from her initial surprise. "Not at all. What are you doing here so late?" She asked as her heartbeat decreased upon learning that she had nothing to fear.

It was just one of the partners, probably wanting something from her. Since the case they were working on had ended in a legal settlement out of court, there was no more reason for them to see each other.

He did help her in the case of Jacob, but only at first. Then, she managed to handle the situation by herself, not needing his assistance again.

"I had planned to see you earlier, but I found myself buried under a new case. I only have time to see you now, so I took the chance, wondering if you are working late." Gerald explained why he was standing by her office after office hours.

But, he already had an idea that she was still around. He had observed that she had been working overtime in this couple of weeks.

"I am hoping that I can finish some of my paperwork before I take my leave." She informed him. "I don't want to leave anything in a mess." Then, she realized that he was still by the door. "Please, come in." She invited him inside the room.

She planned to take a very long vacation before and after the wedding. Her work had been her priority since she became a lawyer. But now that she was getting married, she wanted Alex to be on the top of the list.

So, for now, she did not want her clients to feel that she abandoned them and just handed them off. She would make sure that her cases were either resolved. At least, they had some initial assessment before passing them to the next lawyer.

"That is what I admire about you. Your work ethics are commendable." He could not help but compliment her as he took a seat on the available chair.

He had experienced firsthand how she handled herself during difficult situations. She had acted calmly and professionally even in stressful conditions. She had been a great asset to his team.

She never allowed her interest to cloud her judgment, always thinking of what would be best for her clients. She did not do anything to gain recognition but only sought fair justice.

"I know you are no different from me. We both want to serve what is best for our clients." She instantly reacted to his praise.

She did not want to think that what she did was anything special. She believed that many lawyers liked her, and Gerald still thought of the client first before their own.

"By the way, I have a new case. I only thought that you might be interested in working on it." He offered to her, bringing a file with him to her attention.

He knew that it was unlikely that she would accept the case, but he would like to try. He was impressed with her performance when they had worked together. He would like to partner with her again.

She took the folder he held close to her and peeked at its content. Based on the initial summary of the case, it would seem intriguing. But she would only know the entire story of the case once she reviewed all the information.

"This looks interesting." She closed the file and gently placed the file in front of her. "If I did not have a prior commitment, I might take a deeper look at it. But..."

In her initial assessment, she did find the case something that she might work on if she had the time. But as it happened, she could not commit to anything new when she was about to leave and did not know when she would be back.

"But, you are getting married and taking a long break." Gerald decided to finish the statement for her, disappointed with her answer.

He did see the memo that she had filed a leave of absence for two months. It was in preparation for the wedding ceremony and the afterward celebrations and honeymoon.

He did not want to think that he had lost her for good. But it was just a temporary setback in his plans to have her for himself. He still believed that if fate meant her to be with him, and then he would find a way.

"Yes." She said with a bit of regret, looking at Gerald in the eyes. She did enjoy working with him. He was easy to get along with because of his light humor. She also learned a lot from him.

Working on cases that challenged her mind at the same time helped those who were deeply in need were close to her heart. She would not have declined it if the situation was only different.

She already promised herself that this time work would be the least of her priority.. She planned to devote all her attention to only one thing or one man.

## **Chapter 406 - A Lame Party**

"Hey, where are you?" The voice of Jacky reverberated on her phone as soon as she answered the call.

Jacky suddenly felt anxious that her friend, once again, had fallen from the wagon and forgotten about their date. She and the rest of their other friends were already waiting for her.

It was very seldom that they would see them in one location. Because of the busy schedules in their lives, it had been hard to gather them in the same place and at the same time.

"Wait." She said as she rushed out of the elevator and into her car. "Sorry, Jacky, I am on my way. Give me five minutes."

"Dani, are you back in the office?" She shouted in disbelief when she heard the ding of the elevator. She quickly assumed that she went to work on the weekend and forgot about their plans.

"No." She automatically responded, not wanting her friend to get the wrong idea.

She knew she promised not to be late, but it was already fifteen minutes past their appointed time. In her defense, she planned to leave the apartment early. But Alex had other plans. Not that she was complaining. She did enjoy what he had in mind as much as he did.

At least, she could honestly say that she was not delayed by work this time around. "I was just delayed by something that came up." But how could she explain to her friend her very early rendezvous?

"I swear I was not in the office, but I am now driving towards you as I speak." It was the best she could do as her friend remained quiet, waiting for her explanation.

"Fine," Jacky said on the line, breathing an exasperated sigh.

She knew that there was nothing else she could do but accept her friend's very vague reason. "Please, don't stop for anything."

"I promise." She knew that her word still meant something to her friend, despite the several times that she had failed her.

She ended the call, concentrating on the road. She stepped on the gas, hoping to make the car go faster. But not fast enough to call attention from the authority. Besides, the traffic would not allow her to go a lot faster than the maximum limit.

Thankfully, she arrived at their designated lunch location in one piece. She went down from where she parked the car, a few distances from the entrance. She did see Ben following her, but he had to park at the end of the row since it was already full.

She was walking on the empty and quiet parking lot when her phone vibrated on her bag. She rummaged inside her bag as she continued on her path when she sensed an eerie feeling. She felt like someone was watching her.

But when she looked around and watched Ben, stopping the car at the very end. Except for the two of them, the place was devoid of life.

"Yes," Dani quickly answered without looking at the screen. Her eyes were still scanning the place for another entity that might be around, just hiding.

She could not help but feel paranoid after hearing from Alex about the threat to their wedding. Just like what Alex was doing, she was not taking it lightly. She was taking extra precautions.

"Please tell me that you are already outside." Jacky pleaded on the phone. Well, it was almost thirty minutes since their date. She was already very late.

Jacky had arranged this luncheon as a pre-wedding gift to her friend. She wanted to make her happy and reunite her with her long-lost friends before she ended her single life.

A few of them were from her childhood. While the rest, the women she had met along the way to where she was now. Some of them were also her friends, but there were some who she only met today.

But she managed to trace them all for her friend and arranged this get-together. As her maid of honor, it was her obligation to make sure that the remaining days of her single life would be full of exciting memories.

"What is so important about this lunch anyway?" She finally asked, feeling something was fishy.

She had been late so many times before, but she never saw Jacky this agitated. She suddenly forgot about the earlier incident as her attention went into getting inside fast.

When she felt a slight bump on her right shoulder, making her stop in her tracks. She almost dropped the phone in her hands. She heard the man say sorry, but he continued on his way.

She did not even get to see his face. But she quickly turned away from the man, remembering the phone that was still in her hands.

"Dani, are you still there?" She heard when she placed it back on her ears.

When she turned to look at the man, once again, he was already several meters away. But she saw that Ben was already walking towards her. She wondered if Ben witnessed the tiny incident.

But then again, she dismissed the idea of asking him, not wanting to make a big deal out of something that might be nothing at all.

"I'm sorry. I am almost at the door." She did not hear the rest of what she said, but it did not matter. When she entered the restaurant, she was surprised to see who was waiting for her inside.

Her friend was by the door, already waiting for her. Then several of her friends stood behind her with glasses on their hands. A banner was hanging on the walls, together with an assortment of ribbons and balloons.

With Jacky's signal, everyone raised their glasses to her and shouted. "Congratulations!"

Jacky had rented the entire place to surprise her with a pre-wedding surprise lunch with all her friends. Well, she did not expect her bachelorette party would be a wholesome event.

She was expecting something more lively and eventful compared to this, especially when Jacky was the one planning the program.

She just expected more, not that she was disappointed with her efforts.. She was only surprisingly not anticipating a lame party.

#### **Chapter 407 - For Lack Of A Better Word**

Her face did show an element of surprise worn in her expression. The delight in Jacky's face and the rest of the guests were an indication that they were satisfied with their efforts.

"How did you manage to gather all of our friends in one place?" She questioned her maid of honor, impressed with her skills at organizing.

She walked further inside the room, with Jacky at her side. She greeted, one at a time, the people that she had met who became close to over the years.

Most of them had been very dear to her heart, making a big dent in her heart and molding what she was today. Some of them were acquaintances that had a significant impact on her life.

"You know me. It is just a piece of cake." Jacky whispered near her ears as she acknowledged what she had done with pride. If there was one thing she was extremely good at, it was her skill to manage a social gathering.

It would have been difficult, but since Dani was well-loved by their friends, it was not hard to convince them to set aside time for their friend. They immediately came to celebrate a momentous occasion in their friend's life.

After the greetings, the crowd went back to their designated seats and waited for the commentator to begin the short program Jacky had planned.

"Welcome every one of you, friends of the bride, I assume." The host began announcing over the mike to the men and women gathered around the enormous space.

The crowd cheered, agreeing with the host's assumption. Most of them were honored to be considered a friend of the bride. She was indeed a great person.

"Can I ask Ms. Daniella Hamilton, also known as Dani by all her friends, to come and join me?" The host beckoned the bride to the stage prepared for them for this particular event.

"What is this?" She asked Jacky, confused with the occasion. It was certainly not what she expected from a bachelorette's party.

Although, her idea of such only came from what she had seen in the movies. She never really attended one, always excusing that she had been busy.

Jacky held both of her hands in hers, facing her and looking through her eyes. "I only want you to have fun and share this moment with the people that have been a part of your past."

"Soon, you will be building new memories and a great future, most probably meeting new friends along the way. I want you to remember that no matter what, you are loved by many." Jacky continued before releasing her hands to shove her towards the few steps up the stage.

Jacky could feel a tear was about to drop down on her cheeks, but she stopped them. It was not the time for any dramatics. It was a day of celebration for her friend.

"Most of you told me that it had been a while since you last saw your friend. But you had been witnessed for a portion of her life, contributing to what she is today." The host continued as he looked at the bride by her side.

Dani was impressed with what Jacky had done. She could only wonder what would happen next as she stood silently on the stage, looking over the people that she had been friends with at some point in her life.

Her guests came from various social standings. Some came from her social circles. Some she met at school. The rest she met through her work, but all had become a significant part of her life, one way or the other. She was amazed at how Jacky had managed to gather them in one event.

"Why don't you take the hot seat as we continue with our surprise." The host guided her to a lone chair at the center. "Now, to go on with the program."

The host took out what would seem to be an eye patch to use to cover her eyes. She moved towards Dani and signaled for her to close her eyes.

The piece of cloth covered her eyes, and then the darkness consumed her sight. There was a tiny slit of light coming from the bottom portion of the covering but still not enough to reveal the surprise that was waiting for her.

"Excuse me, what is happening?" She asked, a bit wary as she could not see anything.

She could hear her friends shouting with excitement, but she had no idea what could be causing the commotion. Despite straining her ears to gather some information, she still had no clue.

"Be patient, my dear." The host whispered near her ears as the clapping and shouting intensified. There were several who also hollered and whistled their excitement.

"Are we all ready to reveal our surprise?" The host asked the guests, who simultaneously shouted yes.

She clapped her hand, and the music changed into something more upbeat and exciting. It was as if she was about to unravel a mystery.

Then, the host instructed the guests to shout. "Take it off." Everybody cooperated and followed her direction, yelling the words.

Dani could only anticipate what the surprise would be as she remained seated silently on her chair. Could it be a male dancer, which was about to do a lap dance for her?

She was unsure if she should be excited by the idea or repulsed by it. Well, she knew that she should appreciate what Jacky had prepared for her. But could she sit quietly and allow a man to perform a malicious dance in front of her.

Finally, she felt a finger working its way to removing the cloth that blinded her. She was anxious to know what the surprise was but also fearsome that she might not like it.

Then, her eyes were free to see what was in front of her. But it took her a few seconds to adjust her eyes to the bright light directed at them.

"Hi! Surprise!" The man spoke up in an excited voice. He sounded genuinely happy to see her.

"What is going on?" She anxiously asked, suddenly freezing in her place. A surprise was not the way she would describe how she felt.

Shocked was more like it, for lack of a better word.

#### **Chapter 408 - A Car Accident**

She had to blink a couple of times to clear her eyesight. When she could finally see the man in front of her, she was suddenly disgusted with his touch.

She panicked and shoved him with her two hands. But he barely budged from his position, still standing close to where she was sitting. She scanned the area for a way out. She felt the need to escape.



When her eyes landed on the crowd, they cheered and applauded, but she could not see their faces anymore. She wondered how Jacky could betray her as tears ran down her face.

"You just made me the happiest man alive." He responded with a smirk on his face, unmindful of her mournful cries.

Then, he grabbed her hands, showing her the ring on her finger. Her eyes almost came out of their sockets. She stared at the enormity of the diamond in her hand.

She did recognize the ring that he gave to her. She felt confused with the situation. She could not believe that she was still wearing his ring.

"It can't be. I already threw this away. I am not marrying you." She hysterically said, shaking her head in denial.

She wanted to run, but her body could not move. It was as if something was holding her in place. She struggled in the invisible force that pinned her feet to the floor.

"But you are. You already said yes." He insisted, stepping closer to her. "You can't take it back." He grabbed her by the hand again, pulling her closer to him.

"I already said no." She pushed hard against him, determined to be free.

She was not letting him get what he wanted from her. She swatted his hands away from her until she eventually escaped his hold on her.

Finally, she was successful in evading his grip. When he tried to grab her again, his hand landed only on the side of her arm, only grazing it mildly.

"You are not getting away from me that easily. Not this time." He pounced at her, his face contorted with anger.

But once again, she avoided him. As she shifted her body to the right, she found an opening, an opportunity presented before her. In instinct, she kicked him in the groin.

With a satisfied smile, she stepped away from him. Confident that he would never recover from the blow that easily. "But I already did."

She could feel her lips widen as she remembered the way he twisted in anguish. She wished she could have inflicted more pain as payback to all the terrible things he had done.

She was not going to let him bully his way back to her life. She was finally free. She was already happy with her new life in the arms of a good man.

"She needs help." Several voices shouted in the background. It was vagued, but the noises kept coming and going.

"No, I don't." She told them. "I am capable of handling the situation." She continued to inform them as the noises persisted around her. "I already took care of Nick." She shouted this time to make them stop.

Then, silence.

She smiled contentedly, thinking that finally, they had listened. She had proven that she could take care of herself. She could protect herself from a man like Nick.

Then, black shadows took over her consciousness. She could not hear or feel anything. She was neither confused nor conscious as her mind turned blank.

After a few hours, she finally felt her arms ached, remembering the bruise that Nick had given her. "That's ok. It is just a scratch." She uttered, barely audible even to her ears.

She struggled to open her eyes, but something had placed a weight on it, making it hard for her to move even her eyelids. She might have been exhausted in her struggle to escape Nick's hold.

She kept finding an explanation for everything that hurts in her body as she searched her brain for what happened next. All she remembered was going to the party, discovering the trapped waiting for her inside.

It was supposed to be her bachelorette party, but instead, Nick was there to sabotage everything. But the worse part, Jacky had been a part of it.

"No." Her smile faded as anguish replaced her expression. Tears began to fall on her face, landing on the pillow underneath her hair.

She suddenly realized that she was lying on a bed, feeling the soft cushion on her head and back. Then, she felt the warm blanket that covered more than half of her body.

This time, she forced her eyes open. She slowly saw the white ceiling above her. Then, the beeping sounds and the various voices around her became more evident. She was not alone in the room.

"Where am I?" She wanted to ask, but her voice remained trapped inside her vocal cord. No sound came out of her lips, no matter how she tried.

She was not in her room, nor was she at home. She wondered if she was dreaming or was this real. She did not understand as she strained herself to hear what was going on.

She could hardly move her neck as if something was preventing her from twisting it from side to side. All she could do was let her eyes wander from side to side, seeing what was only on her peripheral vision.

"What is this place?" She tried again, but she was disappointed with the same result as she felt her lips move, but no words came out.

She could see blue curtains surrounding her, but she could not tell what it was for as she felt a thirst she had never felt before. "Water." She uttered again. This time, she heard a breathy sound come out of her lips.

Somebody might have heard it as the curtain swished and opened, a figure appeared in front of her, wearing a blue uniform that she finally recognized.

"You're awake." He gently said, trying not to spook her still dizzy mind. "Do you have any idea of what happened to you?"

She only looked at him with puzzlement. She was confused more than ever. Why would this stranger ask her where she was?

"In the hospital." She answered quickly as if that was a dumb question.

Of course, she knew that she was in a hospital, seeing the uniform he was wearing and the familiar beeping and curtains that she recognized earlier.

"Good." He answered her. "Do you know your name?" He asked again.

"What kind of question is that? Of course, I do. My name is Daniella Hamilton." She said in her tiny voice.

"Hi! Daniella." He greeted her. Then, he questioned her again. "Do you know what happened to you?"

This time, she furrowed her brows, thinking of the answer to his question. That was what she was asking herself earlier. But until now, the answer seemed to be out of her reach.

"I don't know." She finally answered him as she searched her muddled brain for answers. "What is going on?" She once again asked the same question.

The stranger finally answered her, looking at her with kindness.. "You were involved in a car accident."

#### **Chapter 409 - Between A Dream And Reality**

Earlier.

Before the accident, she remembered talking on the phone with Jacky as she drove towards the destined location Jacky had set to meet with her.

She remembered stepping on the gas, finding herself late again. She was sure that she did not exceed the speed limit, careful maneuvering around the traffic.

"You had a car accident. Do you remember that?" The doctor repeated the question. "I am Dr. Foxe, by the way." He introduced himself.

He wanted to know the extent of the damage done to her brain. She did suffer a mild concussion during the accident, finding a wound on the top of her head.

"Can I have some water first?" She repeated in a croaky voice. Speaking was a bit harder when all she could feel was the dryness in her mouth.

She looked at the older man, standing near her bed, looking down on her. She could tell that he already had a lot of experience handling situations like her condition.

"Sure. Wait." He answered her as he stepped outside and ordered one of the nurses to grab a glass of water. When he returned to the cubicle, he walked back to her bedside.

He slowly placed a cup of water near her face, guiding the straw into her lips as he waited for her to take a sip. "Drink up, but slowly." He instructed.

He waited until she had drunk a few sips before he removed the cup and put it down on the table. He turned his attention back to her, waiting for her to answer his question.

"I remembered driving earlier, but..." She could not continue as her brain registered another scene in her mind. It was not the accident but a party and her confrontation with Nick.

Did the accident happen after she had escaped Nick's clutches? She could not establish what truly happened as her brain kept flashing back different scenarios on her mind.

"Anyway, don't force yourself if you don't remember clearly. You might still be in shock." The doctor reassured her that it was perfectly normal.

He had patients who also went through the same condition. They forgot the event they experienced due to the trauma they went through.

But eventually, the memories did come back after a while. But it did not guarantee the same time frame for each one. Some remembered it after an hour or so, but some took a lot longer.

"It will eventually come back when the adrenaline wears off." He explained to her, not wanting her to worry about her condition.

He did not find anything alarming in her situation. It was natural for her to feel disoriented after the trauma she had experienced. Right now, he only felt the need to have her undergo several tests. He had to rule out anything he might have overlooked.

"I think I only have a headache. Maybe you can take off all this attached to me." She slowly moved her hand, pointing to the one in her neck and then the machines on the side of her bed.

She was not comfortable having the brace fastened on her neck, nor the machines hooked to her body. She would feel much better if she could go home and have Alex's arms around her.

"First, you have to undergo several tests before I can guarantee that you are on the clear." He told her as he grabbed her chart and scribbled something on it. "Now, shall we have those tests?"

"Do I have a choice?" When he only gave her a friendly smile, she knew her answer. "I guess not." She would have moved her head, but it was stiff with the tight brace around her neck. "Fine." She finally answered as her voice slowly came back to normal. "Do the test?" She rolled her eyes, knowing that it was all she could do as a sign of protest.

The sooner she had the test, the earlier she would get out of this place. She only hoped they did not find anything seriously wrong with her because she did not want more delays at her wedding.

"By the way, we already informed your immediate contact person, your sister, about your situation. Jacky said that she will be here as soon as possible." Dr. Foxe assured her.

She had nothing to worry about regarding her family. They already notified them of her condition.

"Thank you." She replied, slightly relieved to hear his statement. She was glad that she had placed Jacky as her immediate contact person. She did not want her parents to worry about her condition when she felt fine.

She would not want Alex to rush to her side, knowing there was no need. She did not want to suffer the same fate she had for being a bit careless.

But she still could not remember what happened to her as her mind played a different memory, omitting the portion of the accident.

"Just have the test, so we can be sure that you will be just fine." Dr. Foxe told her as she held on to her head, still feeling the steady ache. It was the only indication that she was indeed in a collision accident.

The doctor ordered a series of tests done on her, chatting instructions to the other residents on the floor. "Go with them, and I will review your results as soon as they are out."

She only nodded, finding that talking was putting a strain on her voice, and she was still weak from the recent event. If she wanted to get out of here sooner, she had to conserve her remaining energy, she thought.

"How long will all of those tests take and for the results to come out?" She asked the nurse pushing her wheelchair to the room where she would be having her first test, a CT-Scan of her head.

She knew that she was already wasting time by being here. She had to go home, where Alex was probably already waiting for her. She did not even know the time.

"A few hours." The nurse answered her as she pushed her into the room.

She underwent several tests before the doctor admitted and transferred her to a permanent room. Once lying on the clean and sterile bed, she began to think of her circumstance.

She stared at the clean white wall in front of her as if she was watching a movie. She played the scene again inside her head, trying to decipher the truth.

But before she could find the answer, her eyes slowly closed shut, bringing her into a peaceful sleep. It might be the adrenaline wearing off or the medications kicking in.

Or it could also be exhaustion taking over her body and consciousness. Whatever it was, she was finally getting her much-needed rest.

"It can't be true." Those were her final thoughts that she wanted to utter but sleep already claimed her body before she could deny what was playing on her mind.

She would not accept that Nick still played a valuable part in her life. That could not be true. She was now getting married to Alex. That was what she wanted to remember.

She did remember meeting him and the memories they had built together.. But her brain was still playing tricks on her as she felt confused between a dream and reality.

#### **Chapter 410 - An Accident Or A Foul Play**

Ben was following Dani closely when the accident happened. Fortunately, he was a defensive driver who had easily maneuvered his car away from the accident. If not, he would be one of the piles of tangled metals on the street.

He immediately went out of his car to check on Dani. He scanned the chaos and counted five vehicles involved in the accident. At the front of the pack was Dani's car.

He simultaneously took out his phone and dialed for help. He reported the incident and made a quick assessment of the situation.

He debated for a second if he should call his boss right away or check on Dani first, but the latter won. Every second counts. His boss could wait. Then, he returned his phone to his pocket.

In instinct, he moved into the wreckage, checking if he could reach Dani's side. It was a tight squeeze, but he managed to work around the carnage of twisted metals until he was standing outside her window.

"Dani, are you alright?" He automatically asked but then again internally berated himself. Of course, she was not, not after she involved herself in the accident, he told himself.

"Dani, can you hear me?" He asked this time. She did not even move or acknowledge him when he repeated to call her name.

She seemed to be unconscious but still breathing from how her chest moved. It continued to go up and down as air entered her lungs. But it was slowing down.

He knew he had no choice as he moved to the backside of the car. He took off his jacket and rolled the cloth in his hands before smashing it on the side mirror.

Glasses shattered, flying across the backseat and onto the floor. Clearing the remaining glass, Ben slid his hands inside the window and reached for the lock in the front seat.

Once he unlocked the door, he quickly opened it, giving him access to her injured body. He could now clearly see some of the damage she incurred during the accident.

In an accident like this, he was aware he could not simply move her body. It might cause her more harm than good. All he could do now was try to help her in any way he could until help arrived.

He moved his two fingers into the side of her neck as he felt her pulse. It was still beating strong, a sign that she was still fighting for survival.

"Dani," Ben called her name as he gently shook her shoulders, trying to wake her up.

He could see a little blood gushing on her forehead, an indicator of a head injury. Then, a few bruises on her arms that was visible to him.

Luckily, the airbag deployed just in time to save her from crashing to the steering wheel or flying through the front windshield.

"Dani." He repeated to call her name, hoping that she would finally respond. But she remained immobile on her seat.

He quickly pulled out the pocket knife hidden on his ankle to stab the airbag that would release her body between the bag and the car seat. But then, he decided against it.

He could not risk causing permanent damage to her spine if he moved her and accidentally severe a part of the vertebrae. Instead, he just stood by her side and guarded her in her sleep until the paramedics arrived.

"Dani, stay with me. Help is on the way." He held her hand to give her support, so she would know that she was not alone.

He had guarded her since the very start of her relationship with his boss. He had learned to like her for the person that she was. She was always trying to be independent, not wanting to be a burden to anyone, not even to him.

But Alex had treated him like a brother, not just a paid nobody. He believed it was only fair that he returned the favor. He would risk his life to protect and keep her safe.

He did not only see the physical beauty she possessed but the inner glow that came from the purity of her soul. She was just like his boss, Alex. She was selfless.

He was ready to offer his life to a woman like her because she was not just anybody anymore. This beautiful princess in front of him became family as soon as she agreed to marry the prince.

"Hang in there, Dani. Help is almost here." He whispered near her as he continued to keep her hand in a firm hold.

He heard the ambulance stop just beyond the wreckage, but the siren kept ringing in his ears. He could see the paramedic teams working their way to the victims. "Here, please help her." He beckoned two of them in his direction.

The only time he had breathed deeply was when he saw her attached to the machines inside the ambulance on her way to the hospital.

Now, he felt that he had failed his prince when he did not foresee the accident before it happened. But he would make up for it. He would figure out what caused the accident.

He followed in his car towards the hospital, reviewing the following incident. He recalled from memory the sequence of events that led to the car crash.

Now that Dani was in good hands, it was time to contact his boss and inform him of the incident. Taking his phone out of his pocket, he dialed his number.

He had already prepared himself for his questions. He already guessed that he would first ask about Dani's initial condition. He also foresaw that he would want to know the details of the car collision.

"Sir, I think there is something else that you should know." He stated after reporting Dani's condition.

"What is it?" Alex could hear the alarm in his voice. He already knew that there was something else he had not told him yet.

"It had something to do with the car collision." Ben began as he continued to the hospital, tailing the ambulance in front of him. He already knew what his boss would ask him about this incident.

Was it an accident or a foul play?