

Royal Contract 521

[Chapter 521 - Innocent Until Proven Guilty](#)

She just sat down at her place at the dining table, waiting for his husband and the others to join her for lunch. She usually took care of the arrangements in the kitchen when she visited the grand palace.

Today, she had the chefs prepare a good meal for her family. It was the only way she could distract herself from thinking about Alex and Dani.

She could not keep brooding about her son and daughter-in-law, or she might go crazy. She had to trust her husband. She believed he was doing everything to get their kids back.

"I heard that a reporter is trying to get in touch with you," Katherine informed her husband, who had just walked into the dining hall to have their lunch.

She had a chat with their head of staff earlier. Grace had mentioned to her that her niece had visited that morning. Grace did not want the duchess to hear that from someone else, especially the part where her niece was snooping around.

"Who?" He asked as he sat down right next to his wife at the center of the long table.

He could already think of several names that might have booked an appointment with his secretary. But he had declined at all their request courteously at the moment.

"Ms. Eida Harlowe." She revealed the identity of their intrusive reporter. "Grace informed me that her niece was trying to convince her to reveal? our location."

Personally, she had liked Eida when she first met her. Eida was not like most reporters who only wanted a story for a big paycheck.

She never told a story that did not go through a thorough investigation. She was a responsible journalist who was cautious not to destroy a reputation without sounding evidence.

"What did Grace say to Ms. Harlowe?" Fred asked her wife as he turned to her with interest.

It was rare that his wife would not talk to him about the rumors circulating around the palace. She only did that when she believed that the information was detrimental to their family, the operation of the house, or the welfare of the kingdom.

"Nothing. You know Grace will never spill information about us or anything that goes on around the palace." Katherine defended their most trusted head of their staff.

Grace had been serving the previous duke and duchess before she even entered the family. When she finally married the duke and became the duchess, Grace swore to be loyal to her as well.

"Good. But what else did that reporter want from us? We already gave her the exclusive of the wedding." Fred asked with growing concern.

He wondered if the reporter had any idea of the abduction. Or was she just snooping around for more scoop? He had learned that the news of his son's wedding to the Hamilton heir had reached the entire world.

The media from all over the world was growing into a frenzy. Many were trying to get a piece of the story. Hence, the long line of reporters waiting to get an appointment with him.

"That is what Grace was talking about. Eida seems to be desperate to see you. She believes her niece had some information she wanted to share only with you." Katherine explained what she had gathered from their conversation.

"Did Harlowe even leave a hint of what she was talking about?" The duke asked his wife, suddenly getting curious about what Harlowe wanted to share with him. Why the secrecy?

He had always been wary of talking to the press, but Eida had proven to be different from most of them. That was one of the reasons he had given her the exclusivity of the wedding coverage.

He was proven to be right in his decision. Eida had provided a magnificent presentation of the wedding to the world. He only had seen a few parts of it, but he heard from the others that it was good.

"Grace said that she only wanted to talk to you. Though what she had to say seems to be important." Katherine related to him.

She wished she could tell her husband more, but Grace also had no idea what Eida was talking about. Since she trusted Eida, she believed it was something to look at.

"Hmmm," Fred contemplated this latest information, whether he should take it seriously or just ignore it.

However, he could not help but question if Harlowe knew something related to the situation. If that was the case, then it was imperative to meet with her as soon as could be arranged.

"Do you think she has any knowledge of who took our kids?" Katherine asked, hopeful that a breakthrough in their case might be just within their reach.

Eida was an investigative reporter. It was not farfetched that Eida might have stumbled into something that would help them find the missing couple.

"We will know when I have the chance to talk to her. I will set up a meeting right away." Fred declared, thinking he had to give the reporter a chance to air her piece.

He thought it was at least worth a shot. Besides, what would he lose if he talked to the reporter? What could be the worse that could happen?

Maybe, she would try to get a new scoop about the newlywed from him. But he could always concoct a story to cover up the actual situation if the need ever arose.

"So, you are meeting with her." She asked, agreeing with his decision.

She never usually meddled with how he dealt with problems that involved the running of the kingdom. But regarding Alex and Dani, she would not keep quiet if he chose the wrong one.

"I guess I have no choice. I am curious about what Eida has to say." He told her wife. In all honesty, he was starting to get desperate. He would welcome anything that might help him at this point.

A commotion at the entrance made him stop and turn in the other direction. He realized that his brother had finally arrived to join them for the banquet.

It would be just the three of them today. Prince Edward had left last night after their meeting. Then, the rest of the visitors that stayed at the palace for the celebration went home.

"Do we have any lead to the case?" The King finally asked, trying to update himself on the current situation.

He failed to visit his brother this morning to check on the status. As King, he also had other pending matters to attend to that he could not ignore.

The kingdom kept receiving problems that required immediate attention. Since Fred was busy finding his son, he knew he had to step in and fill his shoes too.

"Not yet, but we are getting closer. We are looking at something that might give us a clue." Fred told his brother, wishing that the few leads they had would bear fruit.

Fred understood that his brother was concerned about his son's involvement in the case. If he was in the position of the King, he would also exhaust all possibilities to help his son, even if what his son did was wrong.

If Alex was also framed, he would want others to give him the benefit of the doubt. He would also beg for them a chance to prove his innocence.

"Let me know if you need anything else. The kingdom and its entire resources are at your disposal if you need it." The King offered, hoping that would speed up the investigation.

King Edward wanted nothing more but the rescue of the prince and the princess and their safe return home. Moreover, to clear his son of any wrongdoing.

His son might have lost his chance at the throne after his involvement with a criminal. But he wished that he would not end up in jail.

"I will." The duke responded, thankful for the support of his brother. "Is there any news on Prince Edward? He continued, trying to hear if there was something there that could be useful.

The Council, with his blessing, had allowed Prince Edward a chance to clear his name. In return, the prince promised that he would return with proof that would help them with the case.

"Nothing yet. But Edward had already confronted Nick. He would try to get as close to him as possible, even watching his every move. Maybe he would be lucky to find something." The King informed the couple.

The King was thankful that the Council had been lenient with his son. He just hoped that his son would find some substantial evidence that would help his situation.

"Let me know if he had any clue. Even the slightest hint of what Nick was doing. Maybe we could get something from that." Fred told his brother.

Although there was some evidence linking the prince to the criminal mastermind. The duke still believed that it was not yet conclusive.. Besides, everyone was innocent until proven guilty.

[Chapter 522 - Connect The Dots](#)

"The duke had finally summoned for your presence. It would seem that you found your golden ticket to the palace again." Her secretary announced to her as soon as she entered her office.

She walked straight to her table, moving around it until she stood by her side. She dropped several files on top of the desk. Then, she placed a note in front of her.

"What do you mean?" She asked, looking at her assistant as if she had grown some horns, confused by her statement.

As far as her morning went, it had been unproductive. She could not get any information nor find someone willing to share a bit of news. So, why would the duke suddenly accept her invitation for an interview?

She grabbed the note and read its content. She raised her brow to her assistant, asking silently if this was a joke. But her assistant only shrugged her shoulders.

It just did not make sense unless her aunt had something to do with it. She was the only one who knew her desperation to see the duke. Besides, her auntie might have done something to convince him to see her.

"The duke is expecting to see you in an hour. So, I suggest you move your ass before he changes his mind." Her assistant winked at her before leaving her alone with her thoughts.

When the news finally sunk in, she rose from her chair and jumped excitedly. Finally, she would be seeing the duke. She had not lost hope yet.

She had already thought of several options if talking to the duke was not on the table. But she still preferred talking to him first. She believed the information she possessed might interest the duke more than sharing it with the world.

"You know where I will be." She spoke in a low voice to her assistant, who was busy talking on the phone.

She waved at her without waiting for her to finish with her conversation. The elevator doors were already closing by the time her assistant hung up the phone.

She knew she still had several meetings to attend, including meeting with the network producer. But as her secretary had pointed out, she had to leave before Duke Frederick decided not to push through with her appointment with her.

"Eida Harlowe." Introducing herself. She held out her hand by the window of her car and showed the guards her identification card.

She looked at the guards as they inspected her name and face. Another guard roamed around her car with a dog, sniffing if she had any bomb or illegal contraband inside her trunk.

She did not find anything odd with the situation since it was standard procedure every time she would come here for a press briefing.

"What is the purpose of your visit?" The guard near her asked, still looking directly at her face.

She suddenly felt something odd about the way he was questioning her. The seriousness on his face was different from the other times she was here.

Then, she observed how they seemed to be acting out of the ordinary as if they were on high alert. She could tell they were guarding the palace on high alert from the heavy armors hanging on their uniformed body.

"I am here to see, Duke Frederick. He is expecting me." She confidently stated, knowing that she had a go signal to see the Council head.

Under normal circumstances, nobody could enter the premises without an invitation. But if the king or the other royal family wished to entertain, they sometimes indulged a few unexpected visitors.

However, she doubted that anybody who had no prior appointment would get in with the tight security the guards were implementing. She also noticed that the guards were more today that roamed the grounds inside.

It only heightened her suspicion that something might be going on. Her mind wondered if the royal family had received a death threat. It would explain the high security in the location where the couple was taking their honeymoon.

"You may proceed to the main entrance." The guard explained to her before returning her card to her hands.

The other guard signaled her to proceed to the path that would lead her straight to the main door of the palace. She drove slowly, observing the atmosphere around the grounds.

She was immediately escorted to a large room by uniformed staff. It looked like an old library with massive shelves with hardbound books aligning its surface.

She did not wait long as the sounds of the heels of the shoes hitting the floor reached her ears, followed by voices that filled the room.

"Hello, Ms. Harlowe." The duke entered the room and greeted her instantly as soon as she was in sight. "I hope that I did not keep you waiting too long."

He would have been earlier if not for some urgent call that he had to take. It took a while before he was able to settle things. But he immediately went to see the reporter as soon as it was through.

"Not at all, Sir Frederick." She would have called him his highness, but he always insisted that he preferred by his name. She decided to add Sir as something more appropriate for his title.

Besides, she respected the man for everything he did for their country. The kingdom had contributed a lot to the welfare of its citizen. The Council had provided support to their government to develop their entire state.

"Shall we sit down?" He offered her to sit down again and joined him for a cup of tea.

A staff of the palace, just on cue, walked into the room, carrying a tray with a hot pot of tea, two small cups, and some other assortments of flavorings. There were also several assorted slices of English cake that she loved to eat whenever she visited her auntie.

"Oh! Did Auntie Grace bake this?" She could not help to ask since it looked like what her auntie loved to make for her.

She suddenly felt at ease in the presence of the duke. Not that she got spooked easily around people, but her instinct told her to keep her guard up.

"Yes, my wife just could never get enough of her cakes," Fred answered, hoping that his strategy would make her at ease around him. "Anyway, I heard that you wanted to see me."

He needed the information she had collected and an honest answer to all his questions. His intuitions dictated that she might have something valuable for her to make all this effort to see him.

He took a sip of his tea as he waited for her to compose herself. He watched her face as it changed from its relaxed stance to a more guarded one. Whatever was in her head seemed to bother her tremendously, he concluded.

"Well, I wanted to show you something. In my head, it seems to be a good story to explore, but something just did not add up." She began as she placed the cup of tea back on the table and grabbed the bag that she had with her.

She pulled out two folders containing several papers inside. It was the investigation she was doing on two different projects. She handed them over to the duke, hoping that he had some answers.

Two stories that she had been working on. They initially appeared to have nothing in relation. But after careful evaluation, they seemed to be intertwined.. Now, she just had no idea how to connect the dots.

[Chapter 523 - Only Hope](#)

She finally fell asleep on the bed after her meal. She eventually succumbed to her fatigue body from her sleepless night. But it was short-lived when she was awoken again by a terrible dream.

She quickly crawled to the edge of the bed, clinging to the bedpost for support. After a few heavy breathing, the air finally reached her brain and cleared the fog that prevented her from thinking clearly.

"It is just a dream." She mentally told herself, unable to make any sounds. She still felt that her voice was caught up in her throat as she still gasped for air, trying to calm her trembling body.

After a few more minutes, she finally looked up and checked the window. It was still daylight, probably in the middle of the afternoon. Still, no sign of Nick.

Nick gone meant good news for her and Alex. Maybe Samson was telling the truth. Nick must have some problems with his company that he had to attend to.

She believed that besides loving himself, the only thing Nick loved was his company and making money. Because it symbolized power.

"Come on. Snap out of this." She told herself as she stood from the bed and peeked at the window.

It was probably hot outside, just like Samson said. She barely saw a guard on the ground exposed to the sun. They were probably on the side of the house, sheltering away from the blazing heat.

Thankfully, despite being an old house, her room was fully air-conditioned. She did not have to suffer the heat outside. But her thoughts quickly shifted to Alex, who probably was suffering from shortness of breath because of the heat.

A tear again dropped in her right eye, but she abruptly wiped it away. Crying would never solve her problems, remembering what her father always told her when he saw her sobbing in a corner.

"One, two, three..." She counted, trying to distract herself from her thoughts. Then, she saw a movement in the far corner of the house.

A group of men was moving with their guns pointed at the ground. They seemed to be relaxed but moving fast. She wondered where they were going. But they were gone when they turned on the corner.

She counted at least seven men with heavy rifles in their hands. She began to think of all the men loitering around the perimeter during the day. But hid during the afternoon away from the sun.

"That was it." An idea came to mind. Well, not a full-proof escape plan, but it was a start.

If she would convince Samson to take her out, it should be during the afternoon when the heat of the sun was in full force. In that way, the men would either be idle on the side, sleeping or playing.

It was too ambitious for her to hope that they might be drinking while on the job. But who knew, mice did play when the cat was away. It could help her case if some of them could be intoxicated on the job.

Then, a knock came through her door, startling her in the process. She quickly stepped away from the window. She did not want to get caught spying outside.

"I am sorry to disturb you, your highness. One of my men is about to go to town. I am wondering if you need anything. I can ask him to buy it for you." Samson spoke as soon as he entered the room.

He knew that women needed a lot of stuff. He had two sisters that bugged him all the time to buy them different kinds of hair care and another one for the body. Then, there was the assorted female hygiene that he did not want to think about.

Anyway, so far, the only things he was able to give her were oversized clothes that he bought in a flea market. He did not realize that his boss would kidnap her without preparing the basic stuff.

"Oh!" She was surprised by his offer. Come to think of it, she did not even think of those things. "You will do that for me." She asked, finding it sweet that he could be that thoughtful.

It only confirmed that her gentle giant was indeed a good man who only acted tough out of necessity. This was her opportunity to explore her chance to get out of here.

"It is the least we can do for you since we are keeping you out here, in the middle of nowhere." He said, understanding her situation.

He looked around the room and noticed she had nothing of her own. Nothing she could use except for the clothes that she wore at the moment.

He mentally noted to ask his buddy to buy another set of clothes. She would need to change, he thought. Suddenly, he felt terrible that he was a part of this mission to keep her here.

"Well, I will definitely need some things." She spoke up, buying her time to make a list.

She had to come up with a plan asap. Use this opportunity to seek his help or use him if he would not cooperate willingly with her idea. But what was her idea?

She ran her fingers in her long, wavy, tangled hair, thinking deeply about what she should do. She asked for a pen and paper to write down the items, delaying the time.

"Just put them on the list, and we will try to find them," Samson said to her, assuring her that it was ok.

He suggested, stepping further inside the room to hand her a piece of paper he found inside his jacket and a pen. That would do for now.

"There is actually one thing that I want to ask of you." She began, dropping her arms at her side, forgetting about writing anything.

If she kept waiting for an opportunity, it might never happen again. Fate had already presented her with one as she faced the giant man before her, alone in the room.

"What is it?" He asked, eager to help her in her need.

He did see her as a sister that he had to take care of. Not a prisoner that should suffer in this condition. If she was his sister, he would never allow anybody to treat her like this.

But he had a job to do. Although he did not sign up for this, it was the job given to him. He needed the money to pay for the bills.

He was never good at anything, but his size did help land him this opportunity to earn. He would be damn to compromise his income, but it did not mean that he had to be cruel to their captive.

"Well," Dani closed her eyes, gathering some strength and guidance on how she should proceed with her following sentence.

She had no idea how he would react to what she was about to ask of him. She would be a fool to assume that he would agree to her plan that easily.

"What is it?" He looked at her with curiosity written on his face. He wondered what she needed. It seemed that she was shy to tell him. He could think of several things in his mind, but he might be wrong.

"Will you help me escape with my husband?" She spilled the question out of her lips before she changed her mind and lost her nerve to say it.

She knew it was a big ask, but she had to try. She had asked him to betray his boss and teammates to help her. She had to find a reason why he should choose to assist them.. Because, as of now, it was their only hope.

[Chapter 524 - Sense A Mystery](#)

It had been several minutes since she handed the papers to the duke. He had taken it and looked at it immediately but kept his silence as he studied the contents of the file.

Every minute counted at this moment. The duke did not want to waste valuable time by making idle chitchat. But he had also considered being cautious not to alarm the reporter about the present situation.

"What do you think?" Eida had watched and waited for the duke to check her reports.

She tried to read his expression, but his face remained impassive. His eyes did not give away what he was thinking. He only turned the pages after skimming through them. Then stared at some pictures, not even making any sudden movements to show some form of reaction.

Aside from that, he had not said anything or made any hint of what he thought of her report. She rarely encountered people like him, who had so much control of their emotions.

"It would seem that you had been busy since the wedding." He placed the folder which contained the files on a table by his side. "I had no idea when you had time to come up with this when you are always here, interviewing everyone."

He finally spoke up, looking at her directly in the eyes. He showed a bit of interest but not too much to suspect anything. He knew he would be playing a dangerous game if she learned the truth.

But he was not ready to risk the lives of his loved ones to indulge Ms. Harlowe with her theories. Although he appreciated her coming to him with this information, he was not allowing her in with the secrets.

"It is my job. You know I always try to find a good story at the same time get my facts straight." She told the duke, confident that her story was not just a wild goose chase.

She refused to believe that she was only chasing after a ghost story. Her instincts could sense that something big was going down, but the palace was doing its best to keep it a secret.

"You are certainly great at it. That is why we chose you to cover the wedding. You definitely had made a name for yourself." He complimented her hard work, hoping to divert the conversation somewhere else.

He purposely placed the files on the side, not intending to return them to her. He found the details of the report quite intriguing. But it did not indicate that it could mean anything.

He still had to review the facts and discuss them first with his team. Then, do the investigation themselves. He would not simply depend on what was on those files.

"I could not take all the credit. I have a dedicated team who helps me with my research." She explained to him.

She could not take all the merits of her success solely on her efforts. She had a team who had backed her up and believed in her abilities.

"How come you are also investigating Nick? I do not see any connection between Nick, my son, and his wife." Fred asked the reporter, changing the topic of conversation.

From the report, he gathered that she separately investigated the two stories. However, he was curious why Nick was included in her subject of investigation.

He could not help but wonder about her interest in him. Although Dani had a past with him, it had been a long time ago. Nothing was left to connect the two of them.

Unless Eida was interested in the business war between Nick and Alex. However, that was very unlikely since that was not the story that would sell to the masses.

"It is a long story." She answered him, not intending to provide her reasons for researching the background of the despicable man.

Her interest in Nick had always been for personal gain. On the other hand, she could not help think that what she discovered about him could somewhat be related to the other work she was working on.

"Well, I still have a few minutes," Fred said to her, making a show of looking at his wristwatch, but interested he was to learn of her story.

He was old-fashioned. Unlike many young people, he still would prefer to look at his watch than the gadgets they were holding in their hands. Besides, he rarely used those things.

Anyway, he became more fascinated by her motivation for picking Nick as a subject of her interest. Judging from what he had learned about Nick, he was a snake who could never be trusted. Dangerous and a traitor.

"I don't think it is appropriate to discuss my reasons why." She evaded the question of the duke. "It is kind of a personal interest." She did not want to elaborate more.

She took the cup of tea and sipped some of it to wet her parched lips. She usually used this tactic to delay a conversation or divert the topic to something else.

Anyway, constant talking could dry her mouth and cause hoarseness in her voice. Her voice was one of her assets, and she valued it dearly.

"But, do you think Nick may have something to do with what is happening now at the palace?" She quickly asked, not letting the duke press her more about her interest in Nick.

"Has he threatened anyone, or do you think he is planning some form of a conflict against the kingdom?" She fired several more questions to the duke, hoping that one of them would hit the bullseye.

"I have no idea of where you are getting the information that the palace is on fire. But let me assure you that nothing out of the ordinary is going on." The duke spoke up with calm and confidence.

He concluded that Eida might be onto something, but she was still fishing for additional information. He felt relieved that she still had no clue of the actual situation.

But his mind went back to the file, Ethan had told him that he had a gut feeling that Nick was behind this, and his instincts were rarely wrong. However, Ethan still had no concrete proof to pin down this criminal act on Nick.

"Surely, you are not denying that the palace is under attack. I had seen the tightened security outside. You doubled or even tripled the securities guarding the palace." She commented, pointing to the window outside.

She refused to accept his words. She felt insulted that he belittled her intellect by saying she had no story. She had a reliable team that provided her facts, and she had studied them thoroughly.

"..." He was to counteract her statement, but she beat him by adding more of her findings.

He closed his mouth, allowing her to continue, not wanting to seem defensive by arguing with her. It would only heighten her curiosity.

"Then, what about the honeymoon location of the lovebirds. It was more like a fortress than a vacation spot." She immediately added, confronting him with the facts before he could deny it.

Now, her curiosity was at its peak. At the moment, the duke remained quiet, probably contemplating her valid points, she thought.. She could sense a mystery when it was presented to her on a silver platter.

[Chapter 525 - A Story Worthy Of A Nobel Prize](#)

"I guarantee that you are just chasing a story that does not exist. Death threats are just a common occurrence in the royal family. You know that." Duke Frederick reminded her, dismissing her claim as nonsensical.

He could not add fuel to an already burning flame. It might suddenly spread, just like a wildfire, and burn the entire kingdom down.

Ms. Harlowe might have helped them with the information she provided. Still, the duke could not trust a reporter in this situation. He could not risk putting the lives of his family in her hands.

"But we still need to be prepared for anything." He continued, hoping to convince the woman not far from him. "It did not mean that we are preparing for war." Denying her conclusion.

He poured another set of tea and offered her to drink. He watched her under his gaze, sizing up her reaction. If she somehow believed his words.

But drinking his second cup of tea was also a signal for his guards to intervene on his behalf. As soon as he placed down the empty ceramic, a guard made his appearance by the door.

"Excuse me, Your Highness, but the King had requested your presence immediately." He announced inside the room, addressing him directly.

"I am sorry about this, Ms. Harlowe, but I have to go. You know that running the kingdom is a constant pain I have to injure for the people." He made his excuses.

He stood up from his position and held his hand to her. He shook them, adapting what the westerners used for greeting and thanking their visitors.

"Well, can I at least get my files back?" She asked, knowing that she was already being dismissed.

He might not have told her anything conclusive, but her suspicions warned her that she was onto something. She just had to dig deeper.

"I think I should hold on to it. Maybe I might find something that you missed. Besides, it is an interesting read for a conspiracy theory." He picked up the files where he had placed them before, holding them securely in his hands.

"I am sure that you still have other copies." He did not care if she did, but he planned to keep the files for further examination.

If her theory was correct, which he suspected that she might. Then, maybe he could find some clues in the papers in his hands.

"I do, but..." She was about to protest but decided otherwise. "I hope that you will share with me what you will learn from it." She responded, gambling that he would give her an insight into the story.

However, she was not planning to sit idly by. She would be continuing to do her investigation, especially now that she had caught the attention of the palace.

The duke excused himself, leaving her inside the room to finish her cake and tea. He immediately exited the room, carrying the files in his hand.

But unknowingly, Eida had other plans as she quickly sneaked behind him, standing close to the door to spy on the duke. She hoped to find some clues to what treasure was waiting for her at the end of the rainbow.

"Will you tell Major Barry to meet me at my office now? We have things to discuss." He instructed one of the guards who stood just outside the door before proceeding to his office.

He could see the urgency in this matter. It might be the piece that would give them the answer to where Nick had taken their children.

Inside the room, Eida remained standing by the door. Upon hearing his command, Eida finally had reached a conclusion. The duke had been keeping something from her, and she would find out about it.

"Hi! Duke Frederick told me that I could use the music room to make a private call. You see, my phone died." She wiggled her phone on the guard standing post by the door when the duke was out of sight.

She quickly thought of the room since it was one of the places in the palace that was not guarded. She remembered it when she had toured around the whole place in one of her segments about the royal family.

From there, she figured she could sneak around the place and into the office of the duke. She wanted to know what the duke was planning to do with her files.

"Nobody is allowed to roam around the palace today." The guard said. "I suggest you leave the premises as soon as you're through inside."

The guard was skeptical about her claim since they were on high alert. Nobody could come in and out of the palace without permission from their superiors.

"Well, if you do not believe me, maybe you can just escort me to see the duke. It is an emergency that I must make the call." She gave him two options that would help her either way.

She hoped that he would choose either of her suggestions instead of escorting her out of the premises. She preferred the latter since it would land her directly in his office.

"I would have called him so you could directly talk to him, but as I said, my phone died, and I could not make an outside call." She reasoned out, pleading her case.

She could see the indecisiveness of the uniformed man before her as he figured out what to do. She could guess that he was afraid of disobeying the duke.

But at the same time, he was probably also scared to disturb the duke only to confirm her claim. Whatever he decided, she would make the most of it.

"Fine, just proceed to the music room. I believe you know your way." The man finally conceded, not wanting to bother the duke. "Just make sure to exit the palace as soon as you are finished."

She thanked the guard and promised to do what he had asked. Although she had her fingers crossed behind her as she swore to him. Of course, she had no plan of leaving until she found some answers.

She sneaked into the hallway, but instead of turning in the direction of the music room, she proceeded to the office. She mentally told herself that if caught loitering around the corridors, she would say she was looking for the bathroom.

She remembered the office was just around the other corner, but it was heavily guarded. She wondered what would happen if she barged into the office unannounced.

What could be the worse thing the duke would do to her? Probably throw her in the dungeons, she thought. Was it worth taking the risk? Yes, her mind answered her. Nevertheless, she did not get where she was now by playing it safe.

"Here goes nothing." She mumbled to herself before marching towards the guarded room.

She smiled as she approached the two security guards standing by the big double doors. She mentally prepared herself, suppressing her fear aside.

She put her game face on. She had to act like her life depended on it. It was not the time to lose her nerve.. She might be in the middle of discovering a story worthy of a Nobel prize.

[Chapter 526 - Searching For A Needle In A Haystack](#)

"I am Ms. Harlowe. I am here to see the duke. He is expecting me." She announced to the men, who looked at each other as if confirming with the other her declaration.

"Did his secretary not inform you that I am coming?" She continued as if she was also surprised by the situation.

Luckily, the desk that his secretary occupied was empty at the moment. Or else her cover would be blown. She wondered if it was just damn luck or fate working in her favor. Whatever it was, she had to work fast before it ran out.

"We were not informed that you will be joining the meeting." One of the men spoke up.

He looked at his partner for assistance, but he seemed to have no clue of her existence until now. He only shrugged his shoulder as a response to his silent question.

"Of course, I am included in the meeting. In fact, I am already late." Eida said in irritation. "You can confirm at the gate that I have a meeting with the duke." She decided to play that card, hoping that it would work out.

It just confirmed that the duke was inside, conducting a session, probably about the files she gave him. She was now more determined to enter the room.

One of the guards pressed on his radio, contacting the security outside. He talked for almost forever as she stood there waiting. When she heard the guard confirm her appointment, she finally released the breath she was holding.

"It seems she checks out." The one on the radio told his partner. "You can proceed inside. Let me show you the way into the meeting." The other man opened the door and ushered her into the empty, massive office room.

She wondered where everybody was if there was a meeting. She had been inside this room before, but she did not have the privilege to explore it.

They had reached the far end of the room, then a narrow passageway was revealed to her, hidden behind a thick curtain. She always assumed that it was a window.

"Is that the room?" She asked when they neared a door at the end of the hall.

She suddenly felt the excitement of barging into a secret meeting. The hell with the consequence, she thought as adrenaline rushed into her bloodstream.

She could not wait to enter the room and join in the gathering. Not that she was expecting that they would welcome her with open arms. But she was sure to think of something once inside.

"That is the bathroom." The security shook his head as if she was stupid.

"Oh!" She was slightly embarrassed about her assumption. Of course, a secret chamber would not be so obvious, she concluded, admitting her mistake silently.

"Just follow me and don't touch anything." The man instructed.

He still could not believe that the duke had allowed a reporter to join them in the meeting. It was rare that the Council allowed just anyone to see the secret chambers.

However, he was just a soldier who had to obey orders. He could not interfere with the decision of the Council. If they thought her presence was necessary, he had no right to question it.

"Ok." She replied, suddenly cautious not to be caught with her lie.

She watched the man stop just outside the door but turn to his right. He moved a painting aside, revealing a keypad buried on the wall.

She pretended not to look at the man as he keyed in the numbers. His hands were quick, so she was unsure if she had seen the pattern correctly.

Anyway, it did not matter to her. In a few minutes, she would be standing inside the room. She would discover one of the secrets the Council was hiding from the masses.

Something clicked, and then a crack appeared on the wall. A small opening separated the two walls. Inside, a bright light could be partially seen compared to the dark hallway.

"I can take it from here. You may go." She confidently told the man, showing him that she was the one in charge.

She did not want him to catch her with her lie before she could even gather more evidence. She thought that he would not leave, but apparently, her act worked as he started moving back outside, leaving her by the door.

Once alone, she slowly opened the door by an inch, checking if someone would notice her. But everybody seemed to be busy to even detect her presence.

She decided to stand quietly by the door, listening to the activity inside. She could hear the exchange between the people inside. Several voices were talking at once. It felt like a war was ensuing with the argument going on.

Her suspicion strengthened with each second that passed. The more she heard about the conversation, the more her interest peaked.

"Hey, who are you, and what are you doing?" A man suddenly spoke behind her, catching her unaware. She jumped in fright, making her lean on the wall.

He was about to attend the meeting when

Suddenly, her weight pushed the secret doorway open, causing her to tumble down to the floor in front of everyone. She quickly turned her head to the questioning eyes, forgetting about being embarrassed by her current state.

She was more concerned about the consequence of being caught spying on them. Although she had every intention of just wanting to help, still, the Council might not believe her.

"What are you doing here, Ms. Harlowe?" The duke finally spoke and walked towards her.

He was not expecting to see her again so soon. He assumed when he left the library, she would have left the palace too. Apparently, she was harder to get rid of than he thought.

"Do you need any help? I am Lance, by the way." The man who spooked her by the door offered his hand to pull her up. But she ignored him, helping herself up on her own.

He was intrigued, seeing her for the first time in person. He recognized her face from the media news he had watched occasionally.

"No need. I can stand up on my own." She gathered herself, preserving what was left of her dignity. If they were going to punish her, she would not cower down. She was here to do her job.

"What?" She asked when the man stood in front of her, as he kept staring her down. She immediately did not like him, seeing the amused smile on his face.

Of course, she recognized him. He was, after all, a member of the royal family. Although she did not have the opportunity to meet him until now. There had been no opportunity for her to interview him just yet.

"The duke asked you a question, remember?" The prince reminded her since she did not seem to notice the duke standing just beside her.

She was so lost in her world that she forgot that it was not just the two of them, he presumed, as her eyes focused on him with blazing intensity.

"Is the royal family in some sort of danger?" Eida snapped out of her trance, realizing that they were not alone in the room.

She decided to ask the question instead of answering a question that she did not hear. She turned her attention to the duke, ignoring the man right next to her.

"That is not any of your concern. I think you are dipping your nose into things that you should not be involving yourself." The duke responded.

He was growing alarmed with her stubbornness. It would seem that he underestimated her in terms of her nosiness. However, he was curious how she ended up inside their secret chamber.

However, he could not help but appreciate her tenacity. He could applaud her for her resourcefulness. She was indeed cut out for this job.

"I do not think so. In the first place, if not for my files." She pointed to the papers spread on the table. "You will not have anything to work on. So, either include me in this meeting or hear this story on the news in an hour."

She played hardball with the duke, refusing to back down from the opportunity to get in the middle of the story. Well, it was not just a story, but she genuinely wanted to help if someone was in danger.

"Where are Prince Alexander and Princess Daniella?" She finally asked, concluding her findings based on what she had heard so far in the earlier conversation. "Does Nick have anything to do with this?" She followed up on her question.

She had deduced that the duke had finally connected some of the dots. So, it was a matter of time before they finally solved the case.

"I appreciated your help, Ms. Harlowe, but we could not allow you to join our investigation. We are grateful for your contribution, but rest assured that..." But the duke was not able to finish his sentence.

"No, you are not cutting me out of this. I want to help. I promise, if you let me stay, you will have full control of the narrative of my story and when it should be aired." She was putting her cards down, not wanting to be thrown out of the bullpen.

"Let her stay, Uncle. I will handle her." Lance spoke up again. "We can't do much about her at this point." He also pointed out that they were wasting valuable time.

"Just don't speak unless you are asked." He whispered near her ears as he leaned down close to her.

He believed the Council should allow her to be a part of the planning process. Maybe she still had something she could contribute to the case.

She did provide the key that unlocked the case wide open. It gave them a lead to follow.. If not for her, they would still be searching for a needle in a haystack.

[Chapter 527 - Six Feet Under The Ground](#)

Once the words were out, there was no turning back.

She had no regret.

She was not afraid.

But she was desperate.

She knew she had to convince him to help her escape with Alex. There were just no other options left for her. She did not care what happened to her, but she could not let Alex die in the hands of that lunatic.

She believed that their family might be using all their resources to find them, but she was running out of time. By the time they found them, it might be too late.

"Are you insane?" The big man looked at her menacingly. As if she had asked him to commit a capital crime. "Your highness, you don't know what you are asking?" He was stunned, not expecting that she would ask him that.

He looked at her as if she had gone mad. She should not be asking criminals like him to help her escape. That was dangerous and plain stupid.

She was lucky she did not try that stunt with his other teammates. Or else their boss would hear all about it. Then, what? He would make sure that she would learn her lesson.

Fortunately, he would not tell on her. He did pity her condition, especially her husband. As much as he would like to help her, he could not. He had a job to do. That was to guard her and make sure she did not escape.

"Please, if you will hear me out. I know you will agree with my suggestion." She pleaded with him, not surprised at the way he reacted. But she knew it would not be that easy to convince him.

She just suggested he betrayed his boss and risked his life for them. Come to think of it, she realized that it was indeed a big ask. Nevertheless, she was not going to give up easily.

Maybe she should offer him something to compensate for his effort to help them. It should be a reward that would be hard for him to refuse. Money, freedom from criminal prosecution, what else?

"I am sorry. I can't help you. If Nick finds out or catches us, he will surely kill me, including my family." Samson declined, shaking his head from side to side, indicating his answer was no.

He could already imagine the implication of what she was suggesting him to do. He could not risk his life and his family for them. No matter how much he wanted to help her.

He would not have chosen this line of work if he had a choice, but fate had not been kind to him. When he entered the team, the first thing he learned. There was only one way out. Death.

"I am willing to pay you a lot of money. Make sure that your family will be set for life. Just help us get out of here." She begged him, even kneeling before him as tears stopped dropping from her eyes.

She had to use all possible ways to convince him in the small time frame she had. She could not let this opportunity go to waste.

She saw a glimpse of conflict in his eyes. It was as if he was struggling between his choices. She could feel that he was a good man. He just did not have many options back then.

She encountered many like him in her line of work. People were driven to desperation because of the various circumstances that led them to make bad decisions.

"It is not just the money. Nick is paying us more than enough. But betraying him meant I would be risking my family as well, not just my neck." Samson told her in a low voice.

He did not want anybody to hear that he had talked to her about escaping. Although he had not agreed with her suggestion. It was still a capital offense and punishable by a painful death.

He looked at her as she knelt before him, her cheeks covered in tears. He could feel his heart was melting, seeing the anguish on her face.

He wanted to envelop her in his arms and tell her everything would be ok, eventually. However, that would be a lie. Knowing his boss, she would only be facing a future that would be worse than death. Her husband would be lucky if he died soon enough.

"But if you don't help us, Alex will surely...die." She said the last word in almost a whisper. "If that happens..."

She could not even finish the sentence. This time, it was not an act anymore as she sat down on the floor, with her eyes staring at the wooden surface.

She could feel her body tremble and her heart smashed into tiny pieces, just thinking about what could happen to Alex. Her earlier resolution that she could find a way out of this was starting to slip off her fingers.

Seeing the expression on his face, she began to lose hope. He was too afraid to help her. She could see it in his eyes that he wished he could, but his fear was overpowering him.

She did understand that he was thinking of his family as well. He was just like her. It was not his fate that he was worried about, but his loved ones.

"I will put protection on your family. I will do anything to keep them safe." She continued out of desperation. "Samson, please, you are my only hope."

However, she knew she was making false promises. She could not guarantee that she could keep all of them safe from the clutches of Nick.

She wished she did not have to force him to choose between her and his family, but she was running out of options. But she would definitely try to help him and his family if only he would agree with her.

"I am sorry again. But I don't think you know who you are dealing with." He started pacing the floor, rubbing the palm of his hand on his face as if he was conflicted with something.

He wished he could help her. He had never wanted to be a part of this at the very start, but he had no choice. He was opposed to taking her against her free will, but he was just a mere soldier. He had to do what was commanded of him.

He could kill a man even with his bare hands. However, he could not harm an innocent woman or hurt her in any way. He was just not built that way. He could not help but think of his mother and sisters.

"What do you mean?" She was confused by the way he was acting. She finally had stopped the tears from falling, wiping her eyes and cheeks with the back of her palm.

She wondered what he was talking about. She knew Nick well enough to know that he was a scumbag, an evil person, and a menace to society. What else was she missing?

"It is not just Nick." He finally answered her, stopping in front of her. "He is not my real boss. I was sent here to watch over you. Make sure that Nick will not be able to touch you or any of these men."

He finally admitted, but he knew he was taking an enormous risk by telling her this. But he wanted her to understand why as much as he liked to help her, he could not.

His boss would not take it lightly if he betrayed him. He would never be able to hide from him, even if the police protected him.. The only way he would get away from him was in a coffin, buried six feet under the ground.

[Chapter 528 - One More Stop](#)

"Make sure that the entire place is secured. I don't want anything happening while I am away." Nick said to the man on the other line. "What about Dani? Is she cooperating with Samson?"

The man on the other line assured him that she was being well taken care of. She had eaten her meals and had not caused any problems. None as far as he knew.

"What about Alex? Is he still alive?" He could not care less about his condition, but he needed an update.

All he needed was for him to keep breathing until he returned. He had instructed his personal physician to keep his heart beating. He did not mind if he ended up in a coma or a vegetative state.

"He is. The doctor is constantly monitoring his condition." His man reported to him.

His man also informed him that they were running low on stocks, so he had asked one of his men to buy their supplies from the nearby town.

"Fine. You know the drill. Be sure that your man avoids any suspicion. I do not want anyone snooping on our operation." Nick instructed.

Besides using the place as a hideout and keeping the couple captive, he also had a warehouse in the vicinity, keeping most of his stash.

As of now, he only played as the middle man for the big boss and most of his big clients. The big boss sometimes used his business as a cover for his transactions.

"When are you coming back, Sir." The man asked, wondering how long they would wait for their next job or go back to civilization.

Being stuck on the island had its perk, but it could be boring, too. The men were starting to get restless. Some of them had been there for weeks, so naturally, they would like to go home to their families or just wanted to get laid.

"Soon. I still have several issues that I need to handle." He told his man to be patient. After all, they would all be generously rewarded.

He hung up the phone and concentrated on the papers in front of him. He checked the name and the figures on the files. He was trying to determine if the boss was behind the attack on his company.

He could think of several people who had always been after him, but they could not have this kind of resources to attack Ethan, Alex, and him at the same time. Only him but to what purpose.

"Sir, Mr. Mortey has returned for his appointment. He is slightly pissed that you canceled on him earlier." Michael interrupted him as he stood by the door. "He is now on his way up."

His assistant was hesitant to disturb him, seeing that he had returned to the office in a foul mood. However, he knew that the meeting with their VIP client was also important.

"Fuck!" He slightly shouted, running his hands through his hair, feeling slightly exasperated about his situation. He had forgotten all about him.

He did not want interruption at this point. His mind was already all over the place as it was. His little rendezvous did nothing to calm him down. Usually, it worked but not today.

He still could not connect the Big boss with his dilemma. This mystery man had cleaned all paper trails that might lead to his identity.

There was still no way for Nick to discover the man behind the shadows that ran the biggest underworld syndicate in the city. Maybe the world if his speculation was correct.

"I am sorry, Sir," Michael quickly said upon seeing his reaction. "Should I just ask him to come back another day?"

He suddenly thought that he had made the mistake of upsetting his boss further. He should have rescheduled Mr. Mortey for another time.

He was not usually afraid of his boss. As long as he did his job well, he did not have a problem. He could manage his mood swings most of the time. He was, after all, paid generously to tolerate his unusual behavior.

However, since he came back from his trip. He had been acting weird. Well, more aggressive and crazier than usual. At first, he attributed it to the attack on his company, but then again, something was off with him.

"No, sent him in. Just give me five minutes." He quickly replied, realizing that he should deal with the matter now.

Besides not wanting any distraction, the last thing he needed was to meet with this man. A man who believed that he was always right.

If not for his money and investment in his company, he would have gotten rid of him long ago. Now, he had to play nice and entertain the enormous ego of the man.

Because in his situation, he could not afford to offend any of his top investors. He needed their money and cooperation at the moment.

"What brings you here, Mr. Mortey?" He asked, but he already had an idea of his intentions.

He welcomed him into his office after fixing himself up, not wanting to appear as if a train had just run him over. He even offered him a drink to make him feel special.

After almost an hour of nonsense, he was finally saying goodbye to Mr. Mortey. It was an agonizing hour of sucking up to the man, only for him to feel satisfied that his money was still safe in his hands.

But that was what he was good at, convincing people to trust him. He just needed a chance to come face to face with this elusive man. He needed him to believe that he could count on him as a partner rather than an enemy.

"Michael, do you have the files that the investigators sent a few minutes ago?" He asked when he was through signing the papers on his desk.

His assistant immediately brought the papers to his attention. In a few minutes, he had already skimmed through the notes and the document before him.

The day was almost over, and a new problem had just come up. It would seem that someone did not get the memo he had sent and proceeded against his will.

He quickly took his phone out and dialed a number. He talked to the man on the other line, giving him several instructions. "Make sure that he learned his lesson. I want to make an example out of him."

Then, he quickly terminated the call. He could not tolerate insubordination, not in his company or personal life. Everyone would be answerable to him if they double-crossed him.

Now, his investors or employees would think twice before making the wrong decisions. He would not allow any of them to ruin what he had built for himself. His empire.

"It had been a long day. Go home, but make sure to inform me if there are any changes or development." Nick walked out of his office, instructing Michael as they walked towards the elevator.

He still needed to control all his investors before all of them sold their shares. Unfortunately, one slipped through his fingers. He had already sold his before he could get to him.

But, he would make an example of him for betraying his trust. Some of his men were already on their way to teach him a lesson. He would have gone with them, but he had something else he had to take care of first.

It was an important matter that he had to settle before calling it a day. He was tired, and all he wanted was to rest on his bed, but not yet.. He still had one more stop.

[Chapter 529 - A Sentimental Fool](#)

Several minutes later, he was knocking on his door. He knew he was home because he had asked one of his men to check on his schedule. His man informed him that his brother was not on duty today.

Knowing his brother, he probably was still sleeping or just sulking in his apartment. His men had reported before that he rarely went out, not even with the other hospital staff.

"Jacob, open the door." He demanded when no one responded on his first knock.

He had Jacob surveillance when he decided to move to this city. He was doubtful of his intention and would like to check if he had other ulterior motives.

So far, he concluded that he was just interested in the work offered to him. He had called off his investigation afterward. His brother was a harmless being who could not even hurt a fly.

"Jacob, are you in there?" He shouted when his brother had failed to react to his second knock.

He suddenly wondered if he was home or had gone out to do some errand. He might have done some grocery shopping. A man had to eat sometime, he thought. It was what his brother did in his free time, as far as he knew.

Although he had not been in one, having people to do it for him. He never liked doing mundane things. It was just a waste of his time when he could be more productive doing other things.

He was about to bang on the hardwood again when he finally heard a movement and a few seconds later, the knob rattled and unlocked. Then, the door was flung open, and his brother stood with just his towel covering his lower body.

"Hey, Nick." Jacob greeted, quite surprised to see his brother standing outside his door. "Sorry, I was in the shower," Jacob immediately added as he held the towel on his waist.

He had rushed out of the bathroom to check on the loud noise coming from his living room, with his hair still dripping with water on the floor.

He was not expecting any company since not many came to visit him anyway. He also had no deliveries scheduled today. Then, he thought his brother was still on his trip.

"Hey, brother," Nick replied, seeing his brother for the first time without his clothes.

He had never noticed that his brother had been working out. He still remembered him as the skinny nerd who had his face always buried in those thick books.

He was glad that he became a responsible doctor rather than a pain in his ass. He was not proud of him. That was not it. But he just did not like the complication of having a troublesome brother to deal with.

"What are you doing here?" He asked, slightly surprised, since he usually called before dropping by. He was not the kind of brother who just liked to hang out with him.

Besides, he thought that he was still out of town. Actually, he had never heard from him since he had left. So, he was not expecting his unannounced visit.

"Do I need a reason to visit my brother?" He asked as he strode into the room without waiting for his invitation.

As always, he had never liked the place that his brother called home. He could not understand why he would prefer to live in this death trap compared to the apartment he offered.

Anyways, it was none of his business how he had lived his life as long as it did not affect his own. But as of now, he had to make sure that he did not do anything stupid that would ruin him and his business.

"Of course, you are always welcome to visit." He answered, not wanting to offend him. Not that he owed him anything, but he was still family. "But will you excuse while I change?"

He was still only wearing a towel around his torso, and he was not comfortable standing in front of his brother in just a piece of cloth.

He quickly wore a shirt, jeans, and comfortable sneakers before returning to the living room. He was curious and wary at the same time about the reason for his brother's presence in his living room.

"I was thinking of inviting you to dinner. It had been a while since we went out together." Nick offered when he returned and sat on the opposite chair in his living room.

He was not inviting him to bond with his bastard brother. He just wanted to make sure that he would not be crazy enough to sell his shares in the company.

He knew his brother never wanted anything to do with his inheritance. He feared that Jacob would suddenly sell his shares then donate everything to charity. His brother had always been a good samaritan, helping the sick and the needy.

Only if he had been crafty and cunning just like him, he might have liked Jacob for a brother. But he had to turn out like her mother, raised like a saint.

"But I can not have dinner with you tonight." He answered.

He sat on the opposite chair and quickly thought of a possible reason why he was not available.

He was, in fact, in a hurry because he was about to go out with Cassie. She wanted to go out again after their successful trip out the other day. He did not want to, but she threatened to do it alone.

"Why not? Are you going on a date? Do I know her?" He fired some questions. It was the only logical explanation why he was not available. He believed he was not on duty today.

He was suddenly curious about the type of girl his brother would be dating. He had tried to give him a date with some of the eligible girls in the high society, but he always declined. He almost thought that he might be gay.

He always made his profession as an excuse. Due to his lack of time for his personal life and devotion to advancing his career, his brother could not consider dating.

"No, I am not dating. I just had a call from the hospital. We have an emergency case." He quickly came up with a valid reason, although he sounded a bit defensive.

He had used that excuse several times before. So his brother should not suspect that he was lying. He just hoped Nick did not notice that he was slightly nervous.

"Ok. I don't think I can convince you to ditch your emergency case for me." He concluded, knowing how devoted he was to his patients.

"Anyway, just in case, someone tried to approach you with a proposal about your shares to the company. I hope you will consult me first before making any kind of deal." He quickly added, looking his brother in the eyes to make his point across.

"Of course. As I said to you before, I will let you handle my shares until I know what I want to do with them." Jacob was not the least bit interested in them.

But it was the only connection he had with his family.. Call him a sentimental fool, but it was the only thing that indicated that his father did love him at some point.

[Chapter 530 - The Top Of The Hour](#)

"You were a great help in there, Ms. Harlowe," Lance said to her as he escorted her out of the private room and into the adjacent office. "We really appreciate everything you have shared with us."

He offered to guide her out of the room since he also had other matters he had to attend to. He was not part of the following operation anyway. There was no more reason for him to stay.

Besides, he had one more thing he had to take care of before he parted ways with the intriguing reporter. He was actually impressed with her determination to get her facts straight.

He believed if it was some other sleazy reporter, those reports would be airing right now as a blind item, fishing for more information. Until it blew up out of proportion, risking the lives of his cousin and friend.

"I only wanted to help." She did not want to make a big deal of her contribution to their investigation. She was more than happy to learn that her instincts were still as sharp as ever.

But she would be lying if she said she was not interested in the entire story. She gathered she had one explosive news in her hands, just waiting to be told. She was not letting it go that easily.

She still wanted a piece of the action. Maybe an exclusive to the story of the century. A follow-up on her latest telecast. Hopefully, after all the chaos and the traumatic experience, everything would still end with a happy ending.

However, if that would not be the case, she thought it was still a story worth telling to the world. But she would make sure to give it the dignity it deserved. Tell the story as it was, not sensationalize it for money and fame.

"I am sorry that my uncle had to make you leave because of the sensitivity of the situation. I hope you understand." Lance stopped just beside the desk, making her also halt in her tracks.

The duke had asked Ms. Harlowe to give them some privacy as he and his team discussed further their following actions. Her presence might only impede and compromise their plans.

It was already enough that she had been privy to what was going on with the current situation, even discovering their secret chamber. They could not keep giving her more information than what she already knew.

"I knew something was not right when I saw those two reports. Precisely, why I sought out the duke for confirmation." Eida said to the prince, slightly turning so she was facing him.

She did not decline the request of the duke for her to leave. Actually, she was lucky she only got a slap on the hand for snooping around the palace.

Although she did wonder what kind of punishment would befit her transgression. She doubted that locking her up in the dungeon still existed in this day and age.

Well, it was something that she had not bothered to check when she toured the palace. That was whether the old dynasty practiced torture, guillotine, or hanging as punishment for a crime.

"We are glad that you did." He smiled at her before moving to the opposite side of the desk and opening a drawer.

As much as he wanted to join in the rescue mission, it was not his place. He had accepted everyone had a role in this family. His was to keep the peace and order within the palace and beyond those walls.

"You don't have to show me the way out. I don't want to waste any more of your time. I think I know my way out." She told him, seeing that he was about to take out some papers and probably had a busy schedule.

"I could see that you are a busy person." She continued, pointing to the papers and pen in his hands.

She already had taken much of his time. She knew her way around the palace. She could find her way out easily. Or security could escort her out if they wanted an assurance that she had left the premises.

But who could blame them when she did wander around the palace without permission? Then, she trespassed where she was not invited. But it was all worth it, she thought.

She could still feel the excitement as the adrenaline in her blood had not yet worn off. She was actually inspired to write an article about this. But of course, she had no plan of publishing it until the couple was rescued and the culprit arrested.

"I am sorry, but if you will give me a few more minutes. We still have a few things to discuss." He gestured for her to sit down on the available chair.

He sat down behind the desk and waited for her to follow. He still had one issue that needed his attention. He needed her cooperation first before she could finally leave.

He started scribbling something on the empty spaces on the document. Filling up the form while he waited for the reporter to comply with his request.

"I thought we already discussed everything inside. What else was there to talk about?" She was confused, but she eventually sat down to give the prince a chance to explain. Besides, she did not think that she had no choice.

She rummaged in her head, checking if she had forgotten something else. However, she believed she had already told them everything she knew about the case.

She raised her right brow at him when he shoved the papers he held in his hands toward hers. It suddenly clicked in her head what this was all about, seeing the heading in the form.

"You are free to leave as soon as you sign these papers." He told her as he leaned back on the chair after passing the papers and pen.

He could not allow her to disclose anything she had discovered and witnessed earlier. The only way to secure their secret was to make her sign an agreement.

Not that he did not trust her. After all, she was the one who brought the evidence to them. However, he had to follow protocol and secure the situation.

"You know I am not like most reporters. I assure you that you can trust me. I will not tell a soul what had transpired in here." She assured him as she skimmed through what he wrote on the standard form.

Still, she understood his concern. She was indeed in the business of snooping around and telling stories. He did not know her personally, and he was probably doing his obligation.

"I assure you that I don't see you as anything like the reporters I know," Lance said with a boyish grin on his face. He found her statement a bit cliché, but he actually believed her.

"But you still poke your nose where it did not belong. You are still a reporter. I still have to make sure that what you know does not end up in tomorrow's news." Lance spoke up again while she read the papers.

She looked up at him, staring him in the eyes. She could not believe that he was questioning her credibility in keeping her words. One of the things she valued most was her honor.

To think that she thought he was a decent member of the royal family. And the fact that she did find him very attractive. But now, she only saw him as just another royal pain in the ass.

Signing the damn papers, she shoved them in his direction. Then, she said. "Not every story is about making it to the top of the hour.." Before walking out of that office.