

~ Queen of My Country, Queen of My Heart ~

by Alex Tryst

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Disclaimers: First and foremost in order to enjoy this piece to its fullest, you must employ what is referred to in literature as “the suspension of disbelief”. Secondly I must note here that I neither condemn nor condone certain medical technologies such as cloning. Additionally you need to throw everything you know about the American government and monarchies in general out the window. Lastly but just as important, this book isn’t like my others. You must know ahead of time that there is anguish like I’ve never written, so tissues are a must. My beta reader even recommends a whole box.

Dedication: As always, to my wife, you are my fondest wish. To the specific inspiration for this particular piece though, I must credit my father-in-law in as much as it stems from one of his casual history lectures over a leisurely dinner where he so proudly informed me that back after America had won its independence from England, there was debate over whether or not George Washington should become king of our new nation. You will see American historical icons as you have never seen them before as I have grossly manipulated U.S. history, but all in fun of course.

Now on with the show.....

Part 1

Chapter One: Falling into Blue Eyes

Sun was streaming in the large windows that morning as Alexa lay peacefully in her bed. Even though she was awake, her dark eyes remained closed as she desperately wished she could fall back into her dreams. Turning away from the window, her body bumped one next to her, and her eyes opened in confusion. Lying next to her was a stunning blonde with long flowing hair and green eyes that were on her.

“Morning, Gwennie.” she whispered. “Been awake long?”

“Morning, Lex. No, I just woke up a few minutes ago. That sun is really bright.”

Alexa nodded sleepily in agreement. Curling an arm around her bed companion’s waist and placing her head on the elegant woman’s shoulder, she replied, “I just want to go back to sleep. I was having the best dream.”

“About some girl no doubt.” Gwen teased.

“Well, what can I say? I have the most beautiful woman in the world as my best friend. I’ll never find anyone like you Gwen. It’s just too bad you’re straight.”

Gwen smiled. “True but if you asked me to marry you, I’d still probably say yes. You are after all the crowned princess. How could I walk away from that simply because I don’t want to sleep with you? I’d be a fool as would any woman.” she joked.

“You really think I could get any woman I want?” curiously Alexa inquired propping up on her elbow and looking down at her friend.

“Oh, don’t even ask me that. You know you can. Look at you, tall, dark, and sexy, not to mention you are the sole heir to the throne. Women fall at your feet for that reason alone.”

“I know, but I’ve always wanted to find that special one. It’s hard to know who is being real with me and who is only out for what I can offer. With my parents getting on me about marrying, I don’t know what to do really. They want a woman at my side as does the nation, but I want to be in love, Gwennie. I want to find her, but I just don’t know where to even look.”

“I know. You’ll find her though. I promise you, Lex. Someday you’ll find that princess of yours, and she’ll be the luckiest woman in this world.” Hearing noise outside the bedroom door, the brunette asked, “Who’s here?”

“Alfred came in a little while ago. He was ordering up some breakfast. We really should get up.”

Alex groaned playfully and flopped down into the mattress. “I don’t want to. Can’t you all just go on without me? They won’t miss me.” she stated lightly.

Gwen laughed at her tall companion. She gave the princess a gentle push on the shoulder. “Get up, you lazy bum. I’m going back to my room to get dressed. You better be ready when I return.”

Alexa watched the tall thin blonde rise from bed. It really was true that Gwyneth Jefferson was the most beautiful woman to ever grace the earth in her opinion, but the pair had known each other since they were infants and formed a bond that went beyond friendship. They were as close as sisters, including the fights that naturally came with such territory. As much as the media embellished the precise nature of their relationship, both of them knew it never could grow into what popular opinion deemed it to be. When the blonde was gone, Alex reluctantly got out of bed herself and headed into the bathroom. The hotel accommodations for the princess were impeccable, but she hardly even noticed as she stumbled over to the shower. Her head was pounding from all the wine she and Gwen had consumed the night before, and she wondered why the blonde seemed unphased by it. Hoping a shower would rejuvenate her, she stripped off her clothes from the night before and slid under the warm spray.

Half an hour later she emerged from her room dressed in a dark grey suit with a silk red shirt to accentuate her dark hair. Gwen was not back yet, but her secretary, Alfred Simon, was standing in the living area on the phone. He gave her a smile and nod gesturing toward the dining room table where an extravagant spread of food was waiting as well as several of her staff members.

“Good morning, all.” she greeted taking a seat at the head of the table.

“Morning, your majesty.” they replied in unison before taking their seats as well.

Alfred joined them moments later. “Good morning, Lex. Feeling all right?” he teased lightly.

“I’m just fine, Alfred. And you?”

“Good. I was just on the phone with Gwen. She’ll be here shortly. We need to be leaving soon. The presentation is at nine, and it will take about an hour to get there.”

“Fine. As soon as Gwen gets here and gets something to eat, we can go. Tell me again what this is about exactly?”

“You’re presenting this year’s ‘Teacher of the Year’ award to a Miss Lara Monroe. Here is your speech.” he stated handing her a copy. “Read over it. There will be a teleprompter there for you as well. Remember though that this is a surprise. The school doesn’t know which one of their teachers won, except for the principal.” Alexa nodded taking the speech. The remainder of the morning during breakfast and the ride out to the school where the winner taught, she perused her notes as Gwen sat at her side.

When they arrived at the tiny elementary school, the press was already surrounding the building. Alexa just gave Gwen a demure smile and then waited for her door to be opened. As soon as it was, the flashing began as Gwen stepped out of the limo first with Alexa right behind. Extending her arm to the exquisite blonde, the princess escorted her best friend inside. Thankfully the press had been barred from entering the building, leaving them in semi-peace. As with any ceremony there was a certain amount of spectacle that preceded Alexa’s entrance, and this day was no exception. After the auditorium was full for the presentation, she was formally announced and paraded in with her entourage close behind. Everyone stood and gave a bow as she passed by them on her way to her seat in the front row.

Being that Gwen was one of the top directors of the national education program in the country as well as being Alexa’s companion, the tall blonde spoke first after being introduced by the principal of the school. The twenty five year old princess tried to listen as attentively as possible, but her thoughts inevitably strayed. Instead of listening to Gwen’s words, she began to focus her thought on the beautiful woman at the podium. Alexa had received a lot of pressure lately from her parents about choosing a mate, and Gwyneth Jefferson was their prime choice. Another noble from the distant lines of Thomas Jefferson himself, she appeared to be the ideal candidate to carry on the Washington line, and she had the beauty and intelligence to be a true compliment to the princess. “Now, here to present this years ‘Teacher of the Year’ award, is a woman who needs no real introduction. Nevertheless it is an honor and privilege to invite her majesty, the crowned princess of America, Alexa Washington, up to the podium to make the presentation to this year’s lucky recipient.” she stated.

Alexa stood as the clapping commenced and took a moment to straighten out her suit coat and

button it. Making her way onto the stage, she gave the crowd a friendly wave and smile. She came to Gwen and leaned ever so slightly down to kiss the blonde on both cheeks. Alexa then waited for her to leave the stage before stating, "As many of you know, Lady Gwyneth Jefferson is my dearest friend, and she is the executive director of our country's educational program. I would like to take a moment to extend my heartfelt thanks to her for all her dedication in helping mold our youth. Please join me in applause as I salute a real gem to our children." Gwen then stood for a moment as she was acknowledged before Alexa moved on to the item of business at hand. "Well, as you know once a year the national board of education recognizes one outstanding teacher in order to honor them for their dedication to our children. Each school nominates the teachers they think are most worthy of this esteemed reward, and the winner is then picked by the board of education, his majesty King George IV, Queen Victoria, and of course Lady Jefferson. This year I have the highest privilege of presenting this award to one of the teacher's in this school. In addition to the engraved silver cup that is sitting right here for the winner, that teacher will have the highest honor of representing our nation at the international education conference being held this year in Washington, D.C. with Lady Jefferson. Furthermore there is a generous stipend coupled with this award as well as the title of interim assistant director for their appropriate grade range, in this case, elementary, with the national board of education to work in conjunction with the board on a lecture series for the next year. Of course as an added bonus being that the international education conference is in our nation's capital, the winner will be residing at the palace for the duration of the conference." Alexa paused as the audience clapped. After the appropriate time, she started again. "Now I must admit I have not had the pleasure of meeting this year's winner, but I have been told that you have an extraordinary teacher among you. In the brief time she has been with the school, she has been instrumental in bringing a music program to the children, volunteering her time after school until a music teacher can be found. She has also found ways for getting parents more involved with the school by producing semi-annual plays for the whole student body using the parents as vital parts of the programs, and she has single-handedly improved the scores of those students that had previously been classified as unreachable with her after school tutoring program for kids of all ages. A native of Nashville, she has lived here her entire life and attended Vanderbilt University on academic scholarship where she graduated magna cum laude. After that she joined this staff. From what everyone has told me about this woman, she is a real treasure to the school and the educational community. This year it is my great delight to present this year's award to the winner, who additionally I might add is the youngest and newest teacher ever having received such prize. This year's award goes to your hometown lady, Miss Lara Monroe. Miss Monroe, if you would please come forward and allow me to look upon the face of the future of our children."

Alexa's eyes scanned the crowd for the teacher. When a petite little blonde rose from her chair, the princess felt her knees begin to weaken. The young woman was beautiful. Taking a hold of the podium with both hands to hold herself up, the tall royal watched as the pixie of a girl floated down the aisle toward her with an adorable blush gracing her cheeks. The little teacher climbed the stairs and glided across the stage to where Alexa was standing, temporarily mesmerizing the brunette with the way she walked. However she came to as Lara bowed her blonde head in reverence in front of her. Alexa flashed a bright smile at the short woman as her eyes met the bluest ones she had ever seen. The younger woman was smiling slightly as well. "Miss Monroe, congratulations." she stated extending her right hand to the woman formally and holding the

silver cup with her left.

“Thank you, your majesty. It is an honor to even meet you.” she stated softly so only that tall woman could hear.

“I’m sure the pleasure is all mine, Miss Monroe. Please. The floor is yours.” she said gesturing to the podium.

Allowing the blonde to approach the podium, Alexa moved back a few steps to give Lara her moment. “Well, I hardly know what to say. I never expected to win this award in my entire career, not to mention in my first year of teaching. This is the greatest honor I have ever been given, and the feeling of receiving this personally from Princess Alexa, is just more than I can even articulate at the moment. I’m overwhelmed. Teaching and children are my life, and I am just fortunate enough that our principal was kind enough to nominate me for such a distinguished award and that the committee that voted saw fit to give this year’s prize to me. For that I am most thankful, Lady Jefferson. Along with this award comes great challenges, which I will strive to meet and exceed, and I am honored to be the one chosen to represent our prominent nation at the conference. Thank you all. I will serve you well.”

Once the ceremony had come to an end, a tour of the school had been scheduled for Alexa and her group. As the middle-aged balding principal showed them around the building, the princess wondered about the young teacher. She had hoped to spend a little time with her, but she had immediately returned to her classroom. Fortunately though as the tour was winding down, the man mentioned where Lara Monroe’s classroom was. Taking the initiative Alexa walked directly over to it. She heard the blonde’s melodious voice before she saw her. Coming to a stop in the open doorway, she spotted the small woman sitting in a child-sized chair in the front of the room with her students on the floor around her, all of them riveted to her every word as she read them a book. The teacher never even noticed the princess, allowing Alexa time to watch her in action. The little woman was as captivating to the princess as to the kids, and when the book had come to an end, Alexa clapped for the reader to announce her presence. Lara’s head jerked up in surprise to see the dark-haired woman with her group dawning the doorway.

“Your majesty, I didn’t know you were standing there.” she stuttered rising to her feet and bowing.

“I was just listening to your story. Do you mind if I come in? I would hate to disturb your class.”

“No. Please do. Kids, we have a visitor. This is her majesty, Princess Alexa. Can you all say hello?” she asked of her seven year olds. The tall woman smiled as the young children did as they were told. “I was just reading to them. We had one more story to go before we started our math. Perhaps I could be so bold as to ask if you would like to read?” she suggested.

Feeling delicate hands pressing a book into her own and seeing hopeful blue eyes upon her, Alexa knew she was helpless to resist. “Sure. I could read one. However I’m not sure I could do as well as you.”

The blonde blushed lightly. The princess noticed Lara's hand resting on her arm for a moment as the petite woman addressed the kids. "Princess Alexa is going to read our last story today. Everyone please stay settled." Looking back at the tall woman, she said, "They're all yours."

"Thanks." the princess softly replied as Lara moved off to the side. Alexa felt the loss of contact immediately. However she didn't have time to do anything about it as twenty pair of expectant eyes fell on her. Looking around for a suitable chair for her large frame, she found none, so she took to the floor. "All right, kids, here we go." she stated launching into the short book. Ten minutes later it was over, and Lara asked them all to go back to their desks to prepare for math. "Miss Monroe, I was wondering if I might have a word with you in private." Alexa requested.

"Certainly, your highness." she answered coming to where Alexa was standing at the back of the room. "What is it?"

"Well, I was wondering if I could invite you and your significant other to dinner with Lady Jefferson and myself this evening to celebrate your achievement?" she offered, hoping that the little woman was not married.

"Your highness, that is quite an offer, and I would love to join you. However my boyfriend Ryan is out of town on business, and since my father is as well, my mother and I were planning on having dinner together this evening."

"Well, please bring your mother with you then. I would love to meet the woman who inspired such greatness."

Another flush adorned the blonde's fair cheeks. "Your majesty, you are too kind. I wouldn't want to impose you on."

"Nonsense. I would not have invited you otherwise. Please. Will you and your mother join Gwyneth and myself?"

"Yes. That would be wonderful. Thank you."

"Great. We're staying at the Vanderbilt. I trust you can still find your way down to your alma mater. The hotel is right across the way. How does seven sound?"

"That's fine."

"Good. Nothing fancy. Come as you are. One of my assistants will meet you in the lobby and escort you where you need to go. See you then."

On the limo ride to their next meeting on the agenda, Alexa looked over at Alfred who was busy conversing on the phone. However seeing her staring at him, he quickly ended the call. "What is it, Lex?"

"I need some flowers delivered up to the suite, Alfred."

“Fine. What kind?”

The princess shrugged. “I don’t know. Roses I guess.” she stated gaining Gwen’s attention.

“Roses? For what, Lex?” the blonde inquired with a teasing grin. “Would these happen to be for a blonde that we met today?”

“Yes, they are for Lara. I need a card as well I guess. A congratulations one. What color should they be, Gwennie? I don’t want to give off the wrong impression.”

“That rules out red. Go for a white or a pale peach. That would be nice.” Looking back at him, Alexa said, “What Gwen said, Alfred.”

“And how many for the young lady?” he questioned beginning to take a note of the request.

“Let’s not get crazy. Three dozen should do it. Have them put on the side table in the dining room. I want them to be near her but not on the table where they will impede anyone’s view.”

“Certainly. I will call the hotel and make sure that gets done right away.”

“Also, Alfred, see what you can dig up on this woman. I want to know everything you can find out about her and her family.”

“Most certainly, Lex. I’ll get on it right away.”

Fifteen minutes to seven that evening found Gwen and Alexa alone on the balcony of the spacious hotel suite. Alexa was nursing a whiskey and water as she looked out over the city of Nashville. Gwen stood close by her, sipping her wine and taking in the same view. “What’s on your mind, Lex? A certain blonde beauty?”

“She was so amazing, Gwennie.”

“You really took a shine to her. Lara seems like a sweet girl.”

“Too bad she has a boyfriend.” the princess mumbled into her drink. Gwen smiled. “That doesn’t stop you from taking interest though, does it?”

“Is it that obvious?”

“Not to her if that’s what you are worried about. I think she’s clueless. I know you well enough to know that look you were giving her though. Lex, if you really wanted to, you could persuade her to switch teams. You have everything women want.”

“Yeah, I know, the money, power, etc. You know I want her to like me for me though. That’s just not going to happen. I’ll just enjoy this evening with her and leave it at that.” she said as

there was knock on the door of the suite. Moments later Alfred announced the arrival of their guests. Taking Gwen by the hand the tall couple entered the suite to find Lara and an older woman standing there. The little blonde was wearing a sleeveless black dress that came to mid-knee with a black sweater draped over her shoulders. Alexa smiled at how wonderful she looked as she moved to greet them. "Good evening, Miss Monroe. You look stunning." she boldly stated with open admiration. Alexa figured she had nothing to lose by making her interest known. After all she would never be rebuffed publicly by any woman being who she was, so she knew she could get away with it.

Lara blushed deeply at the comment. "Your majesty." she whispered, unable to suddenly find her voice with the way the heir to the throne was looking at her.

Without waiting for any sort of introduction from the teacher, Alexa turned to the older woman. "You must be Mrs. Monroe. It truly is an honor to meet the woman who brought this treasure into the world."

"Katherine, sire, the honor is all mine." she stated with a bow of her head.

"May I present Lady Jefferson?" Alexa introduced. Once Katherine had greeted Gwen as well, Alexa gestured to the dining room. "Dinner was brought up a moment ago. Please, let's sit." She allowed all three towheads to lead the way into the other room and subtly enjoyed the view of the teacher's backside. Going into the dining area, the teacher noticed the roses sitting on a side table with a card with her name on it leaned against the vase. Walking over to it curiously, she looked at Alexa, who nodded for her to continue. The petite blonde picked up the card and opened it. It was simple and yet Lara felt such an honor that Alexa had signed it personally with a note attached. Turning toward the tall woman, she gave a slight flush.

"Thank you, your highness. These are absolutely beautiful."

"They pale in comparison to your blue eyes." the brunette mentioned not meeting Lara's gaze as she was busy inspecting the wine for their meal. However Gwen noticed the teacher turn a deep shade of red at the comment while her mother faded to white. She cleared her throat discreetly to warn her friend that she had gone too far and then invited their guests to sit. Most of dinner focused on what Lara would be doing at the conference and the role she would play during the coming year in her new position with the board of education. However during the meal the phone rang. Both Alexa and Gwen let it go for one of the servants to get, but after just a moment, Alfred dawned the doorway.

"Your highness, you are needed on the phone."

"Who is it? Can't it wait? I'm in the middle of dinner."

"No, sire. It's the queen, and she requires your immediate attention."

Alexa sighed. "Very well. I'll take it in the other room. Excuse me, ladies."

When she was gone, Gwen turned to their guests and smiled. "Her highness is so glad you were able to make it this evening." she stated.

"Well, it's not everyday, the crowned princess invites me to dinner. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I'll admit that she is not what I expected."

"How's that?"

The little woman shrugged. "I don't know. She's real. I guess there was some mystique about her when I would see her on tv, but now having met her, she's just like everyone else."

"That's how she wants people to see her. She hates being treated differently simply because she's the heir. You'll come to learn that as we all work together at the conference."

"She's going to be at the conference as well?"

"Oh yes. Princess Alexa likes to be extremely involved. She will be at as many meetings as she can. I have no doubt that she will want to help prep you as well. You'll be spending a fair amount of time at the palace beforehand I'm sure." Before any more could be said, the brunette returned with a somber countenance. Forgetting their company for a moment, Gwen slipped in her address when she saw her best friend's face. "Lex, what is it? What's wrong?"

"Ladies, I'm terribly sorry, but I'm urgently needed back at the palace. You'll have to excuse me."

"Well, we should go then." Lara suggested, sensing that whatever was wrong was quite serious.

"No. Please stay and enjoy the rest of your meal. Gwen, I need to speak with you a moment."

"Certainly." she replied following Alexa out of the room.

"What is it, Lex?"

"My father, Gwennie. He's in the hospital. I need to go back in case something happens."

"Is it that serious?" she questioned in concern for her friend and her nation.

"He's in a coma. Apparently he had a massive stroke. I have to go right away. The people need to see someone on that throne, and that someone is me."

"Do you want me to come with you?"

"No. I need you to stay here with Lara. If nothing else, find out more about her for me, and if you can slip in some good things about me." she tried to joke.

"Of course. I'll come home later tonight. Call me and let me know if you want company. I don't

care what time it is.”

“Okay. Now go on. We can’t let them know this is going on. The press doesn’t know about it yet. They are waiting on me to make it public.”

“Of course. I’ll leave you to pack then, and don’t worry about Lara. I’ll take care of her.”

“Thanks.”

Half an hour later Alexa stepped into the dining room to see the three blondes still having dinner. “Again I’m terribly sorry that I must depart so suddenly. I’ll be in touch though in regards to the conference.”

“Yes, your majesty. I do hope everything is all right.” Lara replied.

“It was a pleasure meeting you, Katherine. Hopefully next time we see each other it won’t be for such a short time.”

“Likewise, your highness.”

Gwen stood from the table and came to hug her. Leaning to her ear, she whispered, “Everything will be all right. You’ll see.”

Alexa nodded in response before quickly pecking the blonde’s lips in affection. “I’ll see you later tonight.”

“Yes. I’ll come by your place as soon as I get in. I love you, Lex.”

“Love you too. See you in a bit.” Breaking away from her friend, she looked at Lara and her mother. “Excuse me, ladies.”

As the teacher watched Alexa rush from the room, she knew something was terribly wrong. Even though it was not her right to ask what was going on, she was concerned for the princess. Alexa was obviously putting on a strong front, but she saw the vulnerability there embraced in Lady Jefferson’s arm. The mutual adoration so evidently displayed between the two confirmed her curiosity regarding their relationship. All the major publications made it known they were a couple even though both denied it. However seeing the intimate demonstration, she assumed they were definitely involved.

Looking upon the face of Gwen, Lara pondered what it might be like for her. Lady Jefferson had everything, notoriety, education, money, and the arm of the most available woman in the country. The teacher wondered what her life was like, being with Alexa constantly and dealing with the press. It seemed as if the two never had any privacy, and she felt special that they had allowed her to share in their private time.

Knowing that it was inappropriate to inquire of the situation, Lara smiled at Gwen. “We don’t

mean to keep you, Lady Jefferson. If you need to go as well, we will understand.” she said.

“Actually Princess Alexa has requested that I stay here and take care of some business before returning. Tell me more about yourself, Lara. Have you always wanted to be a teacher?”

“For the most part, yes. Of course I think I had the adolescent dreams most girls have of being a princess or ballerina, but teaching has always been my fantasy. Although I must admit I never thought this would happen. The award was nothing that I had ever considered even though I have heard about it obviously. I really am appreciative of it and the opportunity that goes along with it.”

“I know you will do a fabulous job, Lara. We have all the confidence in the world in you and rightfully so by your accolades. You have impressed us all, Princess Alexa, King George IV, and Queen Victoria included. For once I am not so concerned about our presence at the annual international education conference.”

“Well, thank you for such faith. I won’t let you or Princess Alexa down.” That evening after Lara and her mother left the hotel, and the teacher was taking her mother home there was a news brief that interrupted the song on the radio. It was about the king’s serious condition, and the little blonde knew that was the call Alexa had received that evening that had sent her rushing back home. The small woman thought of the princess, the image of strength and composure even in such a moment.

“I sure hope the king is all right.” she stated aloud as she drove.

“Well, the Princess Alexa’s departure makes more sense now. Poor child. She’s too young to lose her father. I hope that he recovers.”

“She certainly was interesting to meet, wasn’t she?”

“To say the least. She seemed to be flirting with you, dear. I don’t see how she could do that in front of her intended.”

Lara shrugged. “I don’t know, but Lady Jefferson didn’t seem to care too much. Maybe it’s a different kind of relationship. I could tell that they love each other regardless of how much they deny it in the press. That was quite obvious. Who knows though? They live differently than we do, and I guess it’s not my business anyway.”

Her mother nodded in agreement. “Makes you wonder though, doesn’t it? They are interesting to watch together. I can see where the love they share could be taken a romantic sense, but I saw more there. It seemed more familial to me, as if they were sisters. I didn’t see a sexual undertone there. However I did see it when the princess was speaking to you.” she pointed out. “Maybe they have an arrangement. Regardless of that though, she did take a shine to you. Surely she knows that you are not available in that respect.”

“I don’t think something like that would matter to her, Mom. She’s the princess after all. I’m

sure she's used to getting her way. She could probably have anyone she wanted, whether or not they were of the same sexual orientation. I mean think about it. Having sexual relations with the only heir to the throne for fame and money, not to mention a crown of your own. I think that could be appealing to lots of women if they are motivated by that kind of thing regardless of their orientation."

"Would it appeal to you, Lara?" her mother questioned hesitantly.

"I don't know. I'd much prefer to marry for love than obligation."

"Too bad because I think the princess has an interest in you." her mother teased.

Lara blushed. "She does not."

"Oh no? You think she gets all women three dozen roses or compliments their eyes?"

"What does it matter anyway?"

"It doesn't. It's just fun to speculate."

Chapter Two: Learning to Woo Her

Several weeks later Lara had been invited up to the king's country castle in the foothills of the Shenandoah Valley for a working vacation with Alexa and Gwen to help prepare for the conference. Alexa had insisted that the royal jet bring her to the country, so Lara was whisked to the royal palace via the plane and a helicopter. When the helicopter landed in the back rolling yard of the castle, she was surprised at the sight that greeted her. Alexa was standing there in a pair of riding pants, boots, and jacket. A helmet was tucked under her arm, and she was grinning brightly as a pack of hounds sat obediently beside her. Just beyond her in the shade under an umbrella were the queen, who was fanning herself lightly and the king close beside her looking frail as he sat in a wheelchair. The press had made it clear that the king had not been the same since his stroke and for all purposes, he was unable to serve in his former capacity, leaving the twenty-five year old princess the unofficial leader of their country. The tall woman moved to the helicopter as it landed and opened the door for the teacher. "Welcome, Lara." she greeted extending her hand to assist the blonde to the ground.

"Thank you, sire." she replied bowing as usual.

"Come. I would like for you to meet my parents." she said moving her hand to the teacher's lower back and directing her over to them. "Father, Mother, this is Lara Monroe. She was the one that won the 'Teacher of the Year' award. Lara, my parents, his majesty King George IV and Queen Victoria." she presented.

"Your majesties, it is an honor." Lara stated bowing humbly before them.

“Please, sit and have some tea with us, my dear. You must be tired after your journey.” Victoria offered gesturing to a chair. “Alexa, go inform them that our guest has arrived so that Lara’s things may be taken to her room.”

“Certainly. I’ll be right back.” she responded depositing her riding helmet on the table and moving away to do her mother’s bidding.

“So, you are the one that Alexa has said so much about? She was most impressed with you when you met. I am so glad that you seem as splendid as your resume. There was a strong pool of nominations this year for the award. I’m glad it appears we made the right choice.”

“Your highness, I am thrilled for the chance to work with the board and represent our country.”

“Lex mentioned that she sat in on your class while she was there. She had only the highest remarks concerning your methods.”

“She did step in for awhile. It was a pleasure to have her there. The children loved her. She was even obliging enough to read them a story.” “She does love children. I hope it won’t be too long before she gives us grandchildren. If we could just get her settled down with a wife first.” the older woman teased. “The country needs that now, but she’s determined to remain single much against her parents’ urging.”

“I’m sure when the moment is right, she will find the one. Whoever she is will be lucky to have such a role. Following in your footsteps won’t be easy for any woman Princess Alexa chooses.”

The queen smiled. “You are as charming as Lex said you were.”

Lara flushed lightly at the compliment and the thought of Alexa speaking about her to her mother. The blonde spared a glance at the king, who had said nothing. He did not look good, his eyes almost vacant and skin ashen. Throughout the many years he had served as king, he had presented himself as such a strong person and to see him so frail hurt Lara’s heart. He seemed on the very edge of life, and her heart couldn’t help but go out to the young princess for her father’s infirm condition.

Seeing where Lara’s eyes had strayed, the queen looked at her husband. “Have you had enough sun, my dear?” she asked of him. He merely gave a nod. “Very well. I’ll have Lex take you in when she returns.” Moments later the brunette came back to the table. “Lex, be a good daughter and take your father inside, will you?” Victoria asked.

“Sure, Mother. Come on, Dad.” she said to him. Lara watched as Alexa embraced him under the legs and around the back to lift him from his chair. As the tall woman carried the ghost of the man that had helped bring her into the world, the blonde saw the complete adoration the princess had for her father by the smile she gave him as they walked off toward the palace. “Where would you like to sit, Father?” she inquired as they moved away from the table.

Victoria noticed Lara watching the display. “She’s always been her father’s girl.” she stated.

“The king is worse than the press even admits?” the blonde questioned despite herself.

“I’m afraid so, Lara.”

“He will recover though, won’t he?”

The queen didn’t respond at first. “The time is fast approaching that Alexa will take over her official duties of the throne. That’s why she needs to marry so soon. She needs a queen to sit beside her when that moment comes.” Victoria replied.

A few minutes later Alexa came back, but this time she had Gwen in tow. The teacher observed the way they held hands as they came to the table. Seeing Lara there with the queen, Gwen smiled brightly. “Lara, how are you?” she inquired taking a seat next to the smaller blonde.

“I’m fine, Lady Jefferson. How are you?”

“I’m doing well. Are you ready to get to work?”

“Whenever you are.”

“Well, I’ll admit that I hadn’t planned anything for the rest of the afternoon. I thought we could relax today and start early tomorrow. How does that suit you?”

“That’s fine. Whatever you two want.”

“Well, I was about to go for a ride when I saw the helicopter land. Perhaps after we’ve had some tea we could all go together.” Alex suggested.

“What a splendid idea, Lex.” Gwen responded. “Wouldn’t that be fun, Lara?”

“That does sound like fun. I’ve always enjoyed a good ride.”

“Wonderful. It’s settled then.” the princess said digging into the refreshments that had been served.

The rest of the afternoon was spent riding. Alexa spent most of her time riding ahead of the two blondes with the dogs, jumping over everything she could and generally doing what Gwen would have considered showing off. The two fair-haired women though followed at a more gentle gait.

“Princess Alexa is quite the equestrian.” Lara mentioned after watching her for a while.

Gwen gave a wry smile. “Yes, she certainly is. Horses have always been one of her pastimes. She loves coming here when she can. It’s her favorite getaway.”

“Lady Jefferson, may I ask how long you two have known each other?”

“Lara, I think it would be best if you started calling me Gwen. After all we are going to be working together, and I foresee us having a friendship. My friends don’t call me Lady Jefferson.”

“Very well. Gwen it is.”

“Lex and I have known each other since birth. Our families are steeped in history together, our ancestors fought together to win our independence from England. For eight generations our families have been friends, and it was my ancestor Thomas Jefferson who actually nominated Alexa’s great grandfather seven times removed, George Washington, to be king of this great nation. In turn King George I gave my family nobility, and Thomas Jefferson became lord over most of the southern Virginia territory. My family still occupies the house at Monticello just outside Charlottesville. My parents live there.”

“Where do you live?”

“In the D.C. area. That is where the headquarters for the national board of education is, so I spend my time there. I suppose there will come a time when I must occupy the house my parents do unless I marry another noble. My family is held in the highest regard by the Washington line due to the relationship our ancestors had though, so there is really no other royal that could be of as much importance.” she stated matter of factly.

“Except for the princess herself.” Lara supplied.

“Yes, except for Lex herself.” Gwen agreed casting a glance at her riding companion. “I think I know what you are wondering about, so allow me to put your curiosity at rest, Lara. The press believes that Lex and I are to be married, but such is not the case. We are dear friends, but she has not asked for my hand despite popular opinion.”

“You are the obvious choice, though, aren’t you? Would you accept if she made a proposal?” Lara inquired, thrilled that Gwen seemed to be willing to discuss intimate details with her.

“It’s true that I am the obvious choice, Lara, but I am not the best choice for, Lex. For the country maybe that is true, but Lex and I both want love. As much as we love each other, there are no romantic feelings between us. A marriage between us would strictly be an alliance of our families. I’m not sure if either of us really wants that, even though our parents do. Regardless of what happens, it would be in her best interest to marry another noble.”

Lara nodded. She couldn’t really comprehend having to live the way the two women she was coming to know did. She couldn’t imagine having to do things for others all the time instead of just themselves. As much as she had envied the life of the royals, she was quickly coming to realize it was not all fun. They had to give a lot of themselves to others. Curiously she asked, “If Lex could marry for love, what type of woman do you think would strike her fancy?”

“Frankly I think a tiny little blonde with a sweet personality would be exactly what she would

want, someone like you, Lara.” Gwen stated staring directly at her.

The teacher’s heart stopped momentarily with the way Lady Jefferson was looking at her. Gwen was making the obvious point that Alexa’s interest could be in her, and Lara didn’t know exactly how to respond. Not knowing what to say, she merely mentioned, “But I’m not a royal.”

Just then Alexa rode up to them sporting a large grin. “What are you two talking about?” she inquired shooting Lara a smile that made her eyes sparkle with mirth.

“Oh, nothing important, Lex. Just girl talk you know.” Gwen answered for them.

“Oh, great. Just what I need.” she teased falling in beside Lara with her horse.

“So, Lara, tell me more about this boyfriend of yours. What did you say his name was? Ryan?” Gwen inquired trying to change the subject. She knew Alexa wouldn’t really enjoy it, but it might be useful information for the princess if she was going to try to woo the teacher.

“Oh, there’s not much to tell. His name is Ryan, and we’ve been dating for about a year. He’s in sales.”

“Is it serious? Do you think you’ll marry him?” Gwen asked in casual interest.

Lara shrugged. “I don’t know. He hasn’t asked, and I don’t think I would call it serious. He’s traveling so much that even though we’ve been together a year, it seems like much less. Only time will tell I guess.” she answered sparing a look at the princess. She felt self-conscious discussing her relationship with her boyfriend in light of what Gwen had just told her. Alexa just smiled at the little woman before consulting her watch. “We should be getting back. Dinner will be in a bit, and I’m sure you’d like to retire early after your long trip, Lara.” she stated turning the house in the direction of the stables.

Later that evening after their evening meal, Lara was left to her own devices as Alexa had business to attend to with her parents. Being on her own, she had a chance to wander the palace and the front grounds.

Meanwhile Alexa was holed up in her father’s office with her parents for a serious discussion. Sitting on the couch, she looked at her father, who sat by the fire. “Alexa, I know you know what this conversation is going to be about. It is far time you choose a mate.” the king began.

“Father, why? I’m only twenty-five. I’m not ready to settle down yet.”

“Alexa, please.” her mother implored. “You need to be wed and soon.”

“Mother, why is this so imperative? I’ve been doing just fine without a wife.”

With a shaking hand, her father touched her on the arm. She looked into his hollow eyes. “Alexa, you know my time is near. I want to see you married before I leave this country in your hands.

Please? Appease me and marry Gwyneth. I want to see you two wed before the year is over. I'm not sure I can even make it that long. You know what the doctors have said. I need to see you walk down that aisle. It would please me as your father. Don't make me order you as your king, Alexa."

The dark-haired woman sighed. She was torn as to what to do. She so wanted her father to be at her wedding when it finally did happen, but she knew he didn't have long. The doctors had made it very clear it was less than a year. She also realized the importance of being wed before she took the throne. No heir had ever ruled alone, and the people would feel most secure if she were married and producing heirs to carry on the line.

"Please, darling," her mother pleaded.

Shrugging in defeat she mumbled, "Fine. You two win. I will ask Gwennie to marry me."

"Thank you. You are making the right decision," her father assured her.

She looked at the two of them before quietly saying, "I guess I need to go talk to Gwen now. If you'll excuse me."

With a heavy heart Alexa went off to find her best friend. Gwen was sitting on the back porch watching the last bit of sun as it set behind the mountains. As soon as she saw Alexa, she asked in concern, "What's wrong, Lex? Is it your father?"

The princess shook her head. "I just had a talk with my parents. They have beseeched me to wed before the year is over. As you know my father's condition is getting worse, and he would like to see me take my vows before it's too late."

Gwen reached for the brunette's hand. "What are you going to do?"

Looking down at the blonde, she answered, "I told him I would do it, that I would marry before then."

"What?" she asked in surprise. "And how do you propose to win Lara's affections in such a short amount of time?"

"I don't." Alexa replied. "My interest in Lara may be love, or it may not be. I need a woman I can count on to sit beside me as my queen. I need a confidant and a friend. I need you, Gwennie," she said. Kneeling down in front of Gwen's chair, she took her friend's hands. "Gwyneth Jefferson, I need you as my queen. It's what my father and mother want, and it's what this country needs. Please, Gwennie, say you'll marry me."

"What about Lara?"

"What about Lara? I'm not even sure of what I'm feeling for her. I know nothing about her or her family. I need someone of nobility. It's what is expected. If I were truly in love with her, then

maybe I could persuade my parents to make an exception, but there is not time for that. She's involved with someone anyway. There really is not a moment to lose. Please, Gwen, will you marry me?" she asked again.

There was a moment of stillness as Gwen pondered the offer. However before she could make any sort of reply, they heard footsteps along the stone path just before Lara turned the corner of the porch. Seeing the princess on her knees in front of Lady Jefferson, the teacher felt for sure she had just interrupted something intimate between them and turned flush in embarrassment.

"Oh, I am so sorry, your highness. I didn't mean to intrude. I was just walking the grounds and watching the sunset. I'll go." she stammered.

Alexa jumped to her feet. "No. Please. Stay here. You didn't interrupt anything important. It can wait. Join us for the sunset. I insist." she said gesturing to a chair.

Lara looked at Gwen who was nodding in agreement, so she took the offered seat. There was an awkward moment as the three of them sat there, no one really knowing what to say. Alexa wondered if Lara had heard anything that had been said, but she didn't ask. She just cast a look at Gwen. The tall blonde shifted nervously as her eyes found her friend.

"You'll have to excuse me." Gwen stated after a moment. "I just remembered some business I had to take care of after dinner, and then I am going to retire early. I'll see you both at breakfast. All right?"

"Sure, Gwennie." Alexa replied standing as Gwen did.

"Good night, Gwen." Lara said.

"Night, Lara, Lex."

When the little woman was alone with the princess, she said, "I really am sorry if I interrupted you two."

"It was nothing." Alexa mentioned.

"It didn't look like nothing." Lara insisted.

"I assure you, Lara. It was not important." A brief moment passed before she inquired, "Would you care to continue your stroll of the grounds with me?" "Sure. That would be nice." the blonde replied.

As the two women stood, the princess whistled loudly, and her pack of dogs came running toward them. "Let's go this way. There is a lovely spot down by the stream." Lara followed her lead, walking just a step behind the powerful woman. "Tell me, Lara. What do you want out of life?"

“Oh, I don’t know. I want to be married and have a family I guess. I’d like to be able to help people. I think that’s what life is about really, leaving the world a better place than how you found it if you can. I’d like to be able to change one person’s life for the better. It would please me greatly.”

“I’d say you’ve already accomplished that with your teaching. The kids in your classroom are blessed to have you whether they recognize that at the moment or not. Trust me. Years from now when they are adults with their own lives, they will look back in fondness as they think of Lara Monroe. You truly have a gift. I’d like to see that gift utilized on a broader scale, and I think working with the board will be a start.”

“It certainly gives me opportunities I’ve never had. I look forward to it very much. Gwen tells me you are really involved with the board.”

“I try to be. Education is an important aspect of development, and our country can’t remain at the top of the pack if we do not take the time to educate our children. I’m a firm believer that education is the basis for brilliant thinkers. We have quite a few brilliant people in this country who are doing wonders for the world, and I would like to see that trend continue. It’s teachers like you that assure that future, Lara.”

The teacher nodded. Changing the direction of the conversation, she questioned, “And what would you like out of life, your majesty?”

“Well, first of all, I think I would like it if you were to call me Lex when we are alone. It’s hard to feel friendly when you are addressing me so formally.”

“Of course, Lex. Whatever you would like.”

Alexa smiled lightly as her name slipped from Lara’s tongue. It was so soft and sensuous the way the blonde whispered it. “Say my name again.” she requested.

“Alexa.” Lara said wondering why she had been asked to do so.

The tall women grinned. “That sounds so beautiful with your slight southern drawl. Your boyfriend, Ryan, is a lucky man, Lara. You’re beautiful, intelligent, educated, and I can tell on top of that you are a sweet woman. He really has it all.”

The teacher blushed at the words. The tall woman’s words warmed her spirit, because it was rare that people complimented her. “Sometimes I wish he realized that.” she said sadly.

“You mean he doesn’t? Is he blind or just stupid?” the princess quipped.

“Look at you. I know plenty of men and women that would give their lives to look into a pretty face such as yours.” she mentioned softly as her hand instinctively came to cup the petite woman’s fair chin. Alexa tilted the bashful woman’s face, so their eyes could meet. “I am one of those women.” she admitted.

“Your majesty.” Lara whispered breaking their gaze.

Alexa couldn't be dissuaded however as she felt drawn to the little woman. Her arm slipped around the teacher's waist. She heard the anxious exhale of the blonde. “Lara, I must admit that the first time I saw you I wanted to know you.” she whispered leaning down to Lara's ear. “I wanted to know you intensely and intimately.” she murmured as her breath swept over the blonde's neck.

“Sire.” Lara managed to squeak as she felt the mouth of the future queen kiss the top of her ear. Instinctually her hands came up to Alexa's stomach.

“Lara, I know you're involved with someone, but is there anything I could say to get you to retire with me this evening?” she inquired softly running her fingers through golden tresses.

Being completely caught off guard at the question and forgetting exactly who she was addressing, Lara asked loudly before she could catch herself, “Excuse me? Did you just ask what I think you did?”

Sensing that she was not going to get the response she wanted, Alexa stepped back and shoved her hands into her pockets. “Listen, Lara. I'm a woman who knows what she wants, and I'm used to getting my way. I didn't mean to offend you. I was just wondering if there was a possibility of us getting to know each other better.”

“Correct me if I'm wrong, your highness, but you just asked me to go to bed with you.”

“That is correct, Lara. I did just do that, and you have not given me an answer.”

“What kind of answer can I give to that, sire?”

“An honest one. If you don't want to, you can say so.”

“I can? You would really accept it if I told you no?” she questioned.

“Of course. I will not force you to do something you don't want to. What do you make me out for? There are plenty of women that would appease me. I'm asking you though. A simple yes or no will suffice.”

Lara looked at the expectant eyes of her sovereign before casting her gaze elsewhere. “In that case, no, your majesty.” she stated quietly. “No?” Alexa questioned in surprise.

Lara met her eyes this time as she repeated firmly, “No, sire. There is nothing you could say to get me to do such a thing.”

The tall princess was taken back by the firm rebuff for it was unusual that anyone deny her anything. However she had given the blonde her word, and she was not about to go back on it

even though she wanted the woman in front of her. “Very well, Lara. I understand.” she replied looking away for a moment. Regrouping her thoughts she stepped closer to the younger woman again. Reaching out she put her hand on the blonde’s arm.

Instantly Lara shied away from her touch uncomfortably. “Your majesty, I would appreciate it if you would refrain from touching me.” she softly stated.

It was obvious to Alexa that the feeling of her repulsed Lara, and it was a shot to her heart. Never had any woman demanded that she not place her hands on them. The princess pulled away. “I’m sorry, Lara. Could I ask you something? What is it about me that you find so unappealing? Is it because I’m a woman?”

The teacher glanced up into the dark eyes of her majesty. “If I may be honest with you, sire, I am utterly offended that you would think me a person that would casually have sexual relations with anyone, you included. I am not that type of woman. You don’t even care for me. You just want what you see, and I find that atrocious. Now if that is all, I think I would prefer to retire to my room.”

“Of course. I’ll walk you back.” she suggested.

“No thank you, your highness. I’d prefer to go alone. I will see you tomorrow.” the blonde said before rushing off, leaving Alexa simply standing there wondering how everything had gone so horribly wrong in a matter of minutes. It was clear that she had not only offended the teacher, she had somehow hurt her as well, which grieved the princess. Unsure of what to do, Alexa slowly made her way back to the palace. Determined to make it right somehow, the brunette took a seat in the garden to ponder how she could make amends.

She had never had to apologize to anyone nor did she know how to court a woman, because no one had ever even admitted to their offense when she had done something, and most of the time women were more than amiable with whatever she wanted. However Lara had shunned her, but she still felt the need to pursue the younger woman at least to apologize. It was a strange situation for the princess, as she had never had to deal with such a problem. Figuring that it wouldn’t hurt to at least give the young woman some flowers, she began to pace the garden looking for the perfect one in which to present to her. Her mother found her studying the rose bushes several minutes later.

“My dear, what are you doing?” she inquired of her daughter.

“I’m looking for the perfect rose.” she answered plainly deciding on the one she wanted to pick. Reaching for it she went to snap the stem.

“Is this for Gwen?”

“No, for Lara.” she stated. “Ouch.” she grumbled as the top of her hand scraped against a thorn and breaking skin. However she smiled in triumphant as her flower came free.

“Oh, Alexa, you’re bleeding.” her mother mentioned reaching for her daughter’s hand. “Are you all right?”

“I’m fine. It’s nothing, just a scratch.” She retrieved a tissue from her pocket and dabbed at the blood running down the back of her hand.

“That isn’t just a scratch. You need to see to that.”

“I will, Mother.”

“Now exactly why are you out here picking flowers for Lara?” she inquired curiously.

“Because I need to apologize, and I thought this might be a good way.”

“Apologize? To her? For what?”

“I offended her, so she’s upset with me.”

“What did you do to offend her, and why do you even care?”

“I just do. Okay?”

“No. Not okay. What’s going on?” Alexa shrugged. She wasn’t sure she wanted to speak to her mother about what was in her heart, because she wasn’t sure she would understand. “Alexa, you can tell me anything.” her mother pressed.

The princess shrugged again and looked at the queen. “Mom, I think I might be falling in love.” she quietly confessed.

“With Lara?” Alexa nodded in confirmation. “Oh, my. Alexa, why didn’t you say something about this to your father and me?”

“I don’t know. I know that you two want me to marry Gwen, so I thought it wouldn’t even matter. Besides she’s not exactly royalty.”

“But you care for her. This makes sense. You’ve spoken about her practically nonstop since you came back from Nashville. I should have guessed, but I just passed it off as you being impressed with her professionally. Do you think she returns these feelings?”

“No. She just left in a huff, because I said something she found offensive and told me so.”

“She told you?” the queen questioned in astonishment.

“Yeah. No one has ever dared do such a thing with me before. It threw me. I feel terrible about hurting her feelings, but in a way I’m impressed she had enough character to stand up for what she believes even if it meant telling me how horrible I was.”

“Oh, Alexa, I wouldn’t say you’re falling in love. I’d say you were already there if you let that little woman walk all over you. You are the crowned princess. She should be catering to you not the other way around. The fact that you are out here trying to do so confirms the fact that you are in love.”

“I don’t know what to do, Mother. I really don’t want to marry Gwen, but I promised Father.”

“Listen, Alexa, your father only wants you to be happy. He’s extremely ill, and he doesn’t have that much time. He would feel more ready to leave this earth knowing you were settled with someone that made you happy. That’s all he wants. If you would rather marry Lara, I’m sure he would understand.”

“I don’t think Lara would marry me though. She has a boyfriend, and she made it clear that she finds offense in the way I treat women.”

“How is that possible? What could you have said to make her think that?”

The young brunette flushed in embarrassment. “It’s not exactly something I want to talk about with you, Mother.”

Her mother nodded. “So, you asked her for sexual favors.” she stated as if it was obvious.

“Mother, you make it sound so unromantic. I tried to do it smoothly.”

“Alexa, listen. Let me give you a little advice. I know you think I don’t know about your escapades, but I do. I’m your mother after all. If you want to win Lara’s affections, you can’t treat her like any of the other women you’ve been with. She’s different and should be treated that way.”

The princess shook her head. “What does it matter? Even if she loved me, we couldn’t get married anyway. She’s not of nobility.”

“If you wanted to marry Lara, I’m sure I could convince your father to make an exception. He wants your happiness after all. You’re about to inherit this country, and you need to be married when you do. He just wants Gwen, because she’s the closest thing you have to a girlfriend of any sort. It’s not her really, just the idea of her.”

“None of this matters anyway. I already asked Gwen.”

“You did? What did she say?” the queen asked.

“She didn’t have time to give me an answer as we were interrupted by Lara. I’m not sure Gwen wants to marry me either, Mother. She would I think for the obvious reasons, but she wants love in her life. She’s my best friend, and I want her to have that. She won’t with me.”

The queen gave a nod in understanding. “This is a life of service, Alexa. It’s not all fun and games. Whoever you married would have to understand that. Gwen knows that life and would be able to handle it.”

Alexa agreed with a nod herself. “Well, I should go try to find a vase or something for this. You’ll have to excuse me. Good night, Mother.”

“Good night, Lex. Don’t worry. Things will work the way they are supposed to.”

After Lara had departed from Princess Alexa’s company, she locked herself into her room. She had called her boyfriend and spent quite a while on the phone with him, but in the back of her mind, she kept thinking about the brunette. Ryan had even mentioned several times during the conversation that she seemed distracted, but she didn’t tell him what had transpired. She still couldn’t believe she had actually said what she had or that the princess took the brutal spurn with hardly any show of emotions. She wondered how Alexa truly felt to extend such an invitation or how it was for her to take the rejection. Briefly she wondered what consequences she might incur for her disrespect, making her toss most of the night.

When morning arrived she leisurely dressed for the day. She was nervous about facing Alexa after what had taken place, but she knew there was no way around their eventual meeting. Gathering the things she would need for the day, she made her way over to her door and opened it. As soon as she did, her eyes caught sight of a beautiful single red rose in a vase with a note leaning against it. She recognized Alexa’s hand from the other card she had received. Her stomach flipped nervously as she reached down to retrieve the items and bring them into the room.

Lara took a moment to admire the flower. The red bud had just started to open, and she wondered where the princess had gotten it. Carefully she opened the envelope to read the enclosed card. The stationery was Princess Alexa’s official stock with the crest of her family embossed in gold at the top center and her name printed elegantly just below. Lara’s eyes perused it, opening a little wider with each passing line, as the princess made her a humble apology for her behavior the prior evening. The note left the teacher in such shock that she had to read it a second time. As the idea of her sovereign issuing any sort of apology, not to mention one that seemed so heartfelt, took hold in her mind, the blonde realized that she was no longer upset about what had happened. It was now easy to forgive and forget the event even took place.

Alexa was alone in the dining area when Lara found her way there. The princess stood for her as she came to the table. “Good morning, Lara. I trust you slept well.” she greeted as calmly and stoically as possible, not allowing any of her emotions to be seen on her face.

“Morning, Lex. I slept all right. How about you?”

“Not well at all. I was up most of the night wondering if you would ever forgive me for what happened.” she tentatively said.

Lara was caught by surprise at the comment. The small woman gave a little nod. “I got your

note. Thank you for what you said. I'd just like to put it behind us if that's all right with you."

"Whatever you would like, Lara. Please sit." she said gesturing to a chair near her.

It was only moments before Gwen appeared dressed immaculately as usual. "Morning, Lex, Lara. How is everyone?"

"Fine. How are you, Gwennie?"

"I didn't sleep very well. I had a lot on my mind." she replied looking at her best friend. Noticing the cut on the brunette's hand, she grabbed it and inquired in concern, "What happened to you? Did you get that seen to?"

"It's nothing, Gwen. I just cut my hand on a thorn in the garden. I swear you are as bad as my mother."

Lara looked down at the Alexa's right hand enfolded in Gwen's. There was a large gash that started just under the knuckle on her index finger and made a diagonal path across almost the entire length of the back of her hand. It was red and obviously infected by inattention. Suddenly the thought occurred to her that the princess had received the injury while finding her rose.

"Are you sure you're all right, Lex?" the teacher asked.

"Yes, I'm fine. Thank you both for your concern however. It's just a scratch." Just then Alfred entered the dining room breaking the brunette's attention away from her company. "Alfred, good morning. How are you? Would you care to join us for some breakfast?"

"No, thank you. I already had some. I wanted to speak to you if you had a moment."

"Is it important?"

"I have the research report for you." he stated, being intentionally vague as to its matter as he handed it to her. "I thought you'd like the highlights."

Alexa lifted the blank top page to see Lara's name written at the top of the second. "Oh, I think maybe you should give the highlights. Excuse me for a moment, ladies." Moving from the table, she followed Alfred out into the hallway. "So, what do we have? Anything interesting?"

"Well, first I must say that Miss Monroe comes from a family that is well off. Her father is a surgeon, and her mother is an M.D. and teaches at Vanderbilt University Medical."

"Wow. That is impressive. What else?"

"One of her ancestors was the president of Princeton University." "That's good, but you know what I'm looking for. Is she related to anyone of truly historical importance?"

“Well, Alexa, that took some in depth research. I’ve had the best investigators and genealogists on this matter. It took a very long time, but we can relate her to a man that actually signed the Declaration of Independence, and you’ll never believe who.”

“Who? Tell me.” anxiously Alexa asked.

Alfred smiled as he put his hand on her shoulder. “My dear, Alexa, she is related to John Hancock.”

“The John Hancock? The one that signed the Declaration of Independence large enough that the king could read his signature without his glasses? Sir John Hancock, the one King George I knighted for his efforts during the revolution? The one who began one of the largest, most successful financial institutions in this country?”

“The very one.”

“You’re kidding me, Alfred.”

“I’m not, Lex. She is related, distantly but related.”

“How distant?”

“There is her family tree the best we could fill it in on the last few pages, so you can see. It seems she is the daughter of the daughter and so on. That’s why she holds no nobility currently. The royal line of the Hancocks was passed down through the oldest children, all who happened to be male. However the fact remains, she is a Hancock in blood. It might not be full blood, but it’s there.”

Alexa grinned widely. “Oh, Alfred, you are the best.” she said hugging him tightly and kissing his cheek. “I love you.”

“I love you too, Lex, as if you were my own.” he responded affectionately cupping her face. “You deserve happiness, and I know she could fulfill your desires.”

“How did you know that is why I wanted this report?” curiously she inquired. “Because I know you and I’ve never seen you this way. You are in love, my child, and I’m so happy for you.”

“I should get back.”

“Certainly. Have a good day. I’ll be out with your mother most of the day.”

“All right. See you later.”

Going back into the dining room, she placed the paper on the table face down and returned to her breakfast nonchalantly. When the meal had come to a close, Alexa looked over at the teacher. “Lara, Gwen and I have a little something we need to discuss. Would you mind meeting us in my

office in about ten minutes?”

“Of course not, Lex. Whatever you want.” she replied standing.

The princess watched her leave the room to make sure she was truly out of ear shot before turning to her best friend. “Well, I think you need to give me an answer to my proposal.” the brunette stated.

“I know I do. I’ve been up most of the night thinking about it, Lex. I know you need me to do this. My country needs me, and I should be thrilled at the idea of becoming a queen. However looking at you, I see that your heart is elsewhere. I can’t accept your proposal, Lex, if you feel so strongly about Lara. We both deserve to be with people we love. As much as I do love you, it’s not in the way I want to love my spouse. I think you should ask Lara.”

“But she’s not going to say yes, Gwennie. I’m not her favorite person.”

“Well, I’ve decided that you should ask Lara first. If she won’t marry you, then I guess I will do the duty our parents designed for us when we were still children. I want Lara to be your queen, Lex, but if she will not take the responsibility, I will take up the crown and sit next to you. However I really want you to ask her first.”

“So, if she says no, then you’ll marry me?”

“Yes, I will marry you, Alexa, but only after you have pursued your heart.”

The princess nodded. “I guess that’s fair. Thank you, Gwennie. I knew I would be able to count on you. However I should tell you that I know have the evidence I need to even pursue Lara. Alfred just brought it to me.” she mentioned picking up the report.

“What does it say?”

“She’s a Hancock.” plainly the brunette announced.

“What? How? Are you serious? That’s amazingly lucky. That means your father won’t have to make an exception for her.”

“I know. I haven’t read the full brief, but Alfred assures me that it’s true. I can marry her now rightfully if I so choose. The problem presently is that she doesn’t necessarily think me worthy of a companion.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Well, she does have a boyfriend, and she thinks I’m a womanizer for a lack of a better word.”

“Why does she think that?”

“Oh, I propositioned her last night.”

“You didn’t? Lex, how could you do that? Don’t you know how to court a woman?”

The princess cracked a grin. “Um, my idea of courting a girl is asking if she’d rather be on top or bottom.” she teased.

Gwen rolled her green eyes. “Of course it is. Why didn’t I guess that? Well, in that case you need to learn how to woo this girl, and I’m going to teach you.”

“Mom said she would help too. Maybe with the two of you I’ll have half a chance.”

“What we need is an opportunity for the two of you to be alone where you won’t let your mouth get you in trouble. Well, this will have to wait for a while. We have work to do. Come on. Your queen awaits.” Gwen stated making a move to stand.

Continued in Part 2

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

~ Queen of My Country, Queen of My Heart ~

by Alex Tryst

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Part 2

Chapter Three: And So the Dance Begins

A month later the conference began in Washington, D.C. Lara stayed in the town palace with Alexa for the duration, while the king and queen were away for some private time. Since Gwen had a place of her own in the city, the princess was given her first real opportunity to have alone time with the teacher. One the first night of the conference a gala was held at the palace for all the nations’ representatives, so Lara dressed her best for the formal occasion. Alexa had gone out of her way to make sure she had everything she needed, even going so far as sending Alfred with the teacher on a shopping trip to prepare, with her majesty paying for the blonde’s new dress.

During that time alone with Alfred, Lara was entertained by stories of a young Alexa, which

amused her greatly. She also had the chance to learn more about Alfred, finding that he had been in the family's service since before Alexa was born. The man spoke about the future ruler with such open affection and admiration that Lara's opinion of the princess began to shift to a more favorable one.

That night as she stood in front of her full length mirror looking over herself and the elegant black evening gown, she wondered what the night would hold. She pondered how the princess would act in front of such a large crowd. Lara knew that the informal manner in which she had started addressing Alexa and Gwen was not allowed at the function, even though over the course of the past few months, she felt like she had gained two new friends in them. Just then a knock broke her musings. Going to the door, she asked who it was. When Alfred announced himself, she opened it quickly.

"Alfred, hi. What do you need?" she questioned with a smile.

"Her majesty wanted to know if you might like to borrow this for the evening?" he asked opening the jewelry case he was holding.

Lara felt her heart stop for a moment as her blue eyes widened in surprise. Within the box was a stunning diamond necklace worth more than the teacher could even fathom. "Oh, my. Alfred, is she sure?"

He nodded. "She thought it would go well with your dress. Would you allow me?" he inquired taking it out and holding it in front of her. Lara leaned in a little, so he could clasp it around her neck. Stepping back Alfred gave a smile. "There you go, Miss Monroe. You are a beauty."

She blushed lightly. "Thank you, Alfred, and thank Alexa for me."

"Certainly. She was wondering if she could escort you in this evening unless you have made other arrangements."

"No. I was just going to go alone."

"Then she would like to be your escort. May I tell her that you will meet her at her room in a few minutes?"

"Okay." she answered hesitantly.

"Wonderful. She'll be pleased to hear that. Well, I will see you in there."

Closing the door again, the blonde raced back to the mirror to look at herself. The diamonds shimmered in the light, and the small woman felt faint at the thought of what she was wearing. She thought for sure she had seen the queen herself in the necklace. Knowing that Alexa was expecting her, she made her way to the tall woman's quarters. When she gave a knock, Alfred was there to answer and allow her inside, but then he was gone, leaving the two women alone.

Alexa was still in the bathroom, leaving Lara a moment to look around the large room. It was elaborately decorated with antiques, but the linens on the bed were tiger stripes, making the blonde giggle lightly at the young heir's personality infiltrating the grand room. Books and papers were strewn about the bed, so letting curiosity guide her, Lara made her way closer. Most everything was in reference to the conference, but something unusual caught her attention. There was a report with her name within the text and several highlighted sections. Instinctively she picked it up and started reading.

Her stomach dropped as she realized the whole paper was about her. It was information that she had not shared with the princess, so she wondered how it had been acquired. As she continued to read, her anger surfaced for Alexa's deliberate inquisition of her life. As she came to the section about her boyfriend, Ryan, she lost her temper as intimate details were there in writing, including the fact that she was still a virgin.

"Oh, I didn't hear you come in." Alexa mentioned seeing the blonde by her bed, making Lara jump in surprise.

The blonde turned her scowl on the princess. Totally forgetting exactly whom she was addressing, she thrust the paper into the brunette's chest angrily. "How dare you do this to me? What gives you the right to invade my privacy?" she yelled, blue eyes turning stormy in her indignation. "Why did you have people investigate me?"

Taken back by the fury of the little woman, Alexa stuttered incoherently for a moment. "Uh, I, um, wanted to know more about you." she feebly explained.

"You could've asked! I would have told you anything you might have wanted to know! What gives you the right to inquire into my intimate life? Who wrote these things about Ryan and me? How did you find out anything about our relationship? Why is this whole section about Ryan highlighted? Why do you care about him so much?"

Alexa sighed. She knew the answer to that question, but she wasn't ready to admit it to the blonde. Seeing the infuriation of the small woman though, she wondered if it would be better just to be honest with her. "I wanted to know what my competition was like." she confessed quietly.

"What? What competition? What are you talking about?" Lara asked in confusion at first. However when Alexa didn't respond, she realized what the princess was alluding to.

"I'll be honest with you, Lara. I needed to know some things about you. This really isn't the time to discuss this. I have much to say, but we're needed in the ballroom. I'm terribly sorry that I have upset you, and I will explain myself. However may I ask that this wait until tomorrow evening? I really can't do this right now." she pleaded.

The blonde didn't let her off so easy however as she screamed, "I don't care that the whole world is waiting on you! I want my answers, and I want them now!"

Even though Alexa could have allowed her own temper to guide her, she took several calming

breaths. “Very well. Wait here.” she replied going over to her phone. Quickly she called Alfred and informed him that she was running late due to a serious situation that had to be seen to immediately.

As Lara watched the princess on the phone, she realized that the tall woman was angry, very angry by the way she held her posture, and it dawned on her that she had just berated her sovereign in a fit of rage. Lara realized that she had truly overstepped her boundaries that time and wondered exactly how the princess was going to respond. Seeing dark eyes turn to her, she felt her body tremble in anxiety. “Your majesty,” she squeaked.

“Sit down, Lara.” Alexa commanded crossing her arms across her chest. “I want you to come sit right here on the couch.”

The teacher quickly did as she was told, as to not further infuriate the brunette. “Sire, I’m so sorry. I lost my temper. I never should have said what I did.” she tried to apologize, but Alexa cut her off.

“Be quiet, Lara. You want to know why I had you investigated, I’m going to tell you, but you have to keep your mouth closed!” Alexa barked unable to control herself. As much as she loved the woman in front of her, the blonde was her bane when it came to her emotions. She wanted to kiss and kill her with equally intensity at times.

“Yes, sire.” meekly the petite woman answered, knowing that she had pushed the tall woman too far. Anxiously she waited for Alexa to begin speaking. The princess looked down at the blue eyes she adored. Seeing their dread she knew she was going about this in completely the wrong way. Turning her back on Lara, she gave herself a moment to calm herself. The moment of truth was at hand, and even though Alexa didn’t feel she was ready, she knew now was the time for her to disclose her feelings and intentions.

Taking a deep breath, she looked back at the blonde again. She took a seat on the coffee table directly in front of the teacher and leaned forward propping her arms up on her thighs. “Lara, when I first met you, I was intrigued. I wanted to know you better as more than a friend. Additionally I wanted to know you as more than a lover. From the moment of our first meeting, I have fantasized about what it might be like to have you for my queen.” she quietly admitted. Lara felt herself stop breathing, but she didn’t say anything as Alexa had ordered her not to speak. “Lara, you may or may not know this, but currently there is a law that someone of my place should only marry a person of nobility. That’s why I had Alfred hire some investigators. I wanted to see if you could be traced to anyone of historical or political importance, because I was hoping to make a case to my father for an exception. However that won’t be necessary now as you have been traced to a noble.” Pausing for a moment, she reached for the blonde’s quivering hands. Looking upon the teacher with all the tenderness she felt, the princess slid onto her knees. “Lara, I know you have a boyfriend, but I also know that you have not had relations with him or anyone else, making this even easier than I thought it might be. You give me the impression that I am not your favorite person in the world, but you are mine. As you know my father is extremely ill and the doctors give him less than a year. He has asked me to marry before the year is over, and I told him that I would. My choice for marriage is you, Lara. Please? I am

offering you the crown. Will you take it by joining with me to lead this country? Will you marry me, Miss Monroe?"

"Marry you?" Lara repeated in utter shock.

"Yes, marry me, Lara."

The teacher sat there for a moment trying in vain to wrap her mind around the idea of what Alexa had just proposed, but she couldn't. Pulling her hands away from the brunette's she rubbed her forehead. "Honestly, Lex, I don't know what to say to that." she confessed.

"Well, at least tell me that you'll consider it? If I don't marry who I want, then I'm going to be forced to marry for political reasons. Gwen and I don't want to marry each other, but we'll have to if you do not wish to sit beside me."

Still trying to come to terms with what had just been said, Lara stated, "Lex, I don't love you that way."

"You don't have to. You just have to like me, and we have to be able to get along in public. This arrangement can be whatever we make of it. There will be obligations for you to fulfill such as having my children and at least pretending we're happy in front of the press, but other than that, we can still remain only friends if that's what you want."

"Do you love me, Alexa? Is that why you're asking this of me?" she questioned in confusion.

"I'll admit, Lara, that I do love you. I've been trying to hide that fact, but I'd rather not have to. I love you, and I think I will continue to do so. It would make me extremely happy for you to accept my proposal. As I said though, we can make this arrangement whatever we so choose. I am willing to work out an amiable agreement with you. I really want to discuss it with you further, but the world is waiting for me downstairs right now. I really have to get down there. Please. Tell me you'll at least be open to discussing this further before giving me an answer?" hopefully she asked. Lara looked at the dark eyes of her future queen and saw so clearly the love the sovereign had for her. Not knowing what to do, she simply gave a nod in response to the question. "Wonderful. Now let's go. I believe I am supposed to be escorting you in."

Quietly the pair made their way downstairs to the ballroom. Alfred was there waiting and looking concerned, but he never asked what the delay was, only moved to inform everyone that Princess Alexa was about to make her entrance. It took a few minutes for people to get settled, standing on either side of the ballroom in a long line to watch her procession. When Alfred came back to them, he smiled at Lara. He handed Alexa her crown to place on her head. The princess rolled her eyes in annoyance but did as her secretary silently instructed. Alexa grinned at the small woman as well as she extended her arm. Lara took a hold of it just above the elbow before Alexa nodded in Alfred's direction.

He moved to the entrance of the ballroom and formally and loudly announced, "Her majesty, the crowned princess of America, Alexa Washington escorting Miss Lara Monroe."

Allowing the tall woman to lead her, Lara eyed the crowd. Everyone bowed to them as they passed and murmured quietly amongst themselves. The teacher had no doubt she was the subject of such speculation as she was not only on the arm of the princess, she was wearing family jewelry, and Alexa was making an obvious show of her affection for the little blonde by smiling sweetly at her. Moving her to the end of the room, Alexa took Lara to her seat and in an unprecedented gesture, pulled the chair out for the blonde before looking at her expectantly. Realizing the princess was waiting until she was seated to take her own, Lara suddenly felt a wave of authority overcome her. She realized everyone in the room was waiting on her to take their seats, including her sovereign even though it was usually the royal family that sat first.

“Thank you, Lex.” she whispered softly sitting.

“My pleasure.” Alexa replied with a smile sitting next to her.

As soon as the brunette was in her chair, the congregation began to disburse and find their own tables for the dinner. Gwen came toward them though before going to her own table and gave a large grin. “Well, you look lovely this evening, Lara.” she complimented. “Queen Victoria’s necklace looks even better on you than it does her.”

“Thank you, Lady Jefferson.” she responded. Her thoughts strayed to the fact that if she took Alexa’s hand in marriage it would be Gwen bowing to her, an intriguing image the teacher admitted to herself. As much as she did like Gwen, the woman did have an air of superiority about her, one that most people catered to as the teacher had in the beginning. “You look beautiful yourself as usual.”

“Thank you, Lara.” Turning her eyes to Alexa, she commented, “Doesn’t Princess Alexa look stunning too? That suit on her just makes her look all the sexier. That red shirt sets off the rubies in her crown.”

Lara looked over at Alexa who was already busy speaking to other people at the table. She did think that the princess looked especially handsome in her crown, but she didn’t voice those thoughts. Instead she said, “She does look nice.”

“Well, enjoy your dinner. I have rounds to make. Excuse me.”

Over the meal Lara watched Alexa in action. She had a natural way with people, a magnetism that drew people in. Lara could see that she would be a powerful leader if she was already able to sway people’s opinions as a princess. As she sat there pretending to attentively listen, she pondered what her life would be like as Alexa’s queen. Everyone in that room would have bowed to her as she processed with the brunette that night. Not only that they would have gone out of their way to impress the blonde. Suddenly the idea of being on Alexa’s arm didn’t seem as foreign to her as it had a few minutes earlier in the evening. It might not be so bad to be in the position the princess had requested of her.

However she wasn’t sure she could come to love the future queen. She had feelings of friendship

for the tall woman, but she knew if she married the woman, there would be some sexual responsibilities that came with the role she would be asked to play. First and foremost she would have to pretend that she was as in love with the princess as the brunette was with her. Secondly she would be responsible for producing heirs to the throne. She knew it would be ideal to have at least two children with Alexa to assure the succession of the Washington name. The more thought she gave to the proposition, she realized that Alexa had requested a life of servitude from her. It was true that with this service came great benefits, but the idea of not being able to marry for love bothered her.

It wasn't as if Ryan was a large obstacle. She did care about him, but in her heart she knew he was not her true love, making the idea of separation from him not difficult. However looking at the stately woman sitting next to her, she was unsure whether or not she could ever truly and completely love the princess with the passion and magnitude she wished for her longtime partner.

Once the meal was over, people were simply wandering around conversing with each other. Lara watched them all from her position at the head table as she listened to the orchestra play. However it struck her as odd that no one was dancing even though there was a large floor designed for that purpose. Just then Alexa leaned over to her ear and quietly asked, "Having fun?" Lara nodded. "Lex, why isn't anyone dancing?" she asked curiously.

The dark-haired woman grinned. "Because they are waiting on me to do so first. Protocol demands it. I guess I should go ahead and take a turn about the floor just in case someone wants to. Would you like to dance, Lara?"

"Um, okay." she stated.

With her answer Alexa stood and extended her hand to the blonde. She led Lara over to the dance floor and took the little woman in her embrace, one hand around her petite waist and the other clasping the teacher's hand. Gently the princess began to guide the teacher around the floor. Lara noticed that within moments other couples joined them. One song led to another and then several more before the blonde requested a break. Alexa complied escorting her back to the table.

"You'll have to excuse me, Lara. I really should do some mingling now. As much as I would love to just stay right here with you, duty calls." she explained.

"Go ahead. I'm fine." With a small nod of her head Alexa turned and waded through the sea of guests. However Lara wasn't alone for more than a moment before people approached her.

A few hours later Lara was still engrossed in conversation when her eyes sought out her sovereign, wondering what she could be doing. Blue eyes found the princess on the dance floor, tightly enfolded in Gwen's arms. The tall blonde had her arms securely around Alexa's neck, elegant fingers threaded through her majesty's short thick hair. In turn Alexa's arms were around Gwen's waist, roaming lightly over her back as their hips ground together in a slow rhythm. It was obvious by the way Lady Jefferson was laughing that the princess had just said something

witty. Lara felt an unfamiliar gnawing in her stomach at the sight. The two women looked quite comfortable with each other to Lara, even more so than either of them had ever admitted, once again making the teacher wonder about their relationship. She thought she knew them well enough to know they were only friends, but this display in such a public forum left her with doubts suddenly. Gwen was so stunningly beautiful and graceful that Lara didn't see how Alexa could resist such a woman, making her wonder why the princess had even made her proposal. She didn't feel as if she could match Lady Jefferson's sense of style and power, and all the feelings of confidence she had entered the ballroom with abruptly disappeared, leaving her deflated.

She excused herself from her present company intent on leaving the gala for the evening as she suddenly wasn't feeling social, but as she made her way for the door, a hand on her arm stopped her. Quickly she turned to scowl at its owner when she realized it was only Alfred. "Miss Monroe, would you care to dance?" he offered. Lara looked toward the dance floor. "I can explain their behavior." he mentioned guessing what was bothering the little woman.

"All right." she conceded.

The older man took her to the floor and began to lead her. "Lara, please don't be upset with Alexa. It's only an act." he stated.

"An act? That looks pretty real to me. How could she do that after what she has done tonight?"

"Lara, she mentioned to me that she had proposed to you. She loves you, but she's not sure you feel the same. One of you two ladies will become her queen. I wish it would be you." he said looking into her eyes. "Don't get me wrong. I do like Gwyneth, but Alexa loves you, and I want her happiness. Alexa will give you both equal attention until you have made up your mind, because she doesn't want the press reading too much into either relationship. However I am sure they will be thrilled to write about what has occurred this evening. Do you realize you are the first woman other than her mother to ever be on the Alexa's arm when she has made an entrance?"

"No. I didn't know that. She hasn't even asked to escort Gwen?"

"No. I mean the press has seen her with Gwen, but she's never escorted Gwen for something formal like this. She made her preference for you known to the world tonight when she pulled out your chair. She's never done that for Gwen." Lara took another look at Alexa and Gwen who seemed completely involved with each other. Alfred's words were contradicting what she was seeing, so she wasn't sure what to believe. "Lara, are you jealous of Gwen?" he inquired.

"No, of course not. I just don't like it. If she were serious about her proposal, she wouldn't do this."

"Lara, you have to understand what Lex is going through. She has a lot of pressure on her for marriage right now. She needs to look as if she's serious about it. If I'm not mistaken, you have a boyfriend, don't you?" The blonde nodded. "Well, Alexa doesn't want to drive a wedge between

the two of you. She wants you to make your decision about her with the understanding that if you say no, you still have someone to go back to. She wants you to be happy as well, Lara. She doesn't want to break up your relationship with your boyfriend if you really would rather be with him by acting so intimately with you. She's already made her intentions known by her actions here tonight. She won't do more without your permission, because she respects you and your position. She's trying to give you space to make up your mind."

"Really? Is that truly all, Alfred?"

He nodded. "Lara, she wants to be with you, and she wants to marry you. Alexa can give you everything you ever wanted. Why not take her up on her offer?" he asked.

"She can't give me love, Alfred." she stated.

"Do you think you'll never come to feel for her the way she feels for you?"

"I really don't know. I've never been attracted to women, Alfred. It's true she can give me things, but I'm wondering if it is enough to make up for the lack of love I will endure."

"You will not be short on love, Lara. Alexa adores you. She has ever since she laid eyes on you. Don't you feel it in the way she is with you?"

Lara looked over at the princess. "I have felt it tonight." she confessed.

"Lara, the most powerful woman in the entire world loves you. That's an honor no other woman can claim, not even Gwyneth Jefferson. Surely you can love her."

"I do love her, Alfred, as my sovereign and as my friend. I just don't know if I can look upon her the way she looks upon me. Is that fair to take the hand of the future queen when I know those feelings aren't returned?"

"It's what she wants. Lara, she knows what she's doing. If she didn't want you, she wouldn't have asked. She wants to take you as her queen. It is the greatest honor that could ever be bestowed on any woman in this country."

"But the price I will pay for such a position." she stated.

"Talk to her. I know she's willing to do whatever you want in order to make this reality. I know she will be amiable to whatever you need. She's a woman in love, Lara. Give her a chance."

The teacher shook her head in confusion. "I still don't know how this happened. We've only known each other for three months. How can she be so sure that I am the one she wants?"

Alfred shrugged. "Love is a strange thing, and royals often have to do without it. Most royal marriages happen for circumstances other than love. She didn't want that to happen to her, but it's going to at the end of this year whether or not she's ready. The only hope she has to marry

for love is with you, Lara. She'd rather take her chances with you than marry Gwen. They will never have anything more than a friendship, but she hopes that more can become of her relationship with you. However she knows that it might not be possible, that you may never feel for her what she does for you. Regardless of that though she wants to take that chance. At the very least she'll be marrying a friend. The country needs a queen on her arm right now. The country needs you, Lara. There is great honor in serving one's nation. This is your opportunity."

Lara sighed. Alfred's words were even more moving than the brunette's, making Lara wonder if she really could go through with what Alexa had suggested. She just didn't know. Turning to her dance partner, she smiled. "Alfred, thank you for the dance and talk. I think I'm going to retire now. Please let Alexa know, will you?"

"Certainly. May I escort you back to your quarters?"

"I'll be all right alone. Thank you though."

"Very well." he replied. Taking her by the hands, he bowed slightly as he raised them to his lips, kissing the back of each one. "Pleasant dreams, Princess Lara." he whispered quietly.

"Good night, Alfred." she said moving away. Inside her heart was fluttering in confusion at his words. The very idea that she would hold the title he had so casually whispered further fueled her turmoil.

Heading back to her room, she immediately called her parents. When her mother answered, she stated, "Lara, I was just watching the news. I saw you on the arm of the princess. What were you wearing? Where did you get that necklace?"

"It's Queen Victoria's. Alexa let me borrow it." she replied.

"You're wearing the queen's jewelry? Lara, what's going on?"

"Mother, you wouldn't believe it if I told you." she said softly.

"I think I'd believe anything at this point. Tell me."

"I really don't want to talk about it right now. I promise I'll tell you when I get back in town. I'm coming home this weekend to see Ryan anyway. We'll talk about it then."

"All right but I'm here for you, honey. You know you can tell me anything."

"I know, and I want to talk to you and Daddy about it but not over the phone. Anyway, so how are you two doing?" she inquired trying to change the subject.

The following morning Alexa and Lara met for breakfast together before the conference. As they sat alone on the terrace in awkwardness, Alexa kept looking over at the teacher intently. She wanted to discuss what was on her mind, but she wasn't sure how to approach the subject.

Unable to think of any way to do it delicately, she came right out and asked, “Lara, would you like to discuss the proposal this morning?”

The blonde’s heart froze for a moment. Knowing she would not be able to avoid it, she decided to just go ahead. “What would you like to discuss about it, Lex?”

“Have you thought about it?”

“Yes.” plainly she responded.

“Have you come to a decision?”

“No, I haven’t. I was wondering though. You said that we could make this arrangement whatever we wanted. What exactly did you mean by that?”

“I meant that we could come to a formal agreement, a contract of sorts I suppose. We get married, we have some kids, and at some point in the future if you find yourself truly unhappy, I will release you from your obligation.”

“You mean you would grant me a divorce in the future if I so chose?”

“Yes. I obviously hope it would not come to that, Lara, because I love you, and I want to be with you. It is my greatest wish that someday you return that love, but I truly just want you to be happy. My proposal would be that after we’ve had three children you could leave, but I would take care of you financially for the rest of your life. You would retain your title, Queen of America, Lara Washington. Of course that is assuming that I take over the throne during our marriage, which seems likely at this point. Otherwise you would just be Princess of America, Lara Washington. Either way you would retain that title and all the privileges that go with it. Well, you would unless you remarry anyway. I think I’m asking for about a five year commitment depending on how quickly you can get pregnant.”

“What of the responsibilities?”

“Those you would have to retain as well. Once a royal, always a royal, Lara. You wouldn’t be able to return to teaching. However I could see that you have a permanent place on the national board of education, and you can still carry on your mission of reaching children through that medium.”

“So, I would definitely have to give up teaching for good?”

“Unfortunately yes. However from a financial position, you’ll be taken care of, and you could have great influence on the board. There are other ways of achieving your personal goals, which I am all for, Lara.”

“Okay. What about our public relationship? What would be expected of me?”

“I would expect that you act as if you and I are happily married. You will not shy away from my touch or affection in public. We give the impression that we are truly made for each other. The country needs to see that. I would also expect that you have three children by me.”

“How would you propose to accomplish that?”

“Medical technology. We could do it different ways. One option would be to use my eggs, and you carry. Another option would be to combine our DNA, and you carry. Of course I could just clone myself and have you carry.”

“I’m beginning to get the idea, Lex. You really want me to be a surrogate mother.”

“Yes. I don’t have time for pregnancy myself, but you will. You would simply be a surrogate unless we combine the DNA, which I would love to do. The children would most definitely be ours together that way, but they would also only be girls. However the idea of our children growing inside of you is a rather pleasant one I admit.”

Lara nodded. She knew she could not offer the same sort of sentiment, so she remained silent about it. “All right. That’s the public life. What about our private one? What happens there? What would you expect of me?”

“I would expect us to remain friends. I expect a consummation of our marriage, but after that has taken place, I won’t expect any sort of sexual favors unless you are so inclined to give them. I know you don’t feel that way for me, Lara, so I don’t want to put you in a position of resenting me.”

“But you do want to have sexual relations with me at least once then, huh?” she asked nervously. “You want to be the one to deflower me so to speak?”

Alexa leaned closer to her, staring deeply into blue eyes. “Lara, I am the crowned princess of this country. I am used to getting my way. I am requiring one night in your bed. That point is nonnegotiable. You will give yourself to me for an entire night. After that point you will be free to have relations with whomever you choose as long as you do not conceive from any of those activities. If that happens the whole agreement becomes null and void. If someone other than me impregnates you, you will be stripped of your title, divorced, ostracized by society, and left to fend for yourself. That would be standard protocol. On that point we must be absolutely clear.” firmly she stated. “Now I am prepared to put all of this in a prenuptial agreement and whatever else you might want. Just tell me what you require, and it is yours. Is there anything that we have discussed that would pose a problem for you?”

Lara shrugged. “I think what you’ve said thus far is reasonable. As far as whether it poses a problem, I’ll be honest with you, Lex. The consummation of marriage does not sit well with me.”

“Nonnegotiable.” Alex stated in unshakable resolve.

“Nonnegotiable.” the blonde mumbled with a nod of her head.

“Lara, I promise it will not be as horrible as you are thinking it might.” she said moving her chair closer to the little woman. She leaned toward the blonde’s ear, nuzzling the teacher’s fair hair as she whispered, “I can be a gentle lover, Lara, attentive and caring. I can give you pleasure you’ve never known. I won’t hurt you.” The brunette’s hand came up to Lara’s cheek, cupping it gently and turning it so their eyes could meet momentarily. “I just want to love you.” she confessed quietly leaning to the blonde’s mouth. Lara’s eyes reflexively closed as soft lips met her own. Arms embraced her, pulling her closer to the powerful woman as Alexa probed delicately into her mouth. Lara just allowed the princess access, unsure of exactly how to respond. As the kiss continued on for several seconds, the blonde couldn’t help but notice that the princess was indeed a good kisser, but the thought of having sex with her suddenly made Lara pull away. Alexa just looked at her expectantly. Lara took a few calming breaths.

“I think we need to get going. It’s getting late.” she mentioned consulting her watch.

Alexa nodded. “Think some more, Lara, and we’ll talk again.”

Chapter Four: The Decision

That Friday evening Lara made her way back to Nashville for the weekend since the conference was in hiatus until Monday. Even though it was a distance to travel for such a short period, she desperately needed to see her family to find some solace. Instead of staying at her own place for those few days though, she opted to stay with her parents. When her mother picked her up from the airport, the teacher hugged her tightly, relaying emotions that she was having difficulty in expressing. Her mother just gave her a supportive smile and helped her daughter to the car.

When they were in the privacy of their vehicle on their way back to the house, her mother reached over to take her daughter’s hand. “Lara, what is it? Why is your heart so heavy, my child?”

“Mom, do you remember when we had dinner with Princess Alexa and Lady Jefferson here in Nashville, and you commented on the way home that you thought the princess had an interest in me?”

“Of course. I still think that. Why do you ask?”

“I don’t even know if you’ll believe this. I still don’t know if I can.” she admitted. “Lex asked me to marry her.”

“What? Why? How?” Katherine asked in surprise.

“Well, apparently she found out about our connection with John Hancock. She had our family investigated for the purpose of asking her father for an exception in proposing to me. However now she knows that isn’t necessary. The way she asked wasn’t how I thought it would be. I had

actually lost my temper with her, and she took it, Mother. Princess Alexa allowed me to berate her, and then when I demanded to know why she had invaded my private life, she told me it was because she wanted to marry me. She knelt on her knees right there in her bedroom and proposed.”

“What did she say when you refused?” her mother asked curiously.

Lara paused for a moment before saying, “I haven’t refused her.”

“You accepted?”

“No, I haven’t done either. We are discussing it.” Lara informed her.

“Lara, are you serious? You are actually considering this? I thought you were opposed to this kind of thing. When I mentioned it the first time, you sounded as if you wouldn’t do something like this. What changed your mind?”

“I haven’t changed my mind. I just don’t know what to do. She offers something so tempting in some respects. However I don’t love her, and I’m not sure I can marry someone I don’t love. If I don’t marry her though, she will marry Gwen at the end of this year, because the king has requested this of her. What do I do, Mom?”

“Honey, I have no idea. I would not even begin to know how to answer such a question.”

“Do you think it would be wrong to accept, because I don’t love her?” Katherine shrugged.
“Does she love you, Lara?”

“She says she does, and I believe it. Ever since she asked, I can see the way she feels. She made it obvious at that gala.”

“Lara, I don’t know what to tell you. Your father and I would only be able to support you on whatever you chose. We could never make that decision for you. The princess has asked you to marry her. That is something that doesn’t happen every day. There is a lot she is offering you.”

“Yes and there is a lot of responsibility that goes with it. It’s not the responsibility that concerns me though, Mom.”

“What does? Is it Ryan?”

“No. I care about him, but I know I will never marry him.”

“Then what is the issue?”

Lara shifted uncomfortably in her seat at the thought of what Alexa desired from her. It was difficult for her to even think about much less vocalize, but she wanted desperately to lay her burden on someone else. “Princess Alexa has made it very clear that she has sexual interest in

me.” the teacher stated quietly.

“Of course she does. A woman like her would. You have a lot to offer her as well, Lara.”

“But it’s the reality of being physical with her that bothers me, Mother. I don’t know if I can do it.”

“Is that the only thing keeping you from saying yes?”

Lara shrugged. “It’s the biggest thing. She’s made her demands quiet clear. She wants access to me sexually in order to consummate our marriage, but she swears she will not ask for more.”

“Do you not believe her? Is that the problem?”

“Strangely I do believe her. It’s the thought of doing what she wants though. The thought of her touching me that way, her hands on me or worse her mouth. It kind of turns my stomach.”

“But the only thing she has asked for is the consummation? That’s only one night, Lara. Do you think you can get through that to what lies on the other side?”

“I guess, but I’m not sure. I mean she kissed me earlier this week, and it wasn’t terrible. I just can’t get to the thought of us in bed together doing you know.”

“One night, Lara. How long is that really? Think about it. How long do you actually think she could last? Surely she would tire herself out after a couple of hours.”

“I don’t know, Mom. When she says all night, I honestly think she means that. I think she means being active the entire night. She strikes me as being able to do that.”

“All right. Suppose she does. How long could that really be? Ten hours, probably less. That’s all it would be for a crown of your own and unfathomable access to anything you want.”

“Mom, listen to yourself. That would be like torture for me. I’m not a prostitute, and right now I feel like I will become one if I say yes.” “Then say no, Lara. Tell the future queen of our country that you will not marry her. The fact that you haven’t done that yet, tells me that there is something you’re still unsure about. What is it?” her mother asked.

“I know this is going to sound so selfish, especially since Gwen has become my friend, but I don’t want Gwen to be queen. Lex told me that if I didn’t marry her, she would marry Gwen, and I don’t want that. God, I just have no idea what to do.” she confessed running her hands through her hair in frustration.

Patting her daughter on the leg, Katherine said, “Lara, regardless of what you decide, know that your father and I will support you. You should do whatever you feel is best. There are opportunities by marrying her, but there are responsibilities as well. You should weigh them carefully.”

“Would you think I was a fool for saying no?” the teacher asked.

“Not at all.”

“Would you think I was selling out if I said yes, because I don’t love her?”

Her mother shook her head. “Lara, you have a challenge no one else ever has had. There’s no way anyone could judge you for what you do. Your marriage to the future queen would be a privilege and a burden. There would be no way around that, but at this point either way you decide will have similar consequences.”

Curious as to what her mother would do in her position, she inquired, “If it was you with the offer, what would you do, Mom?”

“You mean if your father wasn’t in the picture?” she clarified. Lara nodded.

The older woman smiled. “That’s easy. I’d marry her.” she teased.

“You would? Why?”

“Lara, look at her. She’s got a crown, money, access to everything I’d ever want, and let’s face it. She’s not unattractive by any means.”

“But what about the sex?” Lara questioned immensely inquisitive with her mother’s admission.

Katherine smiled. “I don’t foresee the sex being a problem for me. When you think about the realm of possibilities of what might happen, it’s not really different than with a man. The only thing that would be truly different is that she wouldn’t orgasm the way a man would, and that’s not necessarily a bad thing, because we know what a mess that can be. Close your eyes, and she’s whoever you want her to be.” she explained. Lara shifted uncomfortably. She had never told her mother about any of her own sexual encounters or lack thereof, so she couldn’t truly identify. Seeing her daughter’s sudden uneasiness, Katherine hurriedly inquired, “You do know what I’m describing, don’t you? I mean you have... with Ryan, haven’t you?” Lara shook her head slowly. “With anyone?” she asked.

“No.” softly the teacher confessed.

“Oh. Well, is that where some of your hesitancy is maybe coming from? Are you scared of what it might be like?” her mother inquired as assuringly as possible. “I mean there is nothing wrong with feeling that way. You’re still young, only twenty-three. There would be no way that you could possibly know the entire gamete that love entailed. I’m not even sure I know at fifty.”

“You really think it wouldn’t be that bad?”

“Not at all. I mean you just said she kissed you, and it wasn’t terrible. I think you would be

surprised how easily you could lose yourself in a fantasy to get you through if you needed to. However she strikes me as the type of person that knows how to elicit the right emotions in an encounter such as that. I don't think she would hurt you by any means. I think the whole catch is that you want to be madly in love with the person you are with the first time, isn't it?"

"I always thought it would be nice."

"Well, think about it this way. You'll be with someone who is madly in love with you. That counts for something, doesn't it?"

Lara looked at her as she asked, "You want me to do this, don't you?"

"I want you to be happy, Lara. I want you to be taken care of. I wouldn't worry about your financial well being. However there will be other concerns. This choice is yours and yours alone, but I will stand by you regardless." On Saturday morning Lara was over at Ryan's place early since they were meeting for breakfast. When he opened the door, he gave her a bright smile. "Hey, Lara. So good to see you finally." he greeted wrapping her in his arms and kissing her deeply.

As his mouth connected with hers, Lara tensed a moment before allowing herself to relax. She was surprised by the fact that her first thought was of Alexa instead of the feeling of her longtime boyfriend's affection. Pulling back slightly she smiled demurely. She patted his chest as she said, "It's good to see you, Ryan."

"I have something to show you before we leave. Come look at this." excitedly he stated pulling her into his apartment. She followed him over to his dining table. Her heart stopped for a moment when her eyes saw what was lying there, a nationally published magazine with a picture of Alexa and her from the gala gracing the cover. It was a full length shot of the tall woman's entrance that night, and the brunette had her head turned slightly in the blonde's direction giving her an obviously affectionate gaze. The headline across it alluded to Alexa's feelings for the teacher. "Isn't this funny?" he asked. "They suggest that the princess is in love with you and you her. You look good though." he commented idly flipping the pages.

"Thanks." she mumbled.

Seeing her unenthusiastic response, he questioned, "What's wrong? You don't think this is amusing? How did you manage to get escorted in on Princess Alexa's arm anyway?"

"She asked." Lara replied. "Ryan, we need to talk about this article. I didn't want to do this now. I was hoping we'd at least have some time before I had to bring this up."

"What is it?"

"We should sit." she said gesturing to the couch. He gave her a questioning look but did as she suggested, tossing the magazine on his coffee table to give her his full attention. She took a seat next to him. "Ryan, there is no easy way to say this. That article is partially true."

“Which part?” he inquired.

“Lex has made her interest known to me.” she stated.

“Is that interest returned?”

Breaking their gaze Lara sighed. “Ryan, not in the way you might think. She has made it clear that she would like to pursue me, and that was quite a shock to say the least. At first I was completely taken back and refused her.”

“But?”

The blonde shook her head. “I’m going about this all wrong. What I want to say to you really has nothing to do with Lex. There is something I need to ask you.”

“What is it?”

Looking into his eyes, she took one of his large hands in her own. “Ryan, do you see us together forever? Do you think we have that kind of future?” “Lara, I love you.” he said plainly.

“I know, but do you want to marry me? Can you see that ever happening?”

He was silent for a moment before answering, “Lara, we’re only twenty three. Marriage isn’t something I really think about. Can’t we just see how it goes? I mean I do love you. Maybe at some point a long time from now I could see that happening. Why are you asking me this?”

“Because, Ryan, I’ve come to realize what I want out of life. I want to get married, and I want to have children.”

“Do you have to have those things right now?”

“No but it makes me realize that I should only be with someone who has the same goals as I do, and I know that I want those things in the near future if possible.”

He scowled at her. “Are you breaking up with me?” he questioned. “Is this about her?”

“This isn’t about Alexa. I swear it’s not, but she has made me think about my priorities. Ryan I can’t be with you if you don’t want the same things. It’s just not fair to either of us. You’re not ready for a commitment like that with me, and furthermore I know that I am ready for that commitment but not with you. It doesn’t make sense for us to carry on like this.”

He dropped his head forward slightly and sighed. “If I proposed would you stay?” he asked.

Lara shook her head. “No, sweetie, I wouldn’t, because I know it wouldn’t be genuine. I care about you and your happiness, Ryan. You know as well as I do this is not going to work in the

long run.”

“I suppose you’re right.” he conceded. “I didn’t want to admit it, but we’ve really been more friends than anything over the past few months. I could feel it slipping away. I guess I just didn’t want to see you go. You’re the only woman I’ve ever felt this way about, but I suppose that if I’m not ready to commit after a year I probably won’t. My past relationships clearly show that much.” He leaned back against the couch and closed his eyes.

Lara knew he was trying to control his emotions as he always did. “This is for the best, Ryan.” she assured.

“And the princess?” he quietly asked.

Lara shrugged. “We’ll see. I don’t know yet.” A few minutes passed in silence before she inquired, “Do you still want to go for that breakfast, or should I just go?”

“I think I just want to be alone for awhile.” he mumbled.

Nodding her head in understanding, Lara stood. “All right. I guess this is it then.”

“Here. Take this with you.” he asked handing her the magazine.

“I’m sorry about hurting you, Ryan. I just think this is best.” He gave a nod but said nothing further. “Well, good bye.”

Going straight back to her parents’ house, she ran into them in their own kitchen. “Back so soon?” her mother inquired as she took a sip of her coffee.

“I broke up with Ryan.” the young woman stated flopping into a chair near them.

“What? Why?” Katherine asked.

Looking at them seriously she replied, “Because I think I’m going to marry Alexa.”

There was an extended pause before her mother questioned, “Really? You’ve made up your mind already?”

“Assuming we can work some things out, I think so. I broke up with Ryan though, because I know regardless of Alexa, I never want to marry him. What was the point of being together?”

“Wow. Our daughter is going to be the future queen.” her father mentioned. “I can hardly believe it.”

“Well, I think you were right, Mom. Alex can give me opportunities that I can’t get anywhere else. This is an arrangement. We’ll only be married in name really. She’s using me as much as I will be her. It’s temporary, and we’ll both benefit from it. It really accomplishes all my goals

without too much responsibility. I mean the benefits will far outweigh them I believe.

She and I just have to get some things straight first.”

Her mother nodded. “Well, when are you going to tell Alexa?”

“I guess when I get back tomorrow. I know there is a time issue involved with her father. I’m sure she’ll want to know right away.”

Raising her glass of juice, Katherine stated, “Well, here’s to you, Lara, the future queen. I think you’ll be happy you did this.”

On Sunday afternoon the teacher returned to the palace. As soon as the helicopter landed, she looked out the window to see the princess standing there waiting on her. She thought about the fact that in a few short months she would become the brunette’s wife and how happy that would make so many people. As soon as the helicopter was on the ground, Alexa made her way over to open the door. Smiling brightly at the blonde, she extended her hand to assist her in getting down. “Hi. Welcome back.” she greeted leaning in to hug the short woman.

Lara responded in kind, figuring she might as well try to get used to the idea of the tall woman’s physical affection. “It’s good to be back.” she answered. Looking toward the palace, she saw the hustle of people rushing around. “What’s going on?”

“My father’s birthday party. I was hoping you would get back in time to be my date. It starts at seven and is just family and close friends. Of course if you’re too tired, I would understand.”

“No. I’m all right. I would love to go if you want me to be there.”

“I want you to be there. I have to get back to some business, but I just wanted to welcome you back. I’ll see you in the library around seven with everyone else. Okay?”

“Sure. I’ll see you then. That gives me a little time to relax.”

Lara walked toward her room with palace servants close behind carrying her bags. Going into her room, she noticed that someone had been in there cleaning as all her belongings had been put away neatly. The bed had been made better than she had left it, and on the nightstand there was a huge bouquet of red roses with a card. Even before she got to them, she knew they had to be from Alexa. Once she was alone, she moved over to the flowers and opened the card. It was written in Alexa’s hand saying, “Welcome home. I missed you. Lex.” Lara smiled as she put it on the table. If nothing else the princess went out of her way to express her emotions to the little woman, which pleased her. The teacher looked around her room as she thought of the fact that the palace would indeed become her home when she married the brunette.

Just a few minutes after seven Alexa was standing in the back of the library watching her parents and their friends chatting. Her father’s health seemed on the steady decline, and it appeared that he was having problems keeping up with the conversations around him forcing him to be a

bystander for most of it. As the princess looked upon the man she adored, her heart felt a profound sadness. She knew this was the last time he would celebrate this event, and it grieved her that her time with him was near its end. Suddenly a small hand on her back broke her musings. Turning she looked down to questioning blue eyes.

“You all right?” Lara asked softly.

“I’m fine.” the princess lied.

Lara looked at the king and then back at the brunette. “It’s okay if you’re sad, Lex. He is your father. You have every right to be upset.”

Alexa nodded. “I just don’t want this to be happening. I’m not ready to take over for him. I want my father not some crown.”

“I understand. You should enjoy what time you have left though.”

“I know. I guess the fact that I’ve agreed to get married this year pleases him as well. That’s a small concession to make, to make his final days more bearable. If only I could announce to him that I am officially engaged this evening, that would be special to him. That would be a perfect gift.” she commented looking at her father. Lara chose not to respond. Instead she took the princess by the hand and pulled over to her family.

The evening passed with quiet talk and laughs about times when Princess Alexa and King George were both younger. When the group moved to the dining area for their meal, Lara watched as Alexa carried her father to his seat and made sure he was comfortable before taking her own. The blonde couldn’t help herself. As the princess took her seat next to her, she slipped her hand onto the brunette’s thigh, patting it lightly in support. Once the meal had passed and they were all sitting around talking, Victoria announced that it was time to give the king his gifts. Lara was curious as to what someone would give a king much less a man that didn’t have much time left. However she quickly realized that each person bestowed kind words onto the king instead of materialistic items. When it came to Alexa, the princess stood with her wine glass.

“Well, Father, I have to say that you are my hero and role model. Everything that I have learned about respecting people, I’ve learned from you. You have taught me compassion and sincerity, and I strive to be just like you. My gift to you this year, which most of you don’t know about yet, is that I am getting married. I hope that I have a marriage half as wonderful as the one you and Mother share and that I raise my children with the same values you have instilled in me.”

When she took her seat, Victoria looked at Lara. “Lara, do you have anything you would like to add?” she politely asked.

Casting a glance at Alexa, she answered, “Actually I do, but I what I have to say is for the king’s ears alone first.”

“Then please come tell me, my dear.” he said gesturing her to his chair. Coming to him Lara

leaned to his ear and quietly whispered what she had to share.

Seeing the light come into her father's eyes and the large grin that graced his face, Alexa wondered exactly what the blonde had just said. Not able to resist, she asked, "Lara, what did you just tell him?"

However the teacher ignored her for the moment as the king cupped her face in his frail hands. "You are an angel." he whispered. "You have made me happier than I've ever been."

"Come on. What did you just say?" the princess pressed in curiosity.

Taking the king's hand in her own, Lara smiled at Alexa. "I just told him that I accepted your marriage proposal."

Alexa's heart stopped and then started again double time at what Lara just said. "You did?" she asked in clarification.

"Lex, why didn't you tell us?" her mother inquired in excitement jumping from her seat to hug her daughter.

Lex returned the embrace but kept her eyes on the fair-headed woman, whose blue eyes sparkled in joy. Victoria gave the teacher the same response before Alexa moved to her bride. Kissing the back of the blonde's left hand, she confessed, "I love you so much, Lara."

"We have to make an announcement right away. Oh, there is so much to plan." Victoria stated.

"Lara and I will give a press conference tomorrow morning before the conference resumes." Alexa said. "For now though let's just enjoy the rest of the night."

That evening once the gathering had ended, Alexa escorted Lara back to her room. She hovered at the door for a moment smiling at the woman she was to marry. Seeing how happy she had made the royal family, Lara felt better about her decision. "I think we have some things to talk about." she mentioned to the tall woman.

"Yeah. Would you like to do that now?"

"That's all right. I'm not concerned about us being able to come to amiable terms for our prenup."

The princess nodded. "Lara, if I may ask, why did you say yes? It's not because of the way I feel, is it?"

The blonde shrugged. "It's perceived as an honor to serve one's country, and this is how I will serve mine. You're kind, Lex, and I know that we will get along well. I should get some rest now. We have the press conference early, and I want to look my best."

“You always do. Nevertheless I will leave you to your dreams.” Brushing Lara’s cheek with her hand lightly, she leaned to kiss her forehead. “Good night, my soon to be wife. Sleep well. Tomorrow your life will change forever.”

The next day the family met for breakfast before Alfred moved to start the press conference. As Alexa stood looking out the window at the gathering media, she felt a hand on her shoulder. She looked down to see the blonde curiously looking out as well. “There are a lot of people out there.” she mentioned.

“Yeah and they’re all here for you. Strange, isn’t it? This is our first test, Lara. Are you ready to do this?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be.”

“All right. Come on then.” Alexa extended her hand to the small woman. Lara took a deep breath before clasping it and letting the princess lead her outside to the waiting crowd. They stood together behind Alfred as he concluded his short speech before moving to the podium themselves. “I’ll make this brief as we are already running behind for the education conference. This morning I have asked you here to formally announce my engagement to Miss Lara Elise Monroe. As all of you should know by following the education conference, she was the winner of this year’s ‘Teacher of the Year’ award and is serving as an interim assistant director for the elementary level. It is a great pleasure for me that she has agreed to become my queen and serve our country. As of now we have not set a date for the wedding, but it will be before year end. At this time Alfred will field any questions you may have, because we have to get to our meeting. Thank you for your time.” Moving out from behind the podium, Alexa made them pause next to it while pictures were taken for a few moments before leading the blonde back into the palace.

That evening once returning from their meetings, Alexa held a traditional barbeque for all the guests of the conference. However being that news of the engagement had swept the country during the day, press had swarmed the palace getting the opinions of those coming and going. As Alexa sat in a chair under one of the large tents temporarily placed on the grounds for the party, people kept bombarding her with their well wishes for her marriage to the little blonde. She obliged them with conversation, but her eyes were across the way on the woman she was to marry.

Alfred had arranged for Lara’s family to be at the party that evening, having sent the royal jet to retrieve them earlier in the day, so Alexa watched the petite woman as she giggled with some of her younger relatives over the ring now adorning her hand. Feeling eyes on her, Lara turned to see the princess observing with a look of pure adoration gracing her face. The teacher smiled and blushed modestly under the gaze. When Alexa had first made her interest known a few months previous, the blonde had been uncomfortable with the idea of another woman having such feelings for her. However now that she had accepted and the brunette made her emotions obvious to everyone, Lara felt a certain security and receptivity to the tall woman’s affections. The teacher had always wanted the kind of love the heir was showing her, and even though she couldn’t reciprocate, she was flattered by the attention.

“Well, congratulations, Lara. You did something no one else was capable of.” Gwen stated as she approached. “You lured the future queen into marriage. I never thought it would happen.”

“Neither did I, Gwen.”

“Guess she made you quite a deal.” the tall blonde said looking over at her best friend. Glancing back at the teacher, she quietly mentioned, “She’s my best friend, Lara, and I want her to be happy. Don’t hurt her. She loves you.”

“I know she does.”

Just then Alexa made her way over to them, sliding her arms around Lara from behind and pulling the little woman to her. The teacher tensed for a second before relaxing, realizing that she was going to have to get used to the brunette’s touch. Snuggling into the toned body behind her, she placed her hands over her betrothed’s. “What are my two favorite ladies talking about over here?” she asked with a gentle smile.

“Oh, I was just congratulating Lara on a job well done. It’s about time someone tame you. Congratulations, Lex. I’m so happy for you.” she said leaning to kiss the brunette’s cheek.

“Thanks, Gwennie. I’m happy for me too.” the princess jested. “Excuse me though. I really must go speak with my future in-laws. Don’t run too far. We have to have a conference with the press in a bit.” she informed her fiancée before kissing her cheek and wandering away.

A few minutes later Alfred did come retrieve them for an interview with the media. Lara was surprised that most of the questions were directed at her. She tried to take it in stride however as she held tightly to Alexa’s hand and laid on her southern charm. The princess just stood next to her smiling proudly at how easily the blonde handled the crowd, and she saw that the little woman was having the same affect on the press that she had on her. Overlooking the group she noted that they seemed as smitten with the young woman as she had been in the beginning.

When the interview came to a close, one overly zealous report yelled in suggestion that they kiss for the camera. Alexa cast a bashful glance at her fiancée at the proposal, but seeing the permission in the blue eyes she loved, she pulled the little woman into her arms. She leaned down with every intention of giving the blonde a simple kiss, but as soon as her mouth met the soft lips of her beloved, all rational thought dissolved as the feeling of the teacher overtook her. Moaning lightly she pressed deeper, diving past Lara’s lips in a sensuous exchange. Faintly she was aware of the fact the little woman responded in kind, her arms locking around the brunette’s neck and pulling her in even closer. It lasted several long moments before Alexa had to pull away for air.

Seeing the dazed glow of Alexa’s eyes, Lara knew she had made the right decision to make things seem as real as possible. As an additional touch, she moved her fingers to her sovereign’s lips, gently wiping off her smeared pink lipstick from her majesty’s slightly quivering mouth in a seemingly doting gesture. Alexa lightly kissed the delicate fingertips that brushed her lips as she conveyed with her eyes emotions she couldn’t say in front of the assembly of people.

For the rest of the night Alexa was constantly by the teacher's side. Lara played along by cuddling with the tall woman in front of the guests. However as the evening came to a close, the princess accompanied the blonde back to her room, holding tightly to the petite woman's hand. Arriving at the door, Alexa lingered for a moment. Seeing dark eyes peering into her own, Lara asked, "What is it, Lex?"

"You are just so beautiful, Lara." she replied brushing back the blonde's hair with one of her hands. "I was amazed with the way you handled yourself today. It was incredible."

The blonde simply nodded. Forgetting herself for a moment, Alexa leaned into the teacher's body, hugging her tightly. Her lips grazed over the small ear before closing over the lobe. Lara didn't respond for a minute, merely standing there until Alexa's lips trailed down her neck. The teacher gasped lightly in surprise. "Lex." she whispered. There was no response from her sovereign. "Alexa." she tried again, but still the princess was involved with her neck. Uncomfortable with the idea of allowing the action to continue and yet scared to really rebuff the woman she was to marry, Lara waited another second. However Alexa continued. Hearing the tiniest of groans escape her majesty, the teacher knew she had to stop things before they escalated further. Pulling away she said, "Sire." Meeting Alexa's eyes, she saw them brightened with fervor. The princess was slightly breathless as she looked at her expectantly.

"Please." the brunette begged shamelessly. "God, Lara. Please let me touch you. I need to feel you."

Staring deeply into those dark eyes, Lara saw their desperation. Alexa was arrantly pleading with her, and for the first time Lara felt bad for the situation she had created. It was so visible the torture she was putting the princess through by spurning her. Nevertheless the little woman was not ready to move further with her fiancée. In fact Alexa's touch left her unstirred in the ways of passion. Knowing she could not give what the tall woman wanted, Lara stepped back toward her door. "Good night, Lex." However Alexa was not going to be dissuaded so easily as she reached to embrace the blonde again and beseeched, "Lara, please."

The teacher removed Alexa's hands from her waist and held them in her own. "Lex, please don't make this harder than it has to be."

The princess dropped her head forward, sighing with resignation. She wasn't going to get what she wanted from the younger woman. Being refused was hard for her to accept, because Lara's sentiments had seemed so real that evening. "I'm sorry." she muttered. "I forgot for a moment. Wishful thinking I suppose." she admitted. "I'll just go. Good night, my princess." Lara watched as Alexa shuffled down the corridor defeat evident in her posture. The princess didn't look back as she wandered out of sight. Lara gave her own sigh of relief and yet remorse. She hated hurting the tall woman, because she did care about her at least as a friend. Going into her room, the teacher tried to just put the day out of her mind.

The princess couldn't sleep after all that happened, so she stayed up reading long into the night. Around two though there was a soft knock on her door. Wondering whom it could be, she rose

from bed and went to answer it. Her mother was standing there in her robe with a tray of milk and cookies.

“Mom, can’t sleep?”

“No. You can’t either?”

“No.”

“Want to share my snack?” Victoria inquired.

“Sure. Come on in.”

They moved to the couch and sat close together. Her mother poured two glasses of milk before handing one to her daughter. “So, what’s keeping you up?” she asked conversationally.

“Stuff.” Alexa replied vaguely. “What about you?”

“Sometimes I have a hard time sleeping next to your father these days. I just want to watch over him instead and absorb every moment that I can.” she confessed.

Alexa wrapped her arms around her mother in comfort. “I know the feeling. He’s only seventy. That’s too young, but we should just enjoy what time we have left.”

Her mother nodded. “I just never thought that I’d be a widow at sixty-five. We’ve been married for forty-seven years, and somehow that just doesn’t seem like enough time together.”

“Mom, could I ask you something about your marriage?”

“Of course. You know you can ask me anything.”

“Were you and dad in love with each other when you got married, or were you just kind of pushed on each other?”

Victoria paused for a moment to take a sip of her milk. “Lex, we did care about each other. I mean we were friends, but we weren’t in love when we married. Our families wanted the marriage, and we obliged. Both of us thought that if we had to do it, at least we knew that we would get along as friends.”

“But you love him now.”

“Yes, I do. I love your father in a way I never knew existed, and looking back I couldn’t imagine being with anyone else. He’s my soulmate.”

“How did that change come about?”

“It was very slowly, Lex. When we got married, we both knew that we needed to have children as soon as possible. It was just considered protocol, and we felt obligated to do so. We tried for twenty-two years to have a child before you were finally born. Over the course of that time our relationship slowly began to change. For the first five years or so when we couldn’t get pregnant, he just kind of brushed it off, saying that it was no big deal, that we had plenty of time. We were friends and only had sexual interaction for the sole purpose of conceiving. I mean we didn’t even share a bed or a room for those five years. In fact I slept in this room for the first years of our marriage.” she said taking a look around. “After time had passed and we were still trying, the relationship seemed different. He started to stay over sometimes after we had done our national duty, and he would hold me, telling me everything would be fine, that it would work this time. He was so supportive of me. I truly felt that I let him down and even more my country down, because I couldn’t get pregnant. For twelve years it seemed like all we did was try to have a child. Finally when I was thirty, the doctors basically told us that there was a very high likelihood that we would never be able to have a baby. I was crushed. You see during all those trials I had somehow fallen in love with my prince, but I knew he had obligations to the country. I wanted him to be happy and to have children to carry on the line, so I asked him if he wanted a divorce. I remember that so clearly, because it forever changed the way we were. I merely was thinking of the country when I suggested it, but by the look on his face, I could tell I had just destroyed him. For the first time ever I saw your father cry. He begged me to reconsider, and he told me for the very first time that he loved me. He said he would rather have me than his crown, and he didn’t care if we ever had kids, that he just wanted to love me for the rest of his life.” Victoria paused as tears came to her eyes. Alexa pulled her mother tighter into her consoling embrace. “It took twelve years, Alexa, before we found love, and that was thirty-five years ago. We had given up on kids all together, and then ten years later when I was forty, there you were. You were a surprise and a blessing, and your father adored you from the moment I told him that I was in fact pregnant. You’d never see a father as proud and excited as he was. From the day you were born, he coddled you and loved you with an intensity I never knew a father could have for their child. That’s why it’s so important to him that he sees you marry. He wants you to be as happy as we are.”

Alexa nodded. “Lara doesn’t love me, Mom.” she stated softly.

“I know, sweetheart. You’re friends. You love her though. That’s more than what we started with.”

“Yeah but I want so much for her to return my feelings. It hurts when she refuses me.” she admitted.

“I know, Lex. Love can be painful sometimes, but there is a good chance that she will come to love you over time. You two are going to get married and hopefully start having children soon. Kids do wonders for relationships. It wouldn’t surprise me at all if she fell for the mother of her children. It would be hard not to, especially knowing how much you adore her.”

“But I want her to love me now.” she grumbled.

“Lex, love isn’t on a schedule. It comes when it does. Give it time. You’ll see. She wouldn’t

have said yes if she didn't at least care about you as a friend. You have something to work with. You just have to let nature take its course."

Continued in Part 3

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

~ Queen of My Country, Queen of My Heart ~

by Alex Tryst

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Part 3

Chapter Five: Princess and Princess

Lara looked out the window of her lavish hotel room at the view of the National Cathedral as her bridesmaids scurried around her. It had been raining most of the November morning as she prepared for the ceremony that day, but she noted that the weather seemed to have past, leaving a chill in the air. Colorful leaves were plastered to the wet cement and a wind whipped lightly through the barren trees. Her thoughts were at the palace, wondering what Alexa was doing at the moment. A hand on her lower back made her turn from the window.

"Penny for your thoughts?" her father asked.

"Daddy." she whispered leaning into his shoulder.

"Lara, you look so beautiful, just like your mother on our wedding day. Who ever would have guessed that my little girl would come to sit next to the most powerful woman in the world as her wife? You were always a princess in my heart, but now you will be my queen." he mentioned as his eyes grew misty. "I just can't believe it."

"It'll be okay, Dad."

He gave a nod. "It's time. Are you ready, Princess Lara?" he asked extending his arm to her.

The blonde let her father lead her down to her awaiting entourage. He settled her in her limousine before getting into a different one with his wife. Lara took a deep breath trying to

settle her nerves. She had to ride alone to the National Cathedral that day, because she was supposed to arrive by herself at the end of a long procession of her bridal party. The closer she came to the cathedral, she began to see people crowding the streets anxiously awaiting her. It overwhelmed her the amount of support of the people who were there, hovering around simply waiting on a chance to catch a glimpse of the royal family on this special day.

Finally she pulled up to the cathedral, and her eyes strayed to how majestic the building was, the gray towers reaching to heaven against the dark clouds. As soon as her door was opened for her, she could hear the deafening screams of the horde of people. Camera flashes began even before she was assisted from the car. Carefully Lara made her way up the granite stairs into the building. In the foyer she met up with her father again. The king and queen had already processed, and her own parents were about to go in. They both gave their daughter one last smile and kiss on the cheek before taking each other's arm. The wedding planner hovered around her doing last minute preparations and making sure she was completely ready while Lara focused simply on her breathing. Her nerves had started to run wild, and her stomach churned in uneasiness. She was about to link her life with the future heir to the throne, and she knew she would never be the same. When the music began to play for her and the heavy doors to the sanctuary opened, a quick breath escaped her. The whole cathedral was full of people, all of them standing and staring at her. However there was only one set of eyes that burned into her as she found them at the end of the long aisle. Alexa was standing there looking so regal in her military attire. Being that she was second in command of the armed forces, her uniform was heavily decorated with medals designating her position, and on her dark head she wore her golden jeweled crown. The princess was smiling more brightly than Lara had ever seen, and she couldn't help but follow suit even though her hands, hidden under her large bouquet, trembled. As she made her way down the aisle, her eyes found her parents, who were giving her smiles of support. She also saw Alfred on the aisle a few rows back from the king and queen looking at her in adoration. The king and queen were both giving smiles as well. Finally though her gaze settled on the tall princess who was beaming in happiness.

Alexa felt light headed at the sight of the blonde as she floated elegantly down the aisle. She had not been allowed to see what the small woman was planning on wearing to the service, so she was surprised and overwhelmed at the teacher's dress. It was a traditional white and conservative. Being that it was fall, it had full length sleeves, and it dipped only slightly, low enough to expose the modest diamond necklace Alexa had given her. The satin dress was fitted throughout the body, accentuating the little woman's slight yet proportional frame and then fuller through the skirt with an extended train that followed for several rows. Her long blonde hair had been curled around her face with most of it pinned up with a long veil completing the look. Overall it was a classic and traditional look that perfectly personified the blonde's personality, and it took Alexa's breath from her. When Lara arrived next to the princess, she handed off her bouquet to her maid of honor and reached for Alexa's extended hand. The princess stepped closer to her beloved and whispered, "You're an angel, Lara. You're so beautiful. I love you so much." Unable to help herself, she leaned down brushing her lips against the blonde's, but she wasn't satisfied with the simple kiss. Pressing deeper her arm came around Lara's back as the other held fast to her bride's hand.

Lara gulped as the princess broke protocol, but she knew it was her role to go along with

whatever Alexa deemed appropriate for the moment. Falling into her place, the blonde responded in kind, bringing her arms around her sovereign's neck and pulling her more intently into the interchange. Her fingers found their way into her soon to be wife's thick dark hair, the tips of her fingers playing with the edge of the crown that was soon to be hers. Lara could feel in that moment more than ever how the princess truly felt for her.

"Your majesty." the minister whispered trying to break them apart in order to begin. However he was ignored. "Your highness." he stated again. Alexa broke away and spared him a glance. He smiled. "Perhaps we could quickly do the vows, so you can get back to what you're doing." he jested lightly causing snickering from the congregation.

"Of course." Alexa replied blushing lightly as she looked down at the blonde. She attempted the best she could to wipe away the smeared lipstick as Lara did the same to her. Turning the little woman toward the minister, she said, "We're ready now."

"Very good, sire." The ceremony ran smoothly for the couple, and it seemed only fleeting minutes until the minister turned them toward the assembly and announced, "May I now present, her royal highness, Princess Alexa Washington and Princess Lara Washington."

Alexa then guided them back down the aisle smiling at people that they passed until they made it outside. A roaring mob greeted them with a chorus of hollering and cheering. Alex smiled and waved to everyone with Lara following suit before making their way to their awaiting limousine.

The reception that day was back at the palace. It seemed like a whirlwind to Lara though, as she conversed with people who she didn't even know wishing her well. She desperately need to see a friendly face, but as soon as she felt she couldn't handle it any longer, Alfred made his way to her. He bowed slightly before addressing her, "Princess Lara, may I have the honor of dancing with you?"

She smiled. "Thank you, yes, Alfred." she answered putting her hand in his. Once they were on the floor, she quietly said, "Thank you for saving me."

"You're welcome. It's my job to know when my sovereign is in distress. We really must come up with a signal though now. We should think that over."

"A signal? What kind of signal?"

"To get out of something if you're bored or unhappy. You give me the signal, and I will come to your rescue. It has to be something subtle."

"Does Alexa have a signal?"

"She sure does."

"What is it?"

“Meeting my eyes and playing with the collar of her shirt.”

“Really? That’s funny.”

“Well, Queen Victoria’s is playing with her necklace.”

“And King George?”

“He doesn’t have one. If he’s bored or unhappy, he just leaves. He is the king after all. So, we should come up with a signal. Maybe playing with your earring or hair or something. I don’t know. Whatever makes you comfortable.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“You really look beautiful today, Lara. I know you have made Lex so incredibly happy, not to mention everyone in this country. You are the darling of the media now, which is quite helpful. You’ll bring some much needed good press to the family, especially with King George being so ill.”

“Well, I hope to be a help.”

That night Alexa and Lara left early for their honeymoon. Alexa didn’t want to travel too far given her father’s condition, but she still wanted some privacy with the little woman, so they decided to take the family jet down to their palace in the Virgin Islands. Even though it was fall, the weather was still fairly warm when they landed on the private island. Servants came to take their bags while the two of them stood just overlooking the ocean for a few minutes.

After awhile Alexa looked down at her wife. She still thought it strange that she was indeed married and to the teacher that had charmed her thoroughly only six months before. “Well, do you want to get settled in?” she asked nervously.

Lara looked up at Alexa. Her nerves were going again, because she knew what was supposed to happen now that they were alone. It was clearly written in their agreement that this was the night Alexa would finally be able to have what she wanted from the blonde, but Lara was dreading the encounter.

“Whatever you want.” she answered softly.

Nodding the brunette gestured toward the palace. Lara fell in beside the tall woman as they walked together. Being that it was already late, there was really only one thing left to do as they moved to their sleeping quarters. The servants had already started putting away their belongings for their stay, which was different for the teacher, given that she wasn’t used to other people going through her personal and intimate belongings.

Nevertheless Alexa seemed used to it by the way she just waited on them to finish before bidding them a good night. Lara just stood at the foot of the bed, arms crossed over her chest and eyes to

the floor until Alexa's voice broke the stillness that encompassed them.

"Perhaps we should just go to bed. It's late." she proposed. Lara just nodded. Seeing the tension coming from the blonde, Alexa wondered how to reassure her. "You can use the bathroom first if you want." she offered.

"Okay."

Ten minutes later it was Alexa's turn for the bathroom. As she stood at the sink rinsing soap from her face, she wondered what the rest of the night would hold. This was her time to be with the woman she loved, but she could clearly see the blonde's angst over the situation. Hoping for the best, the princess merely pulled a robe over her bare body and made her way back to the bedroom.

She found Lara sitting in bed in a pair of modest white pajamas, uneasiness apparent on her face as distinct lines of distress graced her usually pretty complexion. The blonde princess wrung the sheet tightly in her hands as she looked at her sovereign. Alexa came to the bed and took a tentative seat next to the little woman facing her. Her fingers moved over the teacher's brow and forehead trying to massage the lines of worry from her face.

Cupping her fair cheek, she promised, "I'm not going to hurt you, Lara. I'll be gentle." Lara said nothing as her majesty leaned to kiss her and so the night she had dreaded began.

True to her word, Alexa did move slowly and tenderly with the blonde. She took her time adoring the mouth of her beloved while her hands took in the landscape she had dreamed about so many times. Sliding her hand up to the little woman's top, Alexa began to undo each button with exquisite care as her mouth lovingly explored the soft skin of her wife's supple neck. Lara's breath began to hitch in trepidation at the feeling of her majesty's adoring hands on the bare skin of her stomach and then breasts. She knew it was her commitment to comply with the Alexa's desires, but the blonde couldn't relax under the ministrations even though her body seemed capable of responding to the caresses. Powerful hands pulled her top off her shoulders and dropped it to the floor, leaving her only in her little silk shorts. Things were suddenly moving faster as she saw Alexa shrug out of her robe, revealing the sinewy body of authority. Before she even realized it, Lara found herself on her back, Alexa's weight on top of her small form as the princess came back to her mouth. Reflexively Lara's hands found the brunette's shoulders, and she merely held on, wondering how long this would last.

The tall woman kissed down her lover's body, stopping at the breasts she always wanted. She circled the crest of the right one with her tongue before closing over it. Lara cried out softly, her back arching instinctively, but her heart hammered wildly in despondency. She really didn't want to go any farther, nor had she even wanted to venture to this level of intimacy, but she knew it was her duty. Lara felt out of control as her body did things it never had before, and it scared the young woman that it could react one way when her heart another. The princess moved to the blonde's other breast after several long minutes. Alexa was in heaven. As she investigated every inch of the blonde's frame, she knew the teacher had been worth the wait. Letting her need drive her, the princess kissed lower, drawn to the place she fantasized about since they had met.

Lara's essence was magnetic, pulling her ever closer until the crowned heir found herself with her head bowed worshipping her blonde goddess intimately with her mouth. Unable to control her own body any longer, Lara moaned loudly as Alexa's tongue lavished her with attention she had never even thought of with anyone before. Her hips rocked in time with the strokes. Even though Alexa had never pleased another woman this way, she knew the moment she tasted her wife, she would never tire of the flavor of her lover. Groaning with fervor, Alexa followed her own instincts to give the tiny woman delight. Lara could feel tension building within her body, in the pit of her stomach and in her quivering thighs as heat began to run rampant through her. She was finding it difficult to breathe as her breaths came in short pants.

"Alexa." she whispered in uncertainty.

"It's okay, Lara. I love you. Let it go. I've got you. You're safe." the brunette coaxed.

Suddenly spasms ripped through the blonde, and her body shook uncontrollably for a few seconds. She was so incapacitated with the tide crashing over her that she didn't even notice as the princess moved to hold her. However a sharp pang brought her back, and her blue eyes met the dark ones above her. Feeling Alexa's presence within her, the blonde knew her innocence was gone, and she began to cry.

Seeing the tears the brunette began to panic. "Oh, God. Lara, did I hurt you?" she questioned in concern. The teacher shook her head as the crying turned to sobs. "Then what is it, beautiful? Did I do something wrong?" Alexa inquired withdrawing from her lover and pulling back slightly. The little woman was now trembling and weeping uncontrollably and inconsolably. "Lara? What can I do?" the princess asked wanting to soothe the blonde.

"Nothing." Lara whispered turning on her side and curling tightly into herself.

Alarm overtook the tall woman as she saw the blonde's unreceptivness. "Let me hold you." Alexa stated comfortingly, settling her body next to the teacher's and reaching for her, but Lara shrugged her off. "Lara, please." she pleaded. Lara didn't say anything. Instead she just cried, realizing just how awful it was that her own body had betrayed her heart. She felt dirty, like a common whore, and she regretted that she had agreed to such an arrangement. A delicate hand brushed her blonde hair. "Lara, please tell me what I can do. Do you want me to leave you alone?"

She nodded slowly. "I'm sorry." she mumbled. "I just can't do this. Oh, God. Why did I do this?" she questioned aloud pulling the sheet around her quaking form.

Alexa lay there stunned. She couldn't believe the most wonderful thing she had ever experienced had been such a terror for her lover. It made her feel terrible for inflicting such torment on the woman she loved. As tears formed in her own eyes at the realization that she had robbed her beloved of what should have been a magical night, she made the decision to do as the blonde had requested of her. Withdrawing from their marital bed, Alexa silently pulled on her robe again, tying it securely around her waist. "I'm sorry, Lara." she murmured with a shaky voice. "I'll leave you alone. Good night." Without another word between them, Alexa left the little woman

alone with her thoughts.

The following morning when Lara awoke, she sat up and looked around the room. It appeared that Alexa had not returned at all the night, making the blonde wonder where she had slept. Slowly she moved to the bathroom where she was surprised to find all of brunette's belongings had been removed. Lara leisurely dressed for the day, because she was not in a hurry to face her wife after what had happened the previous night. She had broken her end of the deal, so she wasn't sure what Alexa would do. After showering and putting on casual clothes, Lara knew she had to face the repercussions of her actions. They might be married, but she knew Alexa was still her sovereign and ultimately could do with the blonde what she saw fit for her obstinate insubordination.

As she wandered the halls, she wondered exactly where the dining room was, because Alexa hadn't bothered to give her a tour the previous night. However after a few minutes she found it. One of the staff of the palace was cleaning what was obviously Alexa's breakfast. The woman bowed to Lara and greeted her, asking if she was ready for her own meal. Lara responded that she was and was quickly left alone in the large dining area. She stood at the window overlooking the ocean in the distance. It wasn't too long before her food was brought to her. As she sat she inquired as to Alexa's whereabouts, finding out that the princess was down on the beach. Quickly Lara had her meal before heading outside to find her wife. Even though the island was small, it took almost an entire lap before she saw the brunette in the distance, sitting on a large boulder at the edge of the sand. Her gaze was on the water, and she sat in stillness as the breeze ruffled her clothes. The blonde made a slow approach, but either the princess didn't see her or was ignoring her, because the petite woman came within a few feet before stopping. "Lex." she gently called.

The princess turned at the sound of her name. Her wife was standing there looking so beautiful and yet so vulnerable as she shifted uneasily on her feet. Alexa sighed and turned her look back to the ocean. "What do you want, Lara?" she asked shortly, going with the anger she felt instead of the pain.

"Nothing." the blonde answered meekly.

"Then why are you here disturbing my tranquility?" the princess inquired curtly.

Lara didn't answer at first. She knew Alexa had every right to be angry with her, but it still hurt the little woman's feelings. "Do you want me to leave you alone?" she timidly queried.

"What I want is something that no longer exists." she commented. "I want my night back."

"I'll give it to you. I know I messed up, but I'll make it right." she stated stepping closer.

"No! It's over, gone forever, Lara! I can't be near you now knowing you feel the way you do. You defied me, Lara, but more importantly you broke our agreement! We had a written contract, and you just cast it aside!"

“I know, and I’m sorry, Lex. I swear I’ll make it up to you.” the blonde pleaded. “Just give me a chance.”

Alexa scowled at the little woman. “Well, I’m sorry too! Marrying you was the biggest mistake I ever made! I should’ve married Gwen! At least I know I can trust her! At least I know with her my heart wouldn’t be trampled by some selfish...” She cut her sentence off before she said something she regretted. Taking a deep breath, she firmly stated, “Lara, I don’t even want to look at you right now! You have done enough damage to last a lifetime, so just get out of my sight!”

The blonde quavered at the oral assault. “Lex, please don’t be like this.”

“Lara, I’m warning you! If you don’t turn around and leave right now, I’m bound to say or do something I shouldn’t!” she screamed as tears began to flow over her face.

Knowing it was best to do as she was told, Lara gave a weak nod. “All right. I’ll go. When you’re ready to talk, I’ll be waiting.”

Lara spent the rest of the day alone on the terrace of the palace. Alexa never made an appearance, forcing the blonde to take all her meals alone. The blonde princess wondered what was going to happen to her. Alexa was so furious with her for what had happened, but at the time it was truly more than Lara could handle. She wasn’t as prepared as she thought for their intimate encounter, and she questioned whether or not it was worth what she had gained. She already knew it wasn’t worth the pain she had put her dear friend through, and her heart was heavy with penitence that she had asked Alexa to leave their bed when the brunette was showing her such concern. Somehow she knew if Alexa had stayed, the princess would not have pressed for more, only held her the rest of the night. However the thought of them together was more than she could bear. She was still shocked at how her body had reacted to Alexa’s touch, because her heart truly wasn’t involved with the tall woman as a lover, only a friend. It was too late though. The crowned princess made it plain in her strong language that she was not interested in another opportunity to correct the injury that had occurred. The next morning after a sleepless night, a knock disturbed Lara while she was dressing. When she opened the door, Alexa was standing there. “May I come in?” she requested.

“Of course.”

The brunette closed the door behind her. “Sit down, Lara.” she demanded. The teacher complied, taking a seat on the couch. Alexa stood on the other side of the coffee table and stared at her for a minute in silence before saying, “I’m sorry I said the things I did yesterday on the beach. I was very upset and hurt, and I lashed out at you. I’ve been doing some thinking about what has happened since I met you. You changed my life, Lara. You’ve made me believe in love, because I think I fell in love with you from the moment you walked up to that podium to receive your award. That night I had expectations of things going a certain way, and they didn’t. Truth be told I had this idea that I could make you love me by bedding you. I guess I thought if I could show you what kind of a lover I could be you would want me. Now I know that isn’t the case. In fact I hurt you emotionally which I never wanted to do, and I’m truly sorry for that. However you hurt me more deeply than anyone else ever has. You refused my comfort, instead pushing me away.

You'll never know how much that destroyed me, Lara. Then I said some horrible things in my state that I never should have." The princess paused a second to look out the window and gathered her composure for what she was going to say next. "Lara, we have a problem. This just isn't going to work. I know under our agreement I asked you for five years or three children, whichever came last, but I don't think I can handle us having a relationship for that long. I'd like to alter our deal."

"What do you propose?" the blonde hesitantly asked.

"As soon as we get back from this trip, we need to get you pregnant. I need you to have an heir for me, and then I need you to remain my wife until I become queen, whichever comes later. You will become queen as well by default, and our child will become heir to my throne. After that point we can divorce. I'll still let you retain your title and give you the life of a queen. You'll have any palace of mine you want as your permanent home, and you'll have protection at all times. Additionally you'll keep your seat on the board of education. However the child will remain in my custody to be raised by me alone. You can have privileges, take them on visits and vacations, but they are to remain under the roof at my palace for their formative years. Finally and most importantly, you and I do not have to have any sort of physical interaction except in public."

"Is this what you really want?" Lara quietly inquired.

"I'm simply trying to give us both an out, Lara. I have already had Alfred draw up the papers. Here they are. I've already signed them, so the decision is now yours." she stated placing them on the table.

"Do you want me to sign these, Lex? I mean I will work under our old agreement if you would prefer."

"I do not prefer it. I favor this. This is for the best, Lara." she explained putting a pen down as well.

"Very well. If this is what you want, I'll do it." the blonde said signing the documents.

"Wonderful. I'll be going now. Enjoy your stay on the island. I'll be back in a few days to collect you. We'll go home then and pass it off as me being concerned with my father's illness to stay away any longer."

"Where are you going?" Lara asked in confusion.

"I'll be on my yacht. I've arranged for it to be moved out into the bay here. If you need me, you will be able to call. I just want to be alone now. If you want anything, the staff will see to you. Good bye, Princess Lara. See you in a few days." Without any further comment, Alexa picked up the papers and left.

Lara spent the next two days by herself at the tropical paradise, but instead of enjoying what

should have been a wonderful vacation, she felt miserable. She could see the royal yacht only about a half mile off the coast of the island. Boats came and went with such a frequency that the blonde knew Alexa wasn't alone. In fact music and voices floated over from the ship on the breeze confirming Lara's suspicions that the princess was actually having parties. Annoyed at the fact that the brunette had left her in her distress, Lara finally decided to take matters into her own hands. Seeking out the butler of the palace, she demanded that she be taken out to the boat.

Her wishes were readily complied with, and it was mere moments before a boat was ready for her to travel to the yacht. However as the boat neared its destination, security flagged it down, and the royal guards boarded to investigate. Seeing the blonde though they were deeply apologetic for the delay and let it proceed. When Lara stepped aboard the yacht, she climbed the steep stairs to the back deck.

Music was softly playing, but otherwise there was silence as she stepped onto the deck. Immediately her eyes were drawn to the scene before her. The crowned princess was lying on her stomach with her eyes closed. She was only dressed in a pair of small shorts, and the muscles of her strong back were on display. Hovered over her was a petite dark haired woman younger than she was in a skimpy blue bikini top and see-through sarong around her waist. Her skin was a dark golden hue from obvious time in the sun, and her hands were ardently kneading Alexa's muscles. Neither woman noticed Lara.

Alexa was drifting close to unconsciousness as she received her massage. She hadn't slept well in days, and the hands of the masseuse were working wonders on her tense body. Faintly she heard the request that she turn over and complied. Groggily she barely opened her eyes to look upon the woman that was giving her such tenderness. The young woman was focused intently on her task as her hands worked over shoulders and down Alexa's arms. However the princess noticed the little brunette's eyes shyly stray to her bare chest a few times. Deciding to play with her companion a little, Alexa ran one of her hands along the soft contours of the masseuse's side until it came to the knot holding her sarong in place. Their eyes met and spoke for them. Consent was requested and granted without so much as a word. The princess untied the material and let it slither down to the deck, revealing slim toned legs and a blue g-string. The small woman continued her work as Alexa's hand caressed her hip before sliding behind her. She maneuvered the masseuse across her hips and sat up slightly. The small woman exhaled quickly.

Lara stood there frozen at the display in front of her. It was obvious that Alexa was whispering something into the woman's ear as nimble fingers made quick work of the ties to the blue bikini top. The blonde princess only watched as her wife's mouth closed over the brunette's neck. Her stomach flipped in jealousy and irritation. She was mad that Alexa was having a good time while she was battering herself mentally for hurting the princess. However it didn't appear as if Alexa held any resentment at the moment. She was far too preoccupied with laying her latest conquest. Lara felt herself getting angry, because Alexa had sworn that she loved the teacher and yet was casually sharing intimacy with someone else after taking the innocence of the blonde. She then wanted Alexa to be hurting as much as she was.

"Excuse me!" she called loudly to break Alexa from her intended bedmate.

Alexa's eyes opened at the sound of Lara's voice, and she saw the little woman marching toward her with a less than happy countenance. However the princess would not be intimidated by her wife. Gently pushing the masseuse off her, she handed the woman her top. "If you wouldn't mind, wait for me in the parlor." she instructed.

"Certainly, you majesty." the masseuse answered bowing slightly at both of them before rushing away.

Alexa didn't bother to dress, instead only crossed her arms across her bare chest. "Lara, this is an unexpected visit. What are you doing here? I thought I made it clear I wanted to be left alone."

"Alone? Lex, you haven't been alone since you got on this boat! I've seen all the people coming and going! You just don't want to be with me!"

"You're right, Lara. I don't want to be with you. I don't want to look at you. I don't want to listen to you, and I don't want to think about you. If I could I'd go home, but I can't. The press would have a hay day with the speculation of why I arrived home early and without you. Being that I'm stuck here, I'm trying to make the most of it by having a little fun."

"By breaking your vows?" she questioned.

Alexa sneered. "Since when do you care about vows? You broke them first, Lara. I had every right to do as I pleased that night, and I also had the right to take whatever I wanted from you without regard of your feelings, but I didn't. I couldn't, because I love you, and it hurts like hell to know that's not returned. I have the right by our agreement to seek pleasure wherever I so choose just as you do. I never thought I would do it but come to find out that I need it. I need to feel wanted by a woman, Lara. You have demolished me. I have never been treated the way you did, and I don't know how to handle that. Finding comfort in the arms of other women at least relieves the pain of that gapping hole in my soul temporarily. It's not a permanent answer though I know. The only thing to do is to try to get over you."

Lara dropped her head forward. "You'll never give me a chance to make this right, will you? I'll give you that night you wanted."

Alexa shook her head. "You don't get it, Lara. The pain you caused me is not from refusing my sexual favor as much as it is from refusing my comfort. I just wanted to love you. That's all. Had you let me stay, I wouldn't have forced you. I just would have held you. I needed to hold you. That's not something you can give back to me." she said softly brushing away the tear that rolled down her face.

The little woman nodded. "I guess you're right, but if that's really all you want, I can try to give you that. Come to my bed, and I'll give you anything." she proposed hoping the offer would be enough for Alexa.

The tall woman shook her head. "It wouldn't be the same, because I know you don't want it. I never wanted to force my feelings on you. I just wrongly thought that by expressing them you

would be swayed. I'm not going to try again to court you. It's pointless. I care enough about you still to let you go as much as that hurts me. That's why I asked for the amended agreement."

"What about our friendship at least? Are you turning your back on that as well?" the blonde asked seeing that the princess had made up her mind as to what she wanted to do.

"Lara, I've never been your friend. I've always wanted more from the second I laid eyes on you. Friendship is an impossibility for me. I'm sorry if I deceived you into thinking we had that much."

Hearing the brutal truth from the brunette, Lara felt a small tear in her heart. Her eyes watered as she realized there truly was nothing for her to try to salvage. Alexa was set in her mind as to what their relationship now entailed. Giving a tiny nod, she moved away from the princess. "I guess I should let you get back to your company now. When will you be coming by to get me?"

"Tomorrow. I've decided that we'll ride back up the coast on the yacht. We'll leave early. Be on board by nine."

"Okay." she whispered. Turning away Lara made her way toward the stairs. She could feel Alexa's eyes on her, but she refused to look back. She didn't want the princess to see her crying as her life came crashing down around her.

The following morning Lara arrived at the ship on time. The crew was already busy prepping for the return voyage up the coast while Alexa ate a leisurely breakfast on the back deck. Seeing the blonde woman come aboard, the princess invited her to sit for something to eat. Lara accepted the offer slipping into a chair next to her wife, but they were both awkwardly silent. Finally though when Lara couldn't take it any longer, she reached over to her wife's arm, touching it softly. Being that there was staff about, Alexa didn't pull away, but she did glare at the blonde. "Lex, please. This is driving me crazy. Let me make things up to you."

"There is nothing to make up, Lara. It's over." the brunette grumbled.

The little woman glanced around. All the crew was pretending to ignore them. However Lara knew this would be what Alexa considered public by their contract. Knowing that the blonde wondered if she could manipulate things to her advantage. Moving from her chair, she came to Alexa's. Without so much as a word, her hands began to massage the tall woman's shoulders. The princess didn't say anything but cast her eyes around. She saw her servants pretending not to notice, but she saw their eyes on them anyway. Suddenly she felt her wife's breath against her ear. "Alexa, please." the teacher begged in her most sensuous voice.

The princess growled softly as her libido jump started. It was her desire to hear Lara in such a way. As the blonde's hands moved more possessively over her arms, she felt the small woman's breasts against her back. Turning her head her eyes met the blue ones. Lara leaned down to catch her wife's mouth before anything could be said, hoping that her majesty couldn't resist, and indeed she didn't. With fervor guiding her, Alexa pulled the petite woman down into her lap. Even in her hurt, she knew she still desired the woman she married. Lara was everything she

wanted. For several minutes they exchanged lustful kisses as Alexa took in the body of the blonde, and prying eyes were forgotten. Finally when Lara felt enough time had passed for her wife to reach a passion that couldn't be ignored, she pulled away slightly. Meeting dark eyes, she softly demanded, "Take me to bed, Lex."

The princess stared at the woman in her embrace. Her body was racing out of control, but when she met the blue eyes of her wife, Alexa saw something that quickly impeded her amorousness. There was no ardor or fire in that cool blue gaze. In fact Lara was looking upon her like she looked upon anyone else. However being that there were so many people around them, Alexa didn't want to rebuff the small woman. "To bed, huh? All right. I'll take you, my princess." she replied firmly scooping the blonde up in her arms. Just in the tall woman's response, Lara knew she had crossed the line. She didn't know where Lex was taking her however as she held her hostage in her arms. The heir walked up the narrow stairs and down a long corridor.

Arriving at one of the many doors, she flung it open and carried the blonde through it. Once it was closed, Alexa tossed Lara onto the bed. She then stood at the foot of the bed and stared harshly at the little woman. "Did you think that was funny?" she snarled. "What was the meaning of that, Lara? How dare you try to manipulate me that way?"

"Lex, please. I'm trying everything I know to get back in your good graces. I mean who ever thought I would actually be begging you to take me."

"That irony is not lost on me, Lara. I never thought this would happen either. There is just one thing I want to know. Do you or do you not want me to make love to you? This isn't about making up for what has been lost. This is about you wanting me. I'm going to ask you seriously, Lara Washington, not as your sovereign but as your wife. Do you want me to make love to you?"

Yes or no?"

Lara looked up at the woman hovering near her waiting for her answer. She knew this was her chance to make things right with Alexa, but she knew if she said yes the brunette would know she wasn't telling the truth. Dropping her head forward, she answered, "I'd do it for you, Lex."

"But you don't want to." Alexa stated definitively. "Let me tell you something, Princess Lara. Never ever ask me to take you again unless you mean it. Next time I might not give you a chance to change your mind. Are we clear on that?"

"Yes, your majesty." the blonde said with a meek nod.

The tall princess looked down at her wife sitting on the bed. Sadness filled the blonde's countenance, and Alexa felt bad for upsetting the petite woman.

"Lara, I just want you to know that I'm sorry for the pain I've caused you as much as you are sorry for what you've done to me. Let's just leave it alone and try to move on. We made a mistake by getting married. That much is clear, but it doesn't have to be permanent. I really did just want a chance to experience real love, and now I know that it can hurt like hell, but I'll never

regret loving you. My regret will be that I couldn't make you love me by being all you needed. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to retire to my room for awhile." she softly said, defeat evident in her voice.

Chapter Six: For Better or Worse

A few days later they had arrived back at the palace, and then Lara left to Nashville to visit her family. As Alexa stood in the library looking out over the winter landscape, she felt a hand on her shoulder. "It's going to be all right, Lex. You'll see." Alfred's voice stated in comfort.

"Alfred, my father's dying."

"I know."

"And Lara doesn't love me." she whispered her mouth quivering slightly as she tried to hold back tears. However as soon as the arms of her secretary embraced her, they came cascading down her face, and she cried in the arms of one of her closest friends. "I'm not ready to lose either of them."

"Lex, it's your father's time. There is nothing that can be done about it. The only thing is to cherish what time you have left."

"It's not fair." she whined. "People need him. I need him."

"That's where you're wrong, Lex. You don't need him any longer. You are just fine on your own. You're a strong capable leader. The country will be in good hands."

"Why doesn't Lara love me, Alfred?"

"She loves you as much as she is able. Love takes many forms, Lex, and what you feel for her is not what she feels for you. However that doesn't mean that she is without love for you. She does love you. The fact is that unrequited love is still love. Enjoy those feelings you have for her.

They're special, and there is no other woman in the world that has ever come close to making you feel the things you do when she's near. Appreciate that. Since you've been back and I've seen you two together, you've only fought. Don't fight this battle with words, Lex. You'll never win. You have to fight with something else, your emotions. Show her the way you feel even if she can't reciprocate now. In time she might be able to. You never know what the future might hold. A few months or a year from now could be different. How can a woman resist your charm when you give it to them?" he asked with a smile.

Alexa did the same through her tears. Casting a glance back outside, she took a deep breath.

"Alfred, why didn't you ever marry?"

“Because that was not the life I was meant to live.”

“Have you ever been in love?”

“Once about forty seven years ago. I was in my early twenties and had just started working here at the palace after graduating law school. Your grandfather hired me on to be your father’s secretary. Your father and I certainly did have some fun times when we were younger being the same age and all. I would say we were best friends.”

“What about the girl? How old was she?” curiously Alexa inquired. “What was she like?”

“She was eighteen. She was like a breath of fresh air, the greenest eyes and fair hair. She had a laugh that could light a room. I remember the day I first saw her. Your father and I were standing on the front lawn of the palace when a limo pulled up the drive. It stopped where we were, and the back window rolled down to reveal the brightest smile I had ever seen.” he mentioned obviously reliving the moment in his mind.

“What happened?”

Alfred shrugged. “It wasn’t meant to be.” quietly he stated. “She was meant for someone else.”

Looking at her friend, Alexa ventured a guess by asking, “Does my mother know you felt that way about her?”

Her secretary gave a demure smile. “We’re not talking about Victoria, Lex. We’re talking about Lara. My feelings for the queen are of friendship only.” he said trying to redirect the conversation.

The brunette shook her head. “Oh, come on. Did she know? Did she feel the same?”

Alfred’s face took on a seriousness. “Alexa, you are asking me very intimate questions about your mother that I do not care to divulge. If you are so curious, ask her. My lips are sealed on this subject. Besides that doesn’t matter. She is my queen, my friend, and she’s married to one of my best friends, one that is at the end of his life. What we can discuss is how to salvage the relationship you have created with Lara. You can’t give up, Lex. Just because you married the woman doesn’t mean the courtship is over. It’s only just begun. You have to woo her still. Show her how much you care. Treat her as if you were still trying to win her hand.”

“It just hurts.” Alexa confessed.

“I know, but the pain will become less over time. You two have to come to a place of peace with what happened. You two have a family to consider. From what I understand, you two are going to try to get her pregnant right away. You have to be unified in the press and public, and the only way to truly do that is to stop being so angry and hurt. Put it to rest, Alexa. Whatever happened must be put behind you.”

The first night when Lara arrived back at her parents' house, the press hovered around outside for most of the evening, trying to get any glimpse of the princess that they could. However the blonde stayed away from the windows, feeling safe that security was posted strategically around the perimeter of the grounds to keep people from intruding.

Sitting at the kitchen table after dinner, the little woman sighed in obvious discontent. "Do you want to talk about whatever is bothering you?" her mother asked.

Lara shrugged. "It's Lex."

"I gathered that much. What's wrong?"

Looking at her mother, she answered, "I think us getting married wasn't such a good idea."

"Why do you say that? Was the honeymoon that awful?"

"It was pretty bad. She actually left me alone for most of it."

"What? Why? You mean you two didn't spend time together?"

"We got in a fight the first night we were there, and she hasn't forgiven me yet, nor do I think she ever will even though I've tried to apologize for my part. She spent most of her time on the royal yacht, and I stayed at the castle. It was terrible, Mom. I never imagined anything being that bad."

"Well, what was the fight about? How could it have been that bad?"

Lara paused before replying, "I don't know if I should tell you what it was about. I don't think Lex would appreciate that. However I will say that she made it very clear that she thought marrying me had been a mistake. She regrets her decision, but now we're both stuck. She can't ask for a divorce until we have kids, and I can't ask for one either until then. We have to produce heirs, but right now we can hardly even be in the same room together. I don't really know what's going to happen. I know she'll stand by her duty, but it pains me to think I caused so much hurt in my friend and sovereign."

"So you're saying what happened was your fault?" Katherine inquired.

The blonde princess nodded. "I failed her as a wife, and I have failed my country as a princess. That is a title I have in name only, and I don't even want it anymore. It wasn't worth what I have done to Alexa."

"What do you mean it's your title in name only? Are you saying you two didn't..."

Lara shook her head. "No, Mother. She performed her obligation." the little blonde whispered as tears appeared in her blue eyes.

Instantly her mother came to hold her. “Oh, Lara. It’s going to be all right, sweetie. Was it that horrendous? She didn’t try to force you, did she?”

“No.” Lara sobbed. “It’s was just awful though, Mom. I felt so scared and out of control. I didn’t really know what to expect from her. She was kind and gentle. She even did something I never expected, but I just couldn’t...” she stated before her voice trailed off.

“Couldn’t do what, honey? She couldn’t get you to fulfillment?” she guessed.

Vigorously the young blonde shook her head. “No. She made me orgasm.” she muttered. “I just couldn’t stand that fact that I whored myself for a stupid crown. I felt so cheap and dirty. I’m no better than some streetwalker. I just got more out of the deal. When it was over, I couldn’t even look at her.”

“And then you fought.” Katherine stated the obvious.

Lara nodded in confirmation. “I wouldn’t let her stay in bed with me. I just felt like such a victim of my own scheme. I can’t believe I actually did this.”

“So what now?”

“She asked I sign an amended agreement, limiting the time frame of our relationship from five years and three kids to one year and one child. Now I get pregnant with her baby and complete the utter disaster I started.” she mumbled snuggling closer into her mother’s shoulder for comfort.

Several minutes passed in silence as mother and daughter sat embraced. Katherine stroked her daughter’s long blonde hair in consolation. “Well, sweetheart, I wish there was something that I could do, but for once I truly can’t. This is your marriage, and this is the future queen we’re talking about here. I guess you just have to carry on the best you can and do the things required of you. However I feel like I should point something out to you.”

“What’s that?”

“For whatever reasons you had, you gave up everything you thought you ever wanted for this opportunity, things that you can never have back, Lara. The fact of the matter is you are married to the future ruler of this country and the most powerful woman in the world, which makes you one of the most powerful women by default. Don’t let Alexa Washington ruin your life, because she’s not happy. She might be our sovereign, but don’t let her dictate your life, Lara. Take control again. You have the right and the power to do so. You do what you must for the royal family, but you do what you want for yourself. You’ve done your best to make amends with Alexa, but if she won’t accept your apology, then that’s her problem, not yours. You did what you could to make it right. It’s up to her now. Don’t torture yourself on her behalf. She’s not worth it. No one is. You are a princess, Lara. It’s time you learn to act like one, which includes being strong in the face of adversity even when that adversity is your wife. The country expects that of you, and I know you can do it.”

“You’re right, Mom. She doesn’t have the right to make me miserable just because she is.” Lara conceded.

“In time I hope that this will pass, Lara. Neither of you deserve such tribulation. Maybe it’s for the best that this be over sooner if you truly don’t love her anyway. It gives you your freedom, and it gives her the child she needs to carry on the line.”

“I guess.” Lara mentioned.

“What do you mean? Do you think this is not for the best that the agreement has been shortened?” curiously Katherine asked her daughter.

The blonde shrugged. “I don’t know. I sort of had this idea of how this would go, and it just hasn’t worked out that way. I guess I kind of thought she and I would be married forever.” she admitted.

“What? But you don’t even love her. Why would you want to remain married?”

The princess didn’t respond at first. “Lara, do you have feelings for Alexa?”

“I don’t know what I feel for Lex any more, Mom. If I tell you something, you have to swear to me that you’ll never tell any one.”

“Lara, I’m your mother. I would never divulge your secrets.”

Lara nodded. Slowly she began saying, “That night after Alexa left I just cried myself to sleep. I felt so bad for what had happened, not only for how I felt but for how I hurt her as well. I could tell that I had crushed her, and that weighed on me just as much as everything else. The following day I went to try to apologize, and that is when she said she regretted marrying me, saying she should have chosen Gwen instead. I can’t even begin to describe how much that hurt my feelings. She shattered me when she said that. I had come to her prepared for whatever my consequences might be, but I never expected her to kill me emotionally. I just retreated into myself. I didn’t want anyone to know how I was feeling, especially her. However when she left for the boat, I couldn’t take any more. I just wept for days. To make it even worse, I could hear sounds from the yacht in the harbor, and I knew she wasn’t over there lamenting. I was angry with her for acting so callously, like she didn’t care any longer. In my anger I went out there to that yacht. What I saw was enough to drive anyone to the depths of depression.”

“What did you see, Lara?” Katherine inquired gently.

“I found my wife, the very person who had taken everything from me a few days before, in a most compromising position.”

“Another woman?” The little blonde could only nod in confirmation. “Oh, honey. I’m so sorry.”

“Mom, I’ve never been so upset in my entire life. I just started to scream at her, but Alexa didn’t allow me to continue. Instead she knocked the wind right out of my sails and put me right back in that hell hole by making it absolutely clear she wanted nothing to do with me any more, that she was finished with me. I pleaded with her to reconsider and tried to appeal to her sense of friendship at the very least, and then she demolished me. She said she never was my friend, that her only interest was in marrying me. She basically made me feel like if I couldn’t love her, then we couldn’t be friends either. I left the yacht knowing my life as I knew it and ever hoped it could be over. Alexa has been cold and distant with me ever since, and there is nothing I can do to resolve the issue even though I would do anything. She knows I would do anything, but she won’t budge.”

“Sounds to me like your feelings for her might be changing. I know you are a kind tender spirit, Lara, but it sounds to me as if you were jealous in that moment. Jealousy is usually a sign of deeper feelings of attraction. Do you think you could be having new feelings?”

“All I know is that we are married, and that means she’s mine, good, bad, or otherwise, and I couldn’t handle seeing her with someone else having the kind of experience we should have had together.”

“Have you tried to persuade her into another chance?”

“Many times, Mother. I’ve never tried to seduce anyone in my life, but I even did that. She ended up giving me a reproaching like none I’ve ever had. It’s hopeless. She says she wants to love me, but I give her a chance, and she refuses. I just don’t know what to do. I’ve put myself out of my comfort zone many times in order to try to get her back, but she’s made up her mind.”

“Do you think maybe she refuses you, because she sees that you aren’t truly desirous of her affections? Maybe she isn’t satisfied with what you’re offering. Maybe she wants it all this time, and that’s why she will not give in.”

“That’s exactly what she told me when she admonished me. There’s truly nothing I can do now.”

“Except show her your growing feelings. Maybe if she sees that you are beginning to feel for her more in the way of a wife, she might move back toward you.”

“But I don’t want to be hurt any more, Mom. I don’t want her to know anything about the way I feel, because she will just use it to make me feel bad. No, this is over. There is only the formality of the child, and then we will both be able to move on from this mistake.” Lara stated in finality as tears streamed over her pale cheeks.

A week later the teacher arrived back at the palace to find her room full of flowers and a simple card welcoming her home, not in Alexa’s writing, but the blonde assumed it was from her anyway as there was no one else who would have done such a thing. Confused by the development, she wondered what they could possibly mean. As she waited for the staff to unload her suitcases, she idly just studied each arrangement. She smelled the red roses on the nightstand until she was alone, and then she went in search of her wife. Finding Alexa in her office, she

knocked lightly to get her attention. Both the princess and Alfred looked up at the sound. “Well, look who’s back.

Welcome home, Lara.” Alfred greeted with a smile.

“Thanks, Alfred.” she replied standing there just looking at Alexa.

The dark-haired woman wondered why the blonde was loitering and inquired, “Was there something else?”

Lara looked at her shyly as she stated, “I just wanted to thank you for the flowers. They are beautiful.”

“You’re welcome.” Alexa answered casting a subtly glance at her secretary. However when nothing else was said, the blonde said, “Well, I guess I’ll leave you to your work. See you for dinner.”

As soon as the princess was alone with Alfred, she gave him a questioning brow. “Flowers?” she asked.

“I confess. I sent her flowers with your name on them.”

“Why did you do that?” Alexa inquired shortly.

However Alfred held his ground with her. “Because, Lex, someone has to keep the peace here. You have to be the bigger person, not some sniveling brat. You’re the princess. You’re invincible in the eyes of your constituents. You need to act like it. You might be married to her, and she might be the princess, but she is still one of them. I will not let you act so high and mighty with her. It’s not in your nature.”

“You won’t let me?” she bellowed. “Who do you think you’re talking to, Alfred?”

“You, Alexa Washington! The child I took to the park, patched your knees when you fell, dried your tears when you were sad, told your parents that they needed to pass a new resolution to allow same-sex marriage, because you were in fact gay! I’m also the one who, with your parents blessing and support, took you over my knee and disciplined you for your intolerable behavior when the British royal family was here when you were six! I’ve done everything for you, Alexa! Now it’s my time to fix your marriage, so this country doesn’t fall apart when you take the throne!” he yelled. The two held an intense stare for a moment, but as Alexa took in the words he said, she couldn’t help but giggle a little. “What’s so amusing?” he asked.

With a smile she responded, “I remember you spanking me when I was six. I was being such a spoiled brat.”

“Yes, you were.” Alfred added with a smile of his own. “Don’t make me take you over my knee again, Lex.” he jested. “You might be married and only a limited time away from becoming

queen, but I will correct you if I have to, and I can assure you it would be with your mother's approval." he stated.

Alexa knew Alfred would really do no such thing, as she was obviously the stronger of the two, his body having finally succumbed to older age. However she knew he was trying to make a point, one to which she conceded. "All right. You win, Alfred. I appreciate you trying to hold the family together right now. Everyone is under a great deal of stress."

"I know, so don't add to it. Be the woman I know you are, Lex, strong, dignified. Try to make amends. Do it for your father if nothing else. He wouldn't want to see you like this. Let him see happiness at the end of his life."

The next morning Lara woke to a knock on her door. Wondering who would be calling so early, she cautiously went to answer it. Alexa was standing there nervously shifting back and forth on her feet. "Good morning." she greeted.

"Morning, Lex. What are you doing up so early?"

"Couldn't sleep. I just came back from a run around the grounds." she said wiping at the sweat on her brow with the back of her forearm. "Could I impose on you for a few minutes?"

"Sure. Come on in." Lara opened the door and watched as the drenched princess swept into the room. Alexa's wet t-shirt and sweat pants clung to her. "To what do I owe this visit?"

Anxiously the brunette moved about the room, never really looking at the little woman. "I just wanted to come by and talk about today."

"What about it?"

"Well, this is the day that we go to the doctor and you know."

"I know." the blonde stated.

"Are you nervous?" Alexa asked finally meeting the blue eyes.

"A little." Lara confessed. "I never thought I'd be trying to get pregnant so early in life, and later today I might be. It seemed surreal when we were last there before we were married, and they were extracting our eggs to work with the DNA. I still couldn't quite picture how this would work, and now here we are. The moment is upon us."

"Yeah. That's kind of how I feel too." the tall woman admitted. "I really think it would be great if this could work today. I would love to give my father the gift of knowing his grandchild if we could do that."

"I know, and I feel the same way. However that's really up to nature. There isn't anything we can necessarily do."

“I know. It would just be nice.”

When there was a pause, Lara wondered why Alexa was really there. “Was there something else you wanted to say, Lex?” she questioned.

“Yeah. I just wanted to thank you for doing this.” the brunette said looking into blue eyes. “After all that’s happened, I know this can’t be easy for you. I just wanted you to know that it is appreciated.”

Lara felt her heart jump at the kind words. Alexa hadn’t been so gentle with her since their honeymoon, so the tenderness took her by surprise. “You’re welcome, Lex. Thank you for saying that.”

Alexa nodded. “Well, that’s all I wanted to say. I’ll see you a little later. Sorry to have gotten you out of bed.”

Watching the princess leave, Lara wondered what had prompted such behavior, first the flowers and now the soft words. Hoping the signs pointed toward the fact that Alexa had forgiven her, Lara headed to her bathroom to dress for the day. As she leisurely showered, she thought about what was to happen in just a few short hours. As part of her agreement with Alexa, she had begun to track her cycle with several doctors, so they would be able to conceive as easily as possible. Now it was the day to try, and Lara was a little anxious about it. She hadn’t pictured herself a mother quite so soon, but she hoped having a child might bring Alexa around at least to friendship with her.

Two hours later the blonde met up with the rest of the royal family for breakfast. Victoria was talkative as usual, asking many questions about the procedure they were about to go through while George just sat attentively listening to the conversation. As Lara answered the questions, she noticed the small smile on her wife’s face. Encouraged by it Lara took a chance and lightly placed her right hand on top of Alexa’s left one as she spoke. The princess didn’t pull away, instead turned her hand slightly, so she could actually hold the blonde’s. Through the rest of the meal the two of them held hands and when it was time to leave, Alexa only broke the hold to assist Lara into her coat before escorting her to the royal limousine. Neither of them spoke on the ride there, but their slightly trembling intertwined hands spoke of their uncertainty and nervousness.

Upon reaching the clinic, they were immediately taken to the doctor’s office where several of them were standing there waiting. All of them bowed slightly and allowed the two princesses to be seated before taking their own. “Well, do I need to reiterate what is going to be happening today, your majesties?” the head doctor inquired.

Alexa looked at Lara for a reply. “No, Dr. Livingston. I’m all right. What about you, honey?”

“I’m fine. Let’s just get straight to it, doctor.” Alexa said.

The woman doctor nodded and then asked, "Have you two come to a decision regarding the fertilized eggs you would like to use? Are we doing the cloning or the combined DNA?"

"Actually I wanted to ask you something about that." Lara stated. "Being that you're going to implant more than one, could we do some of each?"

"I don't foresee a problem with that. Is that what you would like to do?"

The blonde looked at the brunette for confirmation. "Yes, if we could." Alexa answered for them.

"Very well. I was thinking we would implant three this time and see how it goes. I know that would be your ideal number, and best case scenario all three would take. However I do not feel that is highly likely. I would feel lucky if we could get one. You do understand this?" Both of them nodded.

"Okay then. Then how many of each would you like?"

Alexa merely looked at Lara to reply. Seeing that the princess was giving her the choice, the blonde took her opportunity to speak her mind. "I think one clone and two others would be nice." she said looking back at her wife.

The smile she received affirmed the decision.

"Your majesty, is this fine by you?"

Not taking her eyes from Lara, Alexa answered, "What my wife wants is what she gets."

"All right then. We will get those prepared while you get ready for the procedure. I assume you want to be in the room, your highness?"

"Of course."

"Very well. If you two will follow me, I will show you where to go."

As they stood Alexa curved an arm around Lara's shoulders and walked with her a few paces behind the doctor. Lara felt more relaxed by Alexa's actions, even though she was unsure as to why the princess was acting so affectionate with her. When they were left alone in the room, Lara moved behind the partition to undress while Alexa took a seat near the table.

The little woman stood out of sight of her wife for a moment after she had changed into the gown she was supposed to wear. She took a deep breath and then shyly moved out into the room. They hadn't been together when either of them was in so little since the night they had consummated their marriage, so Lara was uneasy about Alexa seeing her this way. However as she came to the table and took a seat, the princess merely gave her a supportive smile. Soon the doctors had returned, and the procedure began. As Lara lay on the table, Alexa stood near the

head, her hand planted on the blonde's shoulder the entire time. Lara felt calmer with the tall woman there with her. The visit didn't last very long that day, and soon they were on their way back to the palace. Quietness filled the limo for most of the ride.

However just as they got to the gate of the palace, Alexa asked, "How are you feeling?"

"All right."

"Guess you can't tell a change at all, can you?" the brunette inquired.

"No. The doctors said to give it time, Lex."

"I know. I'm just anxious about it. I know that wasn't pleasant for you, so I would hate to have to do it more than necessary."

"Me too." Lara replied looking out the window at the palace coming nearer as the car drove up the long drive.

When the limo came to a stop and the door was opened for them, Alexa extended her hand to Lara to assist her out. "You should rest. I'll have your lunch sent up to your quarters if you'd like." she mentioned.

"Would you care to join me if you're not too busy?" the blonde hopefully inquired.

The brunette gave a nod. "Sure. I've got a little time. I'll have it prepared. Why don't you make yourself comfortable? I'll come by in a bit."

Concluded In Part 4

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

~ Queen of My Country, Queen of My Heart ~

by Alex Tryst

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Part 4

Chapter Seven: And Baby Makes Three

In early January of the following year a gala was held at the palace in honor of Alexa's twenty-second birthday. The great banquet hall would be full of royals from all over the country and the world to pay their respects to the up and coming ruler. As Lara dressed that night in her formal blue gown that perfectly matched her eyes, she thought about the day. Alexa had unfortunately been out of town on business, but it had given the blonde time to sneak to the doctor while her wife was away to receive the news both of them had been hoping desperately for. The little woman idly rubbed the velvet material covering her midsection as she eyed herself in the mirror. She had started to feel different over the last few weeks, noticing subtly changes in her habits. Her appetite for food had started to transform itself from only eating when necessary to all out bizarre cravings at times, and she also noted a change in quantity. She didn't think it was large enough to be noticeable to Alexa yet, so she hoped that night she would surprise her wife with the news of their first child. She was also having a little bit of trouble sleeping causing her late starts in the mornings.

Lara took one last look at herself in the mirror and played with the tresses around her face. She had put her long blonde hair up that night, exposing her porcelain supple neck, knowing Alexa would like it that way. She centered the diamond and topaz necklace, a royal heirloom that Victoria had so graciously bestowed upon her shortly after coming back from the honeymoon. Just then there was a knock on the door before Alexa announced herself from the other side. When Lara went to open it, she saw the appreciative eyes of her wife as they trailed over her petite form.

"Here. I came to deliver this." the brunette stated as evenly as possible even though her libido sprang to life at the display before her as she held up a diamond tiara in her hand. "May I?" She waited until her wife had given her consent in the form of a nod before placing the delicate crown on her fair head. "You look stunning, Lara."

"Thank you. You look quite dashing yourself." she replied taking in the Alexa's black suit and blue shirt that impeccably matched her dress. On her head was her crown, and she was wearing a gleaming grin.

The blonde smiled at her wife nervously. She had wondered how to broach the subject with her about the baby but decided she shouldn't spring it on her in front of everyone at the party like she had done with the engagement. However she knew she wouldn't be able to keep it to herself the entire evening either. Deciding that she should just tell the tall woman before they went to the gala, she pulled Alexa into her room by the arm and closed the door. "Lex, before we go downstairs, there is something I wanted to tell you."

Seeing Lara's blue eyes flashing with nervousness, the princess wondered exactly the blonde was about to say. Cautiously she inquired, "What is it, Lara?"

The little princess took a deep breath before asking, "Lex, if you had to make a wish tonight on your birthday, what would it be?"

“That’s easy. I would wish you were pregnant.”

Lara smiled up at the tall woman. “Well, that wish has come true.”

“What? You’re pregnant? How do you know? We aren’t supposed to go to the doctor until tomorrow.”

“I went today while you were still away, because I was hoping to surprise you with it. I knew, but I wanted them to confirm it before saying anything.”

“You really are pregnant?” Alexa inquired with hesitancy. Lara nodded. “Wow. That is so amazing. May I?” She gestured to the small woman’s stomach. Lara took the larger hand in her own and pressed it against her flat midsection. “There’s really a baby in there?”

“Yeah. Pretty crazy, isn’t it?”

“More than one?” questioned the princess.

“They don’t know yet, but there is at least one.”

“I can’t believe it. My parents are going to be so excited.”

“I thought maybe you’d like to announce it tonight. All our parents will be there as well as most of your friends.” she suggested.

“Maybe but maybe we should wait until breakfast tomorrow. It’s still early, and I would hate to announce it to the public until things are more stable.” Alexa replied as she looked down at the woman she still loved. The news of Lara carrying her child was surreal, because it was something she had dreamed about since the first time she was alone with the woman, and after all they had been through emotionally, the blonde was indeed pregnant.

Giving her wife’s stomach a little rub, Alexa whispered, “Thank you, Lara. This truly is the best present I could ever get.”

“You’re welcome, Lex. Happy birthday.”

With a smile Alexa extended her arm to the blonde. “Shall we go, my princess?”

Returning the grin Lara took the offered assistance, picking up the hem of her long dress slightly off the floor. Together they walked down the corridor that led to the grand staircase where they would make their entrance. The king and queen had to take the elevator due to his condition and were waiting on the two princesses to process first. They paused at the top of the stairs and waited until Alfred formally announced their arrival. Upon hearing him introduce them, they swept down the marble staircase, Alexa gazing fondly upon her wife and showing their company how happy they at least appeared to be.

Lara subtly watched as the crowd bowed when the two of them processed through the stately hall. It still took her by surprise that these people were not only bowing for the crowned princess, but they were bowing before her as well, a modest school teacher that was now on the arm of the future queen. The moment was always overwhelming for her, and she often wondered how Alexa had managed to do it for her entire life. Moving to their position at the end of the room at the head table, they waited for Alexa's parents. The same affair occurred with them except even the brunette bowed humbly before her father and waited until he and her mother were comfortably seated before pulling out Lara's chair.

The evening passed in a similar fashion as most events at the palace with dinner and dancing. Traditionally the highest ranking royal set the tone of the evening with the dancing, but since the king was unable to participate in the activity, he demanded that he be allowed to watch Alexa and Lara enjoy themselves. Knowing it would please her father greatly, Alexa asked the blonde to share in the first dance.

Lara knew that it was protocol and not an option to decline, so she accepted and took her wife's hand. Going to the floor, Alexa moved to embrace the little woman gently around the waist with one arm as the other held her wife's hand. As the crowned princess began to maneuver them around the large floor, her dark eyes met Lara's blue ones. There were no words at what she was feeling at the moment. She was truly overcome by a tide of emotions at the thought of the woman in her arms carrying her child and the sacrifices the little woman had made on her behalf, giving up all she had ever dreamed of to become her bride.

As much as it still hurt her to think back on the horrible incident they had over their honeymoon, Alexa couldn't help but have feelings of adoration for the blonde. She loved her with everything she was, and the feeling hadn't changed the eight months she had known her. However she still didn't know how the small woman felt toward her after all that time. She hoped that Lara had at least remained in a place of friendship even though Alexa had rejected the idea of it at first, but the princess ached for the blonde to return her more intimate feelings.

"Lara." she whispered.

"Yes, Lex?" she asked matching her wife's tone.

"Would you mind if I kissed you in front of all these people? It would just seem appropriate." she mentioned.

Lara knew Alexa was just using their public audience as an excuse as she often did in order to get closer to her, but she knew denying the request was not a choice. She had quickly come to recognize opportunities to advance a positive married image as well as the tall woman, and this was definitely a beneficial chance to promote their seemingly blissful relationship in public. "I don't mind." she answered.

As soon as she consented, Alexa leaned down toward her as both arms pulled her petite frame closer. Their lips met gently at first before melding into a more intimate display of affection. Lara's eyes fluttered closed as her wife kissed her. Over the course of time, the feeling of

Alexa's touch had transformed itself, as had her emotions toward the princess. What had started as displeasure had moved into neutrality and then every once in awhile Lara found herself enjoying the attention. This kiss was one such occasion as she found her body responding in a way it never had, a heat radiating from her core as the tall woman's tongue probed passed her lips. Lara found herself reacting in kind as her arms pulled the brunette even closer. Long seconds passed before the kiss came to its mutual conclusion.

When Alexa pulled away, she eyed her wife closely. She felt like the blonde had returned all the fervor she had bestowed into the exchange, but she wasn't quite sure. Unable to resist she went back a second time, this time leaving a lingering peck against the pink pliant lips of her wife. Lara allowed her to do so again, making her wondering if the petite woman was still acting, because Alexa knew she wasn't.

Deciding not to pursue the matter at the moment sparing the risk of an argument on what had been such a pleasant and eventful day, she smiled at Lara. "You know, Lara, you would think on my birthday, I could at least get the music I want to hear." she stated playfully. "This waltz stuff has just got to go. Let's liven up the place, shall we?"

"What are you going to suggest?" the blonde questioned in curiosity.

"Something we young people can really dance to. I mean it's my party, and my parents don't even dance any more. Don't you think I should get my way?"

"I guess." Lara answered with a grin. She knew Alexa had a surprise waiting for her when she requested new music. The king and queen had asked her what Alexa's favorite group was to have them play that night, and the standard orchestra was just a ploy to throw the princess off their real intentions.

"Come on." Alexa said moving them toward the musicians. Making the request the only answer she received was that they would try to play more contemporary tunes. The music stopped for a few minutes, and the orchestra exited in order to regroup was their excuse, leaving the party without music at all. Taking the opportunity, Alexa decided to visit with the guests. Coming up to her best friend, she hugged Gwen tightly.

"Happy birthday, Lex." she said.

"It certainly is, because I've got my two favorite ladies with me." she teased flirtingly.

Gwen laughed lightly. "Oh, no you don't. You're a happily married woman now.

No flirting."

"I am happy." Alexa said looking across the way to see her wife with other guests.

"I'm glad. You two just seemed to have a rough start. Glad to see things are working themselves out now."

“They’re working out rather well now. I guess it just took some time.” she said turning a smile on her friend. “Now all we have to do is find you a man.”

Gwen laughed lightly. “I’m not ready to settle down, Lex. If I said no to you, what makes you think any man would get me to say yes to them? After all you had all the things I wanted.”

“Give or take a few.” the princess joked.

“Yeah, give or take a few.” Gwen repeated in agreement. “Seriously though, why would I want to marry? I already have all I need and want. What do I really need a husband for?”

Alexa shrugged. “Don’t know what the attraction might be.” she teased again. “You are in an especially good mood tonight.” the tall blonde stated observantly. “Is something going on that you aren’t telling me?”

“I’m not at liberty to discuss my relationship with Lara. You know that.”

“But there is something?” pushed Gwen. “Is she pregnant?”

“Gwyneth Jefferson, I’m warning you. You know she and I have a disclosure clause in our agreement that prohibits us from telling anyone anything without the other’s consent. You’ll just have to wait and wonder.”

“Man, you used to tell me everything, Lex. I hate having to share you with Lara sometimes. I used to get all the juicy gossip.” she quipped.

As Alexa was talking with Gwen, Lara noticed that the new band had entered the ballroom. The princess however seemed none the wiser as to what was going on, so when the group began without even an introduction, the blonde saw her wife’s head jerk in the direction of where the orchestra had been. Seeing who was playing, she gave a beaming smile in the direction Lara’s direction and then her parents before moving to them.

“Oh, Mom, Dad, this is quite a surprise. How did you know I liked them?” she inquired kneeling next to her father’s wheelchair.

“Your precious wife told us. I’m glad you’re happy, Alexa. I wanted to give you the best birthday possible.” her father answered touching her face in affection. “Now make me happy by sharing a dance with your mother in my place.”

“Of course. Mom, would you care to dance?”

When the two of them got to the floor, everyone parted to give mother and daughter room. Dutifully Alexa took the lead between them, giving her mother a dance before the queen relinquished her daughter to Lara again saying, “Allow me to watch you two together. That’s what makes your father and me the happiest.”

The following morning after the late night, Alexa arose at her usual time for her morning run. Her thoughts were running rampant as she reflected on her wife. Lara had been radiant the previous night, and the brunette had enjoyed the closeness that they shared, even if it was only for show. She got to hold the blonde in her arms most of the evening, dancing intimately with the woman she loved. The knowledge that Lara was carrying their first child only served to heighten the sense of devotion she felt for the little woman. Knowing this was the day they were going to tell their parents of this special occasion, Alexa knew she had to cut her jog short if she was going to make it to breakfast on time.

That morning Lara was already seated in the dining room with her parents as well as the king and queen while they waited on Alexa. The petite woman could tell the king was not in the mood to wait on his daughter to eat, so she made the suggestion that they start without her. Fortunately however a few minutes after they had been served, Alexa came bounding into the dining area.

“Sorry I’m late. I lost track of time while I was running. I was just thinking about you, and next thing I knew I was running behind schedule.” she offered her wife as an excuse as she leaned down and planted a kiss on the blonde’s forehead before taking a seat next to her. “Good morning, everyone.”

Blushing slightly at the thought, Lara answered, “Well, thankfully you’re here now. As you can see we started without you.”

“Good. I would hate for you to go one minute without food if you’re hungry. We couldn’t have that now.” she mentioned reaching over at lightly rubbing her wife’s stomach in affection. “You’re a growing girl after all.” she teased lightly.

“Growing in one direction at least.” Lara playfully replied knowing it would peak the curiosity of their company. Just as she suspected, the king looked at them questioningly.

“Is there something you want to tell us, girls?” hesitantly he inquired.

Alexa smiled at the blonde who returned the grin whole heartedly. Taking her wife by the hand, she turned toward the four of them. “As a matter of fact, there was something we wanted to tell the four of you.” She took a dramatic pause.

“What?” Victoria questioned in hopeful excitement.

The brunette glanced at the blonde again. “Yesterday Lara gave me the greatest gift anyone ever could. Do you want to tell them what it was?” “No. You tell them.” Lara stated, knowing Alexa was stalling on purpose to tease her parents.

“One of you tell us.” King George said.

Meeting four sets of eager eyes, Alexa grinned and proudly announced, “Lara told me she was pregnant.”

“Really?” Katherine asked.

“Oh my God. This is great news!” Victoria exclaimed.

Both mothers instantly came to hug them. However the king inquired, “How far along are you, Lara?”

“Seven weeks.”

“And when do you plan on announcing this to the public?”

“Alexa and I have decided to wait a little longer just to make sure everything goes as planned, but we wanted to tell the four of you as soon as we knew.”

“Well, this is wonderful. This is exactly what this country needs right now. They need to see the two of you blissfully happy and producing heirs like this. This was a wise move on your part.” King George stated. “I’m happy for you two.”

“So are we. Right, honey?” Katherine asked her husband.

“We are happy if you are, Lara.” her father stated.

Chapter Eight: Succession of Queens

Six months later Alexa found herself standing at the foot of her father’s bed as he took what was sure to be his last breaths of life. The doctors had told them that it was a day if not hours. Beside her with consoling arms around the brunette’s waist was her very pregnant wife. Lara was almost eight months along with their first child, a little girl that they were going to be naming after Alexa and her father. Next to the bed sat her mother, holding her father’s hand as mortal silence surrounded them, and they simply waited for the imminent moment.

Suddenly the quietness was broken by the king’s raspy voice. “Alexa, come sit next to me a minute. There’s something I want to tell you.” Alexa did as she was told, removing herself from Lara’s embrace and coming to sit tentatively next to her father. He reached out with a cold, unsteady hand and covered hers. “Hand me my crown, Alexa.” he requested. The brunette took it off the table bedside him and placed it in his hands. He looked at it for a moment before gazing at his daughter. “You know, no woman has ever worn this crown. You’re going to be the first and hopefully not the last as my granddaughter will wear it after you.” he began sparing a weak smile in Lara’s direction. “However the time is yours now. The country is yours now, Alexa. It’s your time to serve and protect her. You know that with this position comes great privilege and responsibility, but I know you’re ready for it. Your mother and I have been preparing you your entire life for this moment, and now it is upon you. I know you will do great things.” he whispered. He paused to take a painful breath. Alexa tried to hold back her tears seeing him in

such agony. “I took the liberty of having the crown resized already. I want to see it on you.”

“Father, I can’t. It’s yours. You’re still the king.” softly she said.

“Not any more. Please, Alexa. Let me put it on your head. I want to crown my daughter queen.” Alexa didn’t want to wear her father’s crown, but she knew it was best just to pacify his wish, so with tears streaming down her face, she leaned down far enough that he could slip it on her head. Sitting up again she looked at him. “There. I’m no longer king. I have relinquished my power to you, Queen Alexa.”

“Oh, Dad.” the brunette whispered.

“Alexa, you’ve walked in my shadow for your whole life as your daughter will walk in yours, but I’m only going to ask you to do it one more time. The day that I am laid to rest I want you to walk behind me, and I want you to wear this crown when you do. I need my queen watching out over me for that final journey. Promise me you will.”

“Anything.”

“Alexa, a father couldn’t be prouder of what you are and what you’ll become. I have loved you in a way I never knew a father could love their child. You have been the light of my life since you were born. I do regret not being able to watch you grow older or seeing my granddaughter, but my time is over. I have enjoyed it immensely. Know that I might be gone, Alexa, but I will always watch out over you. A love like I have for you and your mother cannot be halted in death. I will always be by both your sides for as long as you want me there.”

“I love you, Dad.” Alexa cried leaning down to embrace him. His trembling arms pulled her as closely as he could. Their hug lasted several moments. Finally though he cupped her cheek, wiping away tears as he softly requested, “Now I need to speak with your mother alone.”

“Of course.”

King George looked at Lara. “Take care of her, Lara, and take care of my granddaughter.”

Unable to even speak, Lara simply nodded as she reached for Alexa, pulling her into her arms. “Dad, I love you.” the tall woman said once again.

“I love you too, Alexa, and I always will.”

Alexa knew as she walked away from the man she had adored her whole life that this would be the last time they would ever speak. Weeping openly she allowed her wife to lead her from the room. As soon as they got into the corridor, the princess dropped to the marble floor as she began to wail. Ripping the crown from her head, she tossed it aside.

Lara knelt beside her as best as she could given her pregnant state and slipped her arms around her. “It’s going to be okay, Lex.” she whispered.

“I’m not ready, Lara! He can’t leave me!” she exclaimed.

“He’ll always be with you. Just because he won’t be here in body doesn’t mean his spirit won’t be with you. He’ll always be in your heart.” she replied trying her best to speak words of comfort even though she knew she would be inconsolable if she were in Alexa’s position.

“I don’t want to be queen. I just want my daddy.” she wept.

“This was the life you were both born to live, Alexa. He was meant to be your father just as much as you were meant to be queen. You’ve had each other for twenty-six years, and you both have made the most of that time. He’s in so much pain. I know you don’t want that for him.”

“No, I don’t.” she conceded.

“It’s his time. We all have one, and we don’t know when that will be. However his is here, and you have to let him go. He needs to go to a better place, one where he isn’t suffering.”

They were silent for a long time, both of them on the floor holding each other as Alexa cried into her wife’s shoulder. Neither knew how long they sat there, but when they heard the door to the bedroom creak open, Alexa jumped to her feet.

Victoria looked blankly at the two of them. The usual sparkle of her eyes was gone, replaced with listlessness as her body was hunched over in despondency. The brunette knew without any words that her beloved father was gone. Coming to her mother, she pulled the smaller woman to her and simply held on as her mother bawled.

Unsure of what to do, Lara quietly inquired of Alexa, “Do you want me to inform Alfred?”

“Yeah, thanks, Lara.” Alexa responded moving her mother back into the bedroom and over to the sofa. The rest of the night passed in a blur as the three women sat together, each clinging to the others for support as the world as they knew slipped away. In the morning none of them left the palace even though hordes of people were hovered along the fence leaving mementos to the family.

In fact it wasn’t until the day of the funeral service that any of them made a public appearance. That morning as they all prepared there was discussion about Alexa’s promise to the former king, because it was pouring outside, but the new queen was determined to keep her word to her father, so that morning as the casket made its way out of the palace grounds on the open carriage that had been used for generations for such purpose, Alexa was right behind it, wearing the crown and a black suit of mourning while her security team followed a few paces behind. Alexa held her head straight forward the entire time, firmly focused on the procession preceding her as she tried to hold back the flood trying to pour forth. Thousands of people lined the drenched street, but somber silence surrounded every onlooker. The walk to the National Cathedral seemed to take forever for Alexa due not only to the rain but the fact that she was taking her father on his final trek.

Coming to a stop in front of the cathedral, the queen waited as selected members of the palace guard picked up her father's coffin and carried it the rest of the way inside with the care they would have given their most precious commodity. The crowd stood as Alexa and her father entered the building and bowed to them both as they processed down the aisle. Reaching the front row, the brunette stopped next to her wife and took her seat. Lara looked at her wife. Alexa was completely soaked and now sitting in the cold building, concerning her for the brunette's health. However she knew it was what the tall woman wanted, so she refrained from commenting.

The service that day consisted of the king's favorite religious songs, and then the soliloquy was given by Alfred, having been a friend to not only the king but also the family since his service began forty-seven years prior. The only other man Alexa had ever truly admired gave a moving oration as he freely showed his sorrow for his beloved friend. Alexa's eyes focused on him and her father's coffin draped in the country's flag for the whole liturgy. When it was over, all three women of the royal family processed out behind the king. Alexa escorted Lara and her mother to their waiting car before falling in behind the carriage again. As the walk continued through the streets of Washington, D.C., Alexa kept herself centered on her father.

These were the last minutes the two of them would have in such close proximity, and she wanted to remember everything she could about the moment. As she processed the rain moved out making way for the bright summer sun. Alexa couldn't help a little grin at the corner of her mouth as she thought of her father and his promise to always look over her as the rays of light warmed her soaked body. The light touched more than her form. It touched her soul as she realized that the man she loved was in a better place free from all the pain he had endured at the end of his lifetime.

At the family cemetery the minister of the cathedral said a few more words before it was time to leave. The close friends that were in attendance said their final farewells before leaving the three women there alone. Lara went up to her father-in-law's coffin and placed her hand against it. She said a little silent prayer before moving away to give Alexa and Victoria privacy. The tall queen moved to her father next and knelt next to him. She kissed the flag draped over him and whispered her love before stepping next to her wife.

The two new queens stood at a respectable distance with their arms around each other quietly observing Victoria. Long minutes passed before the older woman signaled the waiting groundskeeper, and the three of them watched as King George IV was laid to rest and covered before heading back to the royal car where Alfred was waiting on them.

The ride back to the palace was quiet as the four of them watched the people along the streets. As they neared the homestead, Alfred finally spoke. "Lex, do you think you might be up for visiting with some of the people along the palace gate, or would you prefer to just be alone?"

"What would be protocol in this situation?"

"Well, when your grandfather passed on, your parents did go out and meet the people." he

commented.

Alexa looked to her mother for confirmation. “That much is true, Lex. We did do that, and it seemed to go over well, but if you don’t think you are up to it, you don’t have to.”

“No, I want to honor my father, so I will allow the people to extend me their condolences.”

“I’ll go with you.” Lara stated. “However you need to change clothes first.

You are completely wet, and that isn’t good for you. You could catch a cold if you stay in this suit.”

“I don’t know if that is a wise idea, Lara. I don’t want you over exerting yourself right now.”

“It’s fine. We have an obligation to fulfill, and as your wife I should be there.”

“All right. You can come with me. We’ll stop at the gate, so we can get out.”

“Um, Lex, I’m in agreement with Lara on this one. You must change. You can’t go out there like that.” Alfred stated. “You need to shower and clean up first, and take off that crown. It’s not supposed to leave the palace as you know, but this was a special agreement between you and George.”

“Fine. You two win. I will get into drier clothes first. Mother, would you like to join us, or would you prefer to stay inside with Alfred?”

“I think I just need to alone. This is your time now. This is your country, and I’m just the mother of the queen. They have come to see you and Lara, not me. I’ll be content to stay inside behind the scenes as my new role calls for in the situation.” she replied quietly.

Getting back to the palace, the queen quickly changed into another suit before she and Lara made their way outside along with security. Alexa was moved by the support of her fellow countrymen. All of them had only the kindest words for her about her father as well as best wishes for the next heir. The brunette felt better by meeting the people that had gathered around the palace as it made her feel that she was not alone in her grief.

Looking toward her wife, she saw the little woman speaking with an older couple and smiled. Lara was the essence of grace that day, accepting kind words from loyal subjects. Just then a man moved up closer to the blonde queen with a bouquet of flowers in his hand. Many people had flowers with them, but the way he was looking at the little woman made Alexa suddenly uneasy. Looking around for the closest guard, she signaled him over and whispered her concern to him, asking that he move the crowd back several feet and keep an eye on that man. The guard nodded and went to do her bidding. However as the guard was in the process of gently pushing the multitude of people back, something caught Alexa’s attention. Just as Lara moved up to the suspicious man, the brunette saw a flash of metal coming from his sleeve. Without any thoughts of her own safety, Alexa screamed Lara’s name and rushed to the woman she loved just as a

gunshot pierced the air.

The small woman was disoriented for a moment after hitting the ground hard. People were screaming and security shuffling around them. She looked at the numerous people on top of her, realizing that the queen's body was lying across her with two guards covering Alexa. She heard faintly one guard in the distance call for an ambulance, stating that the queen had been shot and the other might be injured as well. Fear struck Lara hearing those words. Gently shaking Alexa by the shoulder she called, "Lex?" There was no response from the queen. "Alexa, can you hear me?" she asked. The tall woman still didn't say anything. However before she could even begin to process what was happening around her though pain racked her own body throughout her lower back and stomach. She winced in agony demanding she be allowed up. Instantly the guards sat back on their heels as the assailant was taken into custody having received a wound himself from one of the guards. However Alexa didn't move, so Lara touched her on the back. Feeling wetness and the tattered material of the suit jacket, she pulled her hand away to find it soaked in blood. Lara began to scream as security quickly carried both of them inside the palace gates for safety.

The blonde ignored the pain coursing through her own body as she hovered over her wife, whose blood was quickly pooling around her on the concrete. Fear consumed her as she frantically ripped off Alexa's coat and pressed it against the wound to try to stop the rapid loss of blood. "Oh, God, Alexa. Please don't leave me." she whispered to her unconscious sovereign.

The ambulance seemed to take forever to the small woman, who then rode with the brunette to the hospital and was beside her until the queen was rushed into surgery. At that point Victoria and Alfred had arrived, and the little woman collapsed into Alfred's arms.

"Lara, are you all right?" he asked in concern. "You don't look good. You should be seen to. Come on. Have the doctors look you over."

"No. I'll be fine. I just want to know what's going on with Alexa." she replied holding her extended midsection as another sharp pain shot through her. She winced and panted quickly.

"That's it, Lara. Alfred is going to get a doctor. There is something that could be wrong with the baby." Victoria sternly stated.

"I don't care about anything but Lex. When I know she'll be okay, I'll have someone look at me." she argued.

Alexa's mother took the queen by the shoulders and stared deeply into her blue eyes. "Lara, your obligation is to this child! Don't even think of Alexa right now! Nothing can be done about her right now! This baby means everything to Alexa and this country! As the queen you have an obligation to your people not your wife!" she yelled.

"How can you say that? You're her mother!" Lara countered angrily holding her back.

"Because I know Alexa would want you to focus on the child. If Alexa doesn't make it, this baby

you are carrying becomes queen, and if Alexa dies before this baby is born, this country will be without a leader! If anything happens to this child, the country will be turmoil! That can't happen!" Victoria stated. "I know you're anxious about Lex, Lara, but think like the queen you are. Your life is for your country, not Lex." Lara wanted to refute her mother-in-law, but before she could offer any sort of reply, another pain bolted through her frame, sending her down to the floor as she wailed in anguish. Instantly Victoria was there on the floor beside her with consoling arms around her. "It's going to be all right, Lara. Just take deep breaths. Help will be right here." she explained as doctors rushed down the corridor to the fallen blonde queen. As soon as she was picked up off the floor, Lara could feel herself beginning to get lightheaded and then promptly fainted.

When Lara awoke she didn't know where she was at first as she stared up at a white ceiling. There was silence in the room except for a buzzing and the sound of breathing near her. Trying to sit up, the first thing she noticed was her pregnant tummy was no longer there, filling her with dread as she frantically looked around her. To her left she saw an incubator holding a tiny child within its compartment. She looked to her right where all the sound was coming from, and her heart dropped. Alexa was lying there, eyes closed with pallid skin and lips that had taken on a decidedly blue tint. Over her nose and mouth was a mask that was feeding the queen oxygen along with several other machines that Lara had no idea what they did. The little woman tried to ease herself from the bed, but it was difficult with the pain running rampant through her body. She felt as if she had been the one who was shot. Managing to get her feet on the floor, she was about to try to stand when the door opened, and Alfred admitted himself.

"Easy there, Lara." he softly said coming to her aid. He helped her to her feet.

Lara moved with his help to her wife's bedside. There was a long silence as she just stared at the woman who had shielded her from the gunman. Lara knew had Alexa not dived in front of her, she would be the one lying there unresponsive instead of the country's leader. After several minutes, she eased her way over to the newly born princess. She slipped her hands into the incubator through the holes in the side and lightly touched her daughter's tiny hand. Their baby was also connected to a machine but appeared to be resting comfortably. Reaching up to her daughter's head, Lara stroked the fuzzy blonde hair she found there. It appeared that their daughter had come from their combined DNA instead of the clone, which pleased Lara greatly as she felt more connected to the queen through their child.

"Where is Victoria?" she quietly asked.

"She's speaking with the doctors about all three of your conditions right now. I've just come back from making the public address in regards to what happened today."

"What did happen, Alfred?"

"A man tried to take the life of the princess and you." he informed her looking at the baby.

"However Alexa was able to stop him by shielding you and taking a bullet in the back.

Unfortunately the force of her knocking you to the ground sent you into premature labor. Being that you and Alexa were both incapacitated at the time, Victoria and I had to make a decision on

your behalf, because the baby was in danger. You might have lost her had they not done an emergency cesarian, and we couldn't risk the death of the queen and the only heir. Alexa has been on life support since you went into surgery."

The blonde looked back at the bed that held her wife. "Is she... going to die, Alfred?" she questioned as tears came to her blue eyes. Suddenly the thought of losing the woman who had saved her life was more than Lara could bear.

"I honestly don't know, Lara. The bullet went into her lung, and it collapsed. She can't breath on her own very well right now, and there was a lot of internal bleeding as well. The doctors have done all they can, and if she wasn't on life support right now, she would've..." he said, his voice fading into nothing as he too struggled with his emotions. "However she is on life support. We had to put her on it, because we had no idea what to expect when the princess was born. We needed assurance that she would be all right before making any decisions about Alexa." he stated.

The blonde didn't have to ask what he was referring to. She knew the queen had been close to fatally wounded if they even had to consider the option of life support. She knew there was no other choice that Victoria could have made for the country, except to put her daughter on the life extending machines while they waited on the condition of her grandchild and country's sole heir. The decision about Alexa's life was secondary now to the life of the baby Lara was now gazing upon. "What about the baby?" she inquired hoping for some positive news in light of the situation.

"Preliminary signs show that she will be okay. However the doctors are concerned, because she was a month premature. Given the circumstances though, she looks good."

"And what happened to the gunman?"

"He received a gunshot to the chest by one of the guards and was rushed to the hospital as well. He is being seen to under the custody of the police, and when he is able, he will be taken to jail to await processing in our judicial system. He seems as if he will be able to stand trial as his wounds were not as serious as Alexa's."

Just then the door opened again, and Victoria stepped into the room with a somber countenance. "Lara, you're up." she stated.

"Yeah. I just got up a few minutes ago. Alfred was informing me about what had happened. What did the doctors say?"

Gesturing back to the bed, she suggested, "I think you better sit down again, Lara. You need your rest."

The little blonde did as she was told, taking a seat on her own bed before looking at her mother-in-law. "Tell me what they said, Victoria."

“Well, the first thing is that you will be fine. The doctors are confident in your full recovery, but you’ll be sore for awhile.”

“And Alexa?”

“Then of course they expect the princess to be fine as well. There were no complications with the delivery, but being that she was premature, they want to keep her here for about a week just to make sure everything is okay before sending her home.”

Seeing that Victoria was avoiding the topic of her daughter, Lara asked again, “What about Alexa, Victoria?”

The queen mother spared a long look at her daughter. “Alexa could or could not make it. They assure me that they have done all they can for her, but she is on the edge. The only thing to do now is wait. The life support will stay on for as long as necessary or until you deem it inappropriate to postpone the inevitable if they see that she is not going to make it.”

“Me? Why me?”

“Because you are her wife and the queen. Typically this decision falls upon the spouse. You are going to be acting on the queen’s behalf for a while. Usually the heir acts if the sovereign is unable to, but since the princess is unable to being a minor, you, as her parent and guardian, must take on the responsibility.”

“I can’t do that. I know nothing about being a queen.” Lara stated in distress. “That’s Lex’s job.”

“Regardless of that you have to take on the duty, Lara. Alfred and I will help you though and guide you behind the scenes. You can do this. Alexa knew you could or else she never would’ve married you. She saw a strength in you when you first met, one she told me about, one that she admired. It’s time to show that strength to the people of this country. You must understand that if Alexa doesn’t make it, you will have to serve in her place until your daughter is of the age of the majority. She will wear the title as queen and you of queen mother, but it will be you that will makes the decisions on her behalf and on that of the country until such time. We all pray that is doesn’t come to that though however.” she whispered moving to her daughter’s bed and taking a seat next to her. Taking Alexa’s hand, Victoria turned her attention back to Lara. “Lara, my only child risked her life to save the wife and daughter she loved so much. She was true to you until the end. Now it’s time for you to be true to her and do what she would want you to. She would want you to carry on and rule in her place until she either recovers or passes her title to her daughter. You must pick up the where she has fallen and move forward.”

The blonde looked at Alfred to see him nodding in solemn agreement. “Lara, Lex would want you to do that. We’ll help you. You won’t be alone.”

The blonde looked at her frail wife. Silently and fervently she prayed for the recovery of the woman who had saved her, and then most of the rest of the day was spent in quiet contemplation. Lara had the doctors move the baby closer to her bed, so that she was able to touch her even

when she was resting.

Late that night after Victoria and Alfred had retired to the palace for the evening, Lara simply laid staring at the ceiling as she tried to get some rest. The day had been quite emotional. What had started as a day of mourning for the former king had turned into an even bigger tragedy as the queen had fallen from a gunshot and was hanging to life with every rattled breath. As Lara finally drifted to sleep in exhaustion, she prayed for her wife's health.

Sometime during the middle of the night a piercing sound broke the silence of the room, startling the blonde. Before she even could comprehend what it was, doctors charged into the room to Alexa's bedside. She overheard one of them state that Alexa's heart had stopped filling the little woman with terror. She watched in horror as they prepared to resuscitate the sovereign and jumped when they shocked the brunette. She didn't even know she had emitted a scream until one of the doctors looked over his shoulder at her and then promptly pulled the curtain closed, so Lara couldn't see what was going on with her wife. Even though Lara couldn't stand the thought of what they were doing to the brunette, she was drawn out of bed and over to the curtain. No one seemed to notice her as they were too busy with the queen. The blonde continued to watch as they shocked Alexa a second time without a response. Lara's heart was hammering wildly in apprehension as she looked at the body of her wife. "Please, Alexa, don't do this to me." she breathed.

After a slight pause from the doctors, they prepared to give it a third attempt, because Alexa's body was still not reacting. With tears in her eyes, Lara held her breath and looked on as the doctors tried once again, shocking the queen with even more intensity. Hearing a small beep instead of a flatline, the blonde sighed in relief. The doctors also seemed absolved mumbling that they had gotten her back. As they all turned, they saw the little woman standing there.

"Your majesty, I'm sorry you had to witness that." the head doctor softly said. "You should rest now. We've gotten her heart beating again."

Lara gave a little nod and moved back to her bed as they pulled the curtain back, so the blonde could see Alexa from her position again. One of them moved to the princess to check on her while they were there, telling Lara that the baby was doing well before leaving the three of them alone. As soon as they were gone, Lara moved to Alexa's bed and took a seat. She took the brunette's hand in her own, stroking it gently.

"Alexa." she whispered. There was no response of course, but she felt the need to continue on anyway. "Lex, I can't believe this has happened. It wasn't supposed to be this way. This day was supposed to be about honoring your father, not the day that I lost you and not the day our child was born. You can't leave me, Alexa. I can't do the things that are of expected of me. You're the only one who can rule this country, and our little girl is not ready to rule in your place." Looking over at their baby, she sighed. "We have a little girl, Lex, one that I haven't named yet, because I was waiting for you. You should see her. She has blonde hair like me, but she has your nose and ears. I wish you could see her." Getting an idea Lara slipped off the bed and moved over to their child. Carefully she rolled the incubator over next to Alexa's bed, ignoring her own body's protest at the movement. Gently she guided her wife's hand into the capsule, so she could touch

their daughter's hand. "There. Now you can at least touch her. She's beautiful, Lex. You would be so proud." Taking her seat again, Lara took her wife's other hand. "Alexa, I want you to know I could never fully understand or appreciate why you did this, but I want to thank you for saving my life and the life of our child. Because of you she will live and grow to have everything she ever wanted, just as you hoped for. However I want her to know your love. You have made the ultimate sacrifice so that she may live, but it would be better if she knew of more than just your selfless loving nature that caused you to shield me from that bullet. She needs to know the love of her mother, her sovereign so that she may learn how to be a great leader. She needs you, Lex. I need you, Lex." she admitted softly.

Over the course of her pregnancy, Lara had come to feel more for the woman she had married. Alexa had made every effort to cater to the blonde's needs and desires. Even though they still hadn't shared any sincere intimacy since their wedding, they spent an extended amount of time together. During that time Lara thought that Alexa had started to truly become her friend, and the resentment of what had happened over their honeymoon had finally been put to rest. Neither one of them ever talked about it, and they seemed to actually start enjoying each other's company again. When the king died, Lara's heart went out to the woman she married, and for the first time realized she would have given anything to spare the brunette the pain she felt. All Lara wanted was to protect her wife, but she took solace in the fact that Alexa sought her out for comfort instead of someone else. The blonde hadn't even minded the nights she had stayed in Alexa's bed between his death and the day of the funeral giving the tall woman the physical consolation she seemed to need. In fact on those nights after Alexa had wept herself in exhausted sleep, Lara simply watched over her, taking in the features of the queen and feeling the pain as intensely as it had been her own. Through the long nights she held the powerful woman in her arms, stroking her wife's dark hair and back and soothing her into the deep rhythm of slumber.

Now she looked down at that same woman, lying so close to death herself. Lara's heart began to break at the thought of their child never knowing Alexa's affection, but even more surprising she grieved at the idea of never feeling the brunette's hand against her fair cheek or the dark eyes gazing at her with such adoration. Lara had become used to the familiar gestures that Alexa bestowed on her on a daily basis, and she would have given anything to feel the queen touch her that way at the moment. Pressing Alexa's large hand against her own cheek, Lara held it there.

"Oh, Alexa, what I would give to look into your eyes right now, to see the feelings you always have so freely displayed for me. I need that right now." The following morning the blonde awoke to the feeling of someone stroking her hair gently. Opening her eyes she realized she had fallen asleep on Alexa's bed, her head snuggled into her wife's shoulder. Looking up she saw Victoria standing over them, her mother-in-law's hand running through her hair. Neither woman spoke at first as Victoria gently tucked Lara's golden hair behind her ear.

"She has finally won your love." the queen mother stated quietly in observation.

"But I never got a chance to tell her." Lara whispered in sorrow. "And it could be too late."

"It's never too late, Lara." Victoria replied. "I see you've introduced her to her daughter." she mentioned in reference to Alexa's hand still inside the incubator where Lara had placed it last

night. "You need to give her a name soon you know."

"I know. I just wanted to wait for Alexa to do it. However I know she needs a name."

"Well, surely you and Alexa discussed this beforehand."

"Yeah, we did, and we had decided to name her after Alexa and George. However now I want to name her something else as well in light of what has happened."

"Then do it. I'm sure Alexa wouldn't object. The people need to know the name of their princess. If you and Alexa had already come to an agreement, then make the declaration today. Alfred will make an announcement about her and her condition. He hasn't said anything about her since the emergency cesarian, and I'm sure the people are anxious to know of her health."

The blonde nodded. She knew of the importance of assuring the country of the succession of the Washington line. "All right. I'll name her today." she conceded.

"Wonderful. I'll inform the doctors, so the appropriate paperwork can be prepared."

When Victoria left the room, Lara looked down at the queen. Alexa's appearance seemed unchanged since they had revived her the previous night.

"Alexa, I wish you were awake for this. I'm naming our child, and I wish you could be a part of it right now. Since you can't I think you should be the first to know your daughter's name. I'm naming her Alexa Georgianne Faith Washington. My faith is all I have now, Lex. She is all I have." she whispered as she once again began to cry. Leaning down to her wife, the petite woman slid her arms around the unresponsive woman and placed her head on Alexa's shoulder. "You have to come back to me, Lex. I need you. I love you." she uttered softly.

A week later Faith, as Lara called her, was released, but being that Alexa's condition was unchanged, Lara still spent all her time in the hospital with her daughter by her side. Meanwhile Victoria and Alfred carried on in public on Lara's behalf with Victoria stopping by every day as well and spending as much of her time with her daughter as she could. However there were extended times when it was just the two queens alone with their little princess.

Everyday Lara would sit in a chair beside her wife and cradle their child in her arms as she carried on one-sided conversations with the brunette.

However as the days passed into a week and then two, the little woman wondered if Alexa would ever come back to her.

One afternoon as the doctor was doing his daily examination of the queen, he turned his attention to Lara. The look on his face told her before he even said anything that he wanted to discuss something serious. "Your majesty, I think it's time you consider what to do about her highness." he stated hesitantly.

The blonde looked at the tall woman. She knew what he was referring to even though neither of them gave it voice. Lara knew this choice might have to be made, but she had hoped it wouldn't come to it. Nevertheless she had given serious thought as to what would be best for her people and her. "I want the queen moved to the palace." she stated. "Can you do that?"

"Of course. We can do anything you desire."

"In that case I want her at home. I can't run the country in her absence from this room. Everything I need is there."

"I'll have one of the helicopters prepared for the transport." he stated. "However I'm sure you know that is not a permanent solution."

"I know. I just know that if this is the end, she would want to be at home. I'll make my decision about her life support after she's settled."

"Very well. I'll have everything arranged and a schedule prepared for a doctor to be on hand at all times."

"Thank you." When he left the room, Lara looked at the queen. "Lex, what am I going to do with you? I wish we had talked about this before. I don't like having to be the one to make this decision."

By the end of that day, Alexa was resting in her bed back at the palace. As Lara sat on the king sized bed next to her wife, she wondered if she had the strength to make the right decision. She had opted to leave the queen on life support when she was brought over, but now that they were alone, the blonde knew the choice had to be made. Just then her thoughts were interrupted by a soft knock on the door before Alfred entered. In his hand he held a document, and he wore a long face.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, Lara, but I've been going through some of Alexa's things in the office, and I came across this. It's her Last Will and Testament. I think you need to read it."

"What does it say, Alfred? I can tell you have already read it yourself." He took a deep breath. "It clearly states that unless extenuating circumstances exist, she did not want to be put on life support. Now clearly there were such circumstances, which is why we originally did so, but in good faith I can't say those circumstances still exist for her to continue on it. If you want to abide by her wishes, we should take her off immediately. The choice is yours however as her wife and legal guardian of the sole heir to the throne."

Looking at Alexa Lara mumbled, "I don't want her to die, Alfred."

"But do you want her to live if it has to be like this?" he questioned. The blonde queen reluctantly shook her head. Even though she knew what had to be done, she regretted that she had to be the one to make the final call.

“Shall I go get the doctor, Lara?” She gave an affirmative nod. “All right.

I will retrieve him and the queen mother right away.”

Once alone with her wife, Lara sighed. “I guess this will be for the best if it’s what you wanted.” she whispered touching Alexa’s face. “I just wish you had seen your daughter at least once. I will do everything I can to raise her in your image, so she can be the great queen you never got the chance to be.” Taking their sleeping daughter Lara cradled her into the crook of Alexa’s arm. “There. Now you can at least have a chance to hold her once. I love you, Alexa, and I’m sorry that I never got to look into your eyes while I said that.” she muttered. Leaning down the blonde kissed her wife’s lips with a gentle adoration. “I’ll always love you, Alexa Washington.” Silence filled the room for several minutes until Alfred returned with Victoria and the doctor in tow.

“You majesty, you requested to see me.” he stated.

She nodded. “It’s time. Turn... turn the machines off.” she said choking on her tears.

“Are you sure, your majesty?”

“Yes. It’s what Alexa wants.”

“Very well. You need to sign this first.” he said presenting her with the authorization to do as she requested. With shaking hands she signed the life of her wife away to fate and moved to stand beside the bed, leaving her daughter beside the queen. The small, blonde queen stood alone while Victoria stood in Alfred’s arms to watch as Alexa was removed from all the support she had been receiving. It only took moments before the doctor softly said, “I will leave you all in privacy now.”

Not a word was spoken as three sets of eyes stayed fixed on the dark-haired queen and her heir resting next to her. Tears freely streamed down Lara’s fair cheeks. She couldn’t handle it and moved to the bed again, throwing herself down next to the body of her beloved to weep openly into Alexa’s chest. Only sobbing could be heard from the three in the room, but as the minutes passed, Lara became vaguely aware of the fact that she could hear Alexa’s heart continually decline until it finally stopped.

“Oh, God, Alexa!” the little woman wailed cupping the brunette’s face. “Why you? Why now? There were so many things I never got to say, so many things we never got to do!” Just then Faith began to cry, so Lara picked up their daughter, curling her tightly into her chest. “Alexa, I promise you with all I am that I will raise our daughter in your image.”

A clearing of the throat could be heard behind her, and the blonde now queen mother looked up at Alfred. “Lara, I should call a press conference right away, and the people need to see their new queen for the first time. Do you think you will be able to be there with me?” he asked through his own tears.

Lara looked down at Alexa, thinking about what she would do. She knew the tall woman always

had thought of her people first and above her own needs at all times during her life, and being determined to follow in those footsteps, the small woman nodded. “Yes, of course, Alfred. I will be there with Faith.” she stated stoically, even though she felt like dying on the inside.

He gave a tentative nod. “Very well. I’ll come retrieve you in a little bit, and I’ll let the doctor know what has happened.”

“Thank you.” Lara whispered turning her gaze back to Alexa. Unable to control herself, she laid down next to the woman she loved and curled herself tightly around the late queen’s strong form and wept herself into exhaustion.

Epilogue: Love Ever After

Lara woke that night with a startle. As she opened her eyes in the darkness, she wondered what had caused her to wake. Feeling the heat of the body next to her and a hand as it snaked across her bare stomach, she smiled. Hot breath fanned her neck as her lover’s mouth closed over her fevered skin. The little woman giggled lightly. A deep, stirring voice whispered her name. Turning toward her bedmate, Lara met her lover’s lips with urgency as she pulled them on top of her slight form.

Skilled hands quickly made work of her sleeping attire before settling on the petite woman’s twin treasures. Lara panted, her back arching up toward the knowing touch. They had done this many times before, but it never ceased to amaze her the feelings that ran rampant through her body at her lover’s caress. Running her hands through her beloved’s hair, she pulled her closer. “Lara.” her lover growled meeting her mouth again. “I love you.” she sexily whispered as she found her way inside Lara’s aching wetness.

Lara cried out softly clinging closer. “I love you too. Oh, God, right there.” She rode the tide her mate created in her body. She so adored the way they made love. It always touched more than her body. Her very soul ached for the caress. It was mere moments before she reached the summit of pleasure. As she lay quaking, sure arms embraced her, holding her in loving security. When she had floated back to earth, she opened her eyes and found her lover’s gaze in the dark. Bringing her hand up to the strong jaw, she stroked it gently. “I love you so much, Lex.” she avowed. “I always have.”

“I know. I love you too, my darling, Lara, mother of my children.” There was a moment of silence before she continued, “I have to go now.”

“Please don’t.” Lara begged.

Alexa took hold of her wife’s hands. “I have to, Lara, but I want you to come with me. Please come home with me now. You’ve done all you were supposed to.”

“But our girls...”

“They’re grown. They have children, grandchildren of their own. You’ve done what I always hoped you would, filling this house with our family. Come away with me now. It’s time.” she pleaded.

“I have to tell them good bye at least.” she stated.

Alexa nodded as she ran her hand through her own stark white hair. “All right. Say good bye, and I’ll come for you in a bit.” Lara nodded. Alexa stroked her lover’s fair cheek and gray hair as she gazed into Lara’s blue eyes. “You’re so beautiful, beloved. Give our children my love.”

“I will, love.” Lara whispered.

Suddenly Lara’s eyes opened as she heard one of her daughters calling her name. Looking to her left, she saw the empty bed. Shifting her gaze to her right, she saw her eldest, Queen Faith sitting beside her. “Mom.” she called softly.

“Faith.” she stated greeting the woman.

Her daughter was dressed casually and idly stroking her mother’s frail hand. “I was walking by and heard you talking in your sleep. Are you all right?”

“Yeah. I was just dreaming.”

“About Mother?”

“Yes. She was here.” Lara tried to explain in confusion. The dream had seemed so real, as all of them had over the years.

Faith nodded. Placating her aging mother, she decided not to dispute the statement. Instead she asked, “What did Mother say? Why was she here?” The eighty-three year old queen mother blushed modestly under her daughter’s gaze. “Mom.” Faith teased lightly seeing her mother’s reaction.

“It was nothing you need to know about.” Lara answered at first. However after a moment, she said, “She sends you her love.” Faith gave a nod.

“Faith, she asked me to come back with her.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean she asked me to leave with her.”

“You mean leave us?” Lara nodded. “Do you want to go, Mom? Are you ready to go?”

“Yes. You and your sisters don’t need me like you used to.”

Faith sat in silence for a moment before replying, “Well, sixty years is a long time to be apart from your beloved. If you love Mother even half as much as I love Thomas, I could see why you would want to go. We will miss you though. You know that, don’t you?”

“And I’m sure I’ll miss you, but I need to go. I need to have the things we always should have had.”

“I understand.” After a moment Faith looked away from her mother out the window. “Mom, before you do go, there’s something I’ve always wanted to ask you.”

“What is it?”

“Did you ever resent the fact that Mother died while saving me?” hesitantly she inquired.

“Never, Faith. Your mother gave her life for both of us. Neither of us would have lived if it weren’t for her. She was selfless to the end. Never doubt her love for you or mine.”

“I never do. I’m just sorry that fate did this to you. It shouldn’t have been this way.”

“But it was. For sixty years I’ve been waiting for the day we could be together again, and I’m tired of waiting, Faith. My life was over the day she died, and I’ve just been biding my time ever since. However now it is time to go. Now do me one thing. Go get the rest of the family for me. I want to talk to everyone.”

“Of course. I’ll go right now.”

Shortly every member of the Washington family hovered in the bedroom Lara had occupied in the palace since her father-in-law had passed away more than half a century before. The ailing woman looked upon each face, taking in their features and enjoying the final moments she had with them. First there was Faith, Alexa and her first born, and present Queen of America. Lara had been fortunate enough to watch her baby grow into the powerful leader that she had always hoped for as a way to honor her beloved. As she grew up, she had reached the same majestic height as her mother with the same brown eyes but white blonde hair like Lara’s, and her personality and hobbies ironically had turned out to be similar to the late queen’s with her love of horses.

Next to her was Faith’s husband, Prince Thomas Jefferson. Lara gave him a smile. “Thomas, it never ceases to amaze me how much you look like your mother.” she stated, speaking of the late Lady Gwyneth Jefferson.

“I know, Lara. I think it’s a blessing, better than looking like my father.” he joked lightly.

“Your mother was my very best friend for most of my life and was Alexa’s all of hers. You know Alexa’s parents wanted her to marry your mother instead of me. Fortunately for me though they both thought better of it. I’ve always been happy to see that the Washington and Jefferson

lines were finally united though, and you have given us all such wonderful grandchildren and even a great-grandchild.”

Moving her eyes to her eldest grandchild, Faith and Thomas’s first child, Princess Alexa Elise Washington, who was named after her two grandmothers, she smiled fondly. Alexa looked the most like her namesake in the entire family. She had the height, build, and look of Lara’s beloved. Not only that, the second in line to the throne just behind her mother, had the same voracious interest in women that the late Queen Alexa had in her younger life.

Lara’s gaze drifted on to Thomas and Faith’s youngest child and her only grandson, Prince George Thomas Washington. The old woman smiled at him. He was the sweetest man she had ever known outside of Alfred, having always so respectful and gentle with Lara. Next to him stood his newlywed wife and their baby of only a few months and Lara’s only great-grandchild.

Lara’s other two children were next in line. For the first several years after Alexa had passed away, the little woman had tried desperately to get pregnant again in memory of her wife. It was always the late queen’s greatest wish to have three children, so Lara wanted to do everything she could to make that possible. Since she and Alexa had stored many fertilized eggs for future use, Lara eventually found herself pregnant two more times, giving them three girls in all.

Her middle child, Princess Victoria, was named for Alexa’s mother, who had lived several more decades after the passing of her husband and daughter, helping Lara with the challenges of sitting on the throne in her daughter’s place until Faith was able to take over the duties. Victoria looked the most like Lara, being more petite in stature with the same coloring. Her husband Prince Edward Adams stood next to her with their two girls, Lara and Kate.

Last but certainly not least was her youngest child, Princess Katherine, named after Lara’s own mother. Katherine also had many of Alexa’s features, including her dark hair and eyes. Next to her was Katherine’s wife, Princess Nicole.

Giving all of them a reassuring smile, Lara softly said, “I wanted to see all of you now, because I don’t have much time left. In fact I know this will be the last day I am with you, and I wanted a chance to say good bye. You all mean so much to me, but I know you will be fine without my help. I will be watching from afar now with Alexa, and both of us will always be in your hearts. I just want one hug from each of you before I go.”

Each member of the family complied with the request before Lara instructed them all to go about their business. Everyone but her three daughters did as she asked. They hovered around the bed taking the last few moments with their precious mother. “Mom, are you sure you want to be alone now?” Faith inquired.

“I’m not alone, Faith. Your mother is here.” she answered seeing her wife standing at the balcony doors. The three daughters looked where their mother was but saw nothing. Turning back to Lara, they just gave her quizzical gazes. “Go now. Call the press conference. I’ll be gone by the time you return.”

The three of them reluctantly did as they were told, and soon it was just Alexa and Lara. “Are you ready, my darling?” Alexa asked holding out her hand to her wife.

Lara nodded. “I’ve been ready for years, Lex.” she replied taking the offered hand and standing from the bed.

“Let’s go, my wife, my queen.” Alexa said with a gentle smile as she led the woman she loved into the beyond never to look back.

The End

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