

Royal Contract 1011

Chapter 1011: Dream wedding

He looked up into the sky, seeing slight clouds forming on the horizon. Soon, a storm might be brewing on its way. Unlike the weather, he never felt calmer and brighter, just like a sunshiny day.

Everything in his life had fallen into place since he met the woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life with for all eternity. But there was a tiny hiccup in their plans for their upcoming union.

"I want Eida to be my maid of honor and Luisa, my flower girl," Amelia stated, not demanding but hoping. "I wish they could be part of our special day."

That would not have been a problem if Eida would willingly expose herself to his friends. But, of course, that was not an option. He knew Eida wanted nothing else but to be there as a witness to their wedding.

However, she had her reason for staying away from the limelight. The couple understood her situation, but it would not be the same without her and her child at their wedding since they had been the closest to a family they had.

"I want her to be there, too," Evan answered, a little bit frustrated, as they mulled over their wedding plans. "But you know I have to invite all my friends, including Lance."

Besides, even if he did not invite the Prince or he did not attend, the pictures at the reception would still reveal that Eida and Luisa were present in the scene. Then, their other friends, present at the wedding, might recognize her and tell Lance.

.....

Indeed, it was a complicated situation.

But they had to decide on something, or they would never set a date, organize a plan, and be married. "I know." She answered him, echoing his same frustration. He wished there was another way.

"Then, there is your father. You know how close he is with the Count and the Royal family." Evan reminded his fiancée, knowing that putting Eida in the middle of his friends and her family would never be a good idea.

She finally stood up from the bed, realizing how complicated their situation was. All she wanted was to have the most special people in her life in this once-in-a-lifetime event.

After all, it was her wedding day.

"Do we need to invite all these people?" She grabbed the papers on the table, comprising the names of their expected guests.

As her eyes scanned the list, she saw the tally was almost three hundred. But when she looked closely at their names, she barely recognized most of them. She could assume that all of them came from affluent families.

When she finally informed her father about her impending marriage, she had already expected his reaction. He was furious. He did not welcome her news as anything pleasant.

“Do you expect me to be static about it?” Her father shouted over the line. The fact that she had notified him about her engagement on the phone did not help. He found Evan’s action insulting since he did not ask for her hand before proposing to her.

Her father was a traditional man. He had always intended to arrange her marriage to some prince or wealthy business associate to further his power and wealth. She would have become queen if he had his way.

“I love him, Dad, and I want you to be happy for me.” She answered him, knowing it would not have mattered to her father.

He had never considered that she should marry out of love. Her father thought it was foolishness to believe in such nonsense when a good arrangement could solidify their family’s legacy.

It took him a week before her father conceded and accepted he was not winning this battle. Instead, he decided to meddle with their affairs, demanding that Evan should provide the wedding befitting his daughter.

“Dad, I don’t want a big wedding.” She informed her father, suddenly wary of the way he was behaving. She knew her father would try to sabotage her wedding if he could.

She knew Evan was wealthier than most of her father’s friends, but her father would still find her fiance lacking. First of all, Evan did not come from old money. His family name was not in the registry of all the great names in their country’s history.

“You will allow me to become the laughing stock among my friends.” Her father could not even think of her happiness as he mumbled about his reputation and name.

“If you want me to accept this man, then the least you can do is show our family and friends that you are not marrying a caveman.” He added, knowing that he meant it as an insult.

Evan came from a nobody. Yes, her grandmother made it in the entertainment industry, and her grandfather had a successful small-time business. Still, it was not enough to make them cut the list of social elites.

Evan only became very rich when he tried his luck in another country and became successful in his career and business choices. Now, he might be wealthy, but not according to her father’s standards.

“Your father mostly requested all of those people.” Evan reminded her. “We don’t have to invite them if you don’t want.” He moved closer to her, his palms caressing her shoulders, assuring her that he would always have her back. Her wish was his command.

They could do that, but that would surely irk her father. But she did not mind. She had disappointed him all her life. So, what was one more going to do to her?

She had already promised herself when she left him to live alone that she would not let him control her life anymore. She was not about to change that now. She would plan her wedding according to her wishes, not his. Because, as she said before, this was her special day.

Nevertheless, it did not solve her initial problem.

She could uninvite his father's guests, but she still could not invite the two people she wanted to be there. Therefore, she was back to her original dilemma as she let the cold breeze touch her skin as she stood at the open balcony door.

She was gazing at the farthest clouds she could see, trying hard to have a happy ending in this fairy tale wedding, when her fiancé broke into her thoughts. "Tell me honestly, what is your dream wedding?"

It made her think of all her wedding fantasies from the day she fell in love with Lance until she met this magnificent man behind her. She knew Evan would give her the grandest wedding the world had seen if it would make her happy but was that what she wanted?

She turned to face her future husband, wrapping her arms around his shoulders. Then, she let her fingers play at the baby hair growing at his nape as his hair extended longer.

She played several scenarios in her head as she thought about his question, trying to find the correct answer. She could have what she thought was her fairy tale wedding with her Prince charming, but that was a childish dream.

She believed she already outgrew that one. Then, she smiled as she finally decided what she wanted for real.

"A wedding with only the people that mattered the most." For her, it would be her dream wedding.

Chapter 1012: A big deal

She could feel her hands shake and sweat drip from the back of her shirt and armpit. She felt like a pig about to get slaughtered. Yes! She was a nervous wreck as she dragged her last luggage out of her room.

It would be her first time being away from her son for more than a day. Usually, she could not wait to get home after a day's work. Now, she would not see him for almost three days.

She believed it would be a big adjustment for both of them. She was just thankful that Lourdes and her family were willing to care for him while she was away. They had been a real family to her and her child.

"Come on, Edison, finish your meal so we can go down to Mama." She heard Sasha's voice in the kitchen as she helped feed her son.

The young girl had knocked early at her door, knowing she had an early flight. She volunteered to take Edison to her home so he would not see her leave with her suitcase.

Lourdes said she might change her mind about leaving if she saw her son crying and stopping her. They still all agreed, Lourdes, her husband, and Sasha, that she should take this rare opportunity for a relaxing break even if she insisted that this was work and nothing else.

"Hi! Sasha." She greeted her young babysitter. "Are you sure that you can handle him? I don't want you neglecting your studies because of him." She knew that the girl was diligent and intelligent, but she could not help but try to make excuses why she should stay.

.....

"I assure you, Ms. Ria, that Edison and I will be fine." She cheerfully hi-five her son. "Right, Edison?" A new trick Edison was learning from his friend. Edison offered his hand with an energetic smile. "It will be awesome."

"Aw...som..." Her son tried to imitate the older girl. It was adorable to hear him learn new words. Sasha had been a great teacher.

Then, her thought returned to the benefits she would receive if she accepted the permanent position. They offered a daycare facility where she could bring Edison. She saw it, and it was a nice place for a child.

The facilitators also acted as a nanny and teachers, teaching the kids some basic skills, reading, and other things. She would not be a constant bother to Sasha and her family. Despite what they said, she did not want to be a burden to them.

"Yes, I am sure you will have a great time with Sasha." She knelt at her son's level as he stood straight before her.

He was getting bigger and bigger, and she missed most of it. First, she was studying, then now, working. But as they said, single mothers had to sacrifice a lot since they had to be both father and child to their child.

They had to be the provider in the family, assuring that they had all their needs. Then, she had to care for her child, guaranteeing that she gave him enough love and support. It was not an easy balancing act.

"Don't worry, Ms. Ria. We will take care of him. You know how much I love this little fellow." Sasha reassured her. "Just call anytime if you miss him."

After one very long and tight hug and a lingering kiss, she finally let go of her son and waved at him. Then, he was out the door with his guardian angel. She could not help but feel guilty about her decision, but she knew she had to do this.

Most of the time, her wants and needs would have to take the backseat since her child was her priority. But was it fair to her if she passed up this chance of a lifetime because she was afraid of the consequences and to take a few risks?

Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!

That was her cue. Well, she had three days to think about her plans.

At the time being, she had to rush out of her apartment, dragging her bags on the short flight of stairs. Her carriage was already waiting downstairs.

The company had promised to send her a car to take her to the airport. She already had all the flight details. On the other side of the state, another arranged transportation would pick them up and bring them to their hotel accommodation. Easy peasy.

"What is he doing here?" She mumbled loudly, surprised to see the man that was supposed to meet her at the airport standing by his car. She assumed it was his car, although it was different from the sports car he usually drove.

Until now, she could not fathom how someone like him, working at the mailroom, could afford such expensive cars. Maybe he was rich. Judging from his clothes, he might be. He never did say he was poor. She just assumed he was like the rest of them.

She wanted to ask him, but snooping about another person's life was never her style. She would die of mortification if he thought she was interested in him because she was asking him all these questions.

"Are you ready?" He asked when he finally saw her. He walked quickly to her side and looked behind her as she exited the apartment building. "Is that all your things?" He asked, pointing to her one suitcase and a carry-on bag.

"Yes," She reluctantly answered, still baffled why he picked her up instead of the official car. How many things was he expecting she would carry in this three days trip?

"Oh, ok. Let me get that for you." He picked up the suitcase as if it weighed nothing when she almost fell on the stairs carrying it.

She would have said no, but he was almost in the car when she thought of stopping him. In her defense, he moved quickly, and she did not expect he would do that.

Besides, it was rare that someone would carry her things for her. It felt refreshing. And she doubted that it was a big deal.

Chapter 1013: An internal battle

She took a deep breath and then splashed water on her face before facing the mirror again. She immediately rushed toward the bathroom when she found an opportunity to excuse herself from his presence.

Another reason why she was anxious about this trip was because of him. She knew that being in the same space with him would create problems for her. Not that he was doing anything to bother her.

On the contrary, he was extra nice to her since they called a truce. They had agreed that they had to work on this together. To do that, they had to set aside what had happened in the past.

"Pull yourself together." Ria mildly tapped on her face, putting some color back on her cheeks. "That kiss did not mean anything to him, and it should not mean anything to you." She told herself in the mirror.

Luckily, no one else seemed to be using the bathroom, or the other person might think she was going crazy. But maybe she was going out of her mind as she thought about the man waiting for her outside.

"Zach is a player." She could tell from the way he handled her like a pro. "He doesn't want a woman like you." Pointing at herself in the mirror. Why would he want someone with a lot of baggage and a child?

The last man she had a relationship with and loved for years dropped her like a sack of potatoes. He quickly left her as soon as he impregnated her and had a child, saying she was a whore and the baby was not his.

.....

He was a player who had made her believe that he loved her. And that a man like him would change for her. She built her world around him, but unfortunately, she was a fool to believe him.

“Don’t waste your time believing in fairy tales.” She told herself. Her focus should remain on her son, who was waiting for her back home.

She splashed some more water on her face before fixing herself again. She had to hurry up, or her partner might wonder what she was doing inside the bathroom.

Soon, she sat with him inside the airplane with her on the window side. Thankfully, the company gave them a first-class ticket. The room was luxurious compared to the one they passed by. Then, the seats were spacious and comfortable.

It was an experience she would certainly not forget as she looked outside the window. But, of course, there was no view yet to see other than the airport and the runway. She had to wait until they were up in the air. At that point, the engine began to roar.

“Is there something wrong?” The man beside him instantly asked when she accidentally gasped, recalling something she almost forgot out of her excitement and anxiousness.

Another one of her fear in going on this trip was the flying itself. She almost believed that she could get through this without thinking about it. But her anxiety hit her with full force as she remembered that this would be her first time to fly.

She had never traveled much outside of their state. The farthest trip she had in the past was a three hours bus ride. She had not ridden any other form of transportation other than a car. She did not even learn how to ride a bike. She did not have one growing up.

“Yeah, I am ok.” She answered, lying to her teeth, suddenly realizing she was making a scene. She was unsure if she feared heights since she had never experienced being in a high place. But she knew now that she was afraid of planes.

Although she had worked on the top floors, she was inside a building. But flying was different. The plane could suddenly spiral out of control and then crush into the ocean or the ground.

Then, several horrifying ideas came to mind, making her more nervous in her seat. Now, she would never see her son again. The thought only worsened her situation as her nerves went to the roof.

“I don’t think you are ok, Ria. Just relax. Everything will be alright.” She heard his calm voice, soothing her. Then, she felt his fingers wrapping around her hands as his warmth covered her trembling, cold fingers.

“I am sorry, Zach. I don’t know why I am so nervous.” She uttered with a heavy breath as she tried to fill her lungs with air.

She had always been brave. Well, at least most of the time. She could stand in dark and eerie places. But lightning and thunders did give her chills. She just had that fear since she was a child.

“That is ok. Is this your first time flying?” He asked as one of his arms snaked around her shoulders and pulled her body closer to his.

She was about to pull away when she heard the engine roar louder, and the plane jerked a little as it started to move, making her squeeze her eyes shut as fear gripped her entire body.

"Yes," Ria finally found her voice and answered his question. She knew he was trying to distract her from thinking about what would happen next. She tried to cooperate with him by focusing on his voice instead of the motor.

"What you are experiencing is perfectly normal." He said as she felt his fingers wrapped around one of her shoulders, caressing her gently. "Relax and breathe. I am just here." He whispered as his hand moved up and down on her arm.

She did not find his touch offensive, but it distracted her from her fear as she felt her body gradually calm down. But, it did not mean she was on all counts better as she still felt her heart jump every time the plane had a turbulent movement.

"Thanks," She mumbled as her eyes remained shut, with her face buried between his shoulders and chest.

She was not expecting that he would help her. Maybe she had judged him again a little harshly. Maybe more. But now she realized he was not as bad as she thought as she finally opened her eyes, looked up, and saw him gazing down at her.

His eyes looked like a storm was brewing inside him, but his touch remained as gentle and comforting as the calm sea as he continued to soothe her nerves.

She could only wonder what was going through his mind as he appeared to be having an internal battle with himself.

Chapter 1014: Head on a platter

It would seem that his mentor was right about his accusations. He was a fool to fall into the trap set up by his enemies. His future father-in-law had played him like a fiddle. Then, he also danced to his tune.

Now, what should he do with that cunning man and his plans? But the most relevant question was whether Haley had any involvement in her father's schemes.

Did she plan to seduce and use him just like her father? Or was she another innocent victim in this grand scheme that her father had orchestrated? Was she a pawn or the queen?

"So, you do believe me now." Don puffed his cigarette and blew it in the air, creating a large cloud of smoke around him before the air dispensed them into nothing.

He sat in the partly dim lit room with a smug look and smile covering his face. He nodded his head in time with the loud music, amused with the woman sitting on his lap.

Mike had pulled a lot of strings to get the information they needed. From what he gathered, he learned some valuable details. It was conclusive that Alfred Rosley was working against one of his biggest rivals.

"I guess," Gerald answered the man who taught him some of the ins and outs of these businesses, other than his father. "You might be right this time." He agreed with the man.

.....

Did he trust this devious man? No, of course not. His father taught him never to trust anyone completely. But he somehow trusted Mike, his bestfriend. He believed he was the only one who had his back from the start.

But with this one, he would still keep an eye on his old friend. Don betrayed him once when he lost his confidence in him. He could do it again, and the next time might have a different outcome.

He kept his hands on the thighs of the girl on his lap as he looked at the other man sitting opposite him. He wanted to read what was on his mind. But he would not be where he was now if he did not have a few tricks up his sleeves. This crafty man would only show him what he wanted him to see.

“Then, what are you planning to do about it?” Don asked after indulging himself in the bountiful breast of the woman displayed before him before looking up to wait for his answer.

His eyes sharpened at him as if he was trying to read his thoughts. He believed, just like him, this man also did not trust him. He was still gauging what he would do with his current information.

He would safely assume he was waiting for him to slip up and make a mistake. In that way, he could get the confidence of the other members of the organization and finally solidify his claim as their new leader.

“I am working on a plan. I think Mr. Rosley has done enough damage to our organization.” He acknowledged that he needed to act on this information or risk losing the trust of the rest of his comrades if he let him get away with this.

However, he still had to find out if Haley had fed her father any details about his other lifestyle. But how could she, when he had kept this part of his life from her? He still doubted that she had a knowing participation in this.

On the other hand, she might know something about his secrets from her father and was pretending to be clueless, just like the scenario Mike had presented before. Still, he did not want to believe that without any proof.

“Good. I hope you will keep me in the loop.” The older man suggested as he buried his face in the woman’s chest again. Then, he suddenly came up for air and stared at him. “You know I still have a few good ideas that can help.” He offered.

He nodded, acknowledging his statement. He would not mind sharing some information with him, but not the pertinent ones. He knew he still could not trust him.

After a while, Gerald sipped his aged scotch silently, staring at the almost naked women dancing seductively on the stage when his friend snapped his fingers on him, calling his attention.

In truth, he barely noticed the girls, any of the girls around them, as they twisted their bodies to allure the men before them. His mind was elsewhere, thinking of another woman he needed to see soon.

“Don’t you like my gift?” Don asked him, gesturing with his mouth on the girl on his lap that he hardly touched, except for his hands resting on her thighs.

She had her hands around his shoulder, but she just sat there waiting for him to make a move. But he had never touched another woman since he had been seeing Haley.

He kept justifying he was busy with many things that he could hardly have time to go clubbing and hook up with girls. Haley was there and convenient. She was good enough for the time being.

“Which one do you like?” The older men gestured for some other girls to line up before them.

He would have banged any of these girls if he was in the mood, but his mind had something more important to deal with at that very moment. At least, that was what he was telling himself.

Nevertheless, did Haley ruin the other girls for him? He could not help but wonder as he lost his appetite to touch, kiss, or make out with these girls. They all seemed unattractive. Maybe it was just a phase in his life. He still would not believe that this had anything to do with her.

“Of course, I find her fascinating.” He pulled the girl closer to his body, cradling her chin in his fingers. Then he kissed her hard while one of his hands snaked on her breast, under her flimsy brassiere, squeezing it as she moaned into his kiss.

Then, he gradually let go of her and looked at his friend, who seemed quite satisfied. He knew it was a test. He wanted to see if he was still the same man he had raised through all these years.

This man was also checking if he had changed because of the woman linked to his name. If he had stopped fucking other women because of her because that would mean one thing. He had a weakness.

“I need to be somewhere.” Gerald excused himself from his friend. “Can I take her home instead?” Refusing his gift would be an insult as he stood from his seat but grabbed the arms of the girl, planning to take her with him.

His gift was a beautiful woman with a gorgeous body. But knowing this woman’s backstory was not relevant in this business. What was important was how they would please their clients. And he knew what precisely he wanted from her.

“Of course, she is yours for as long as you want.” Don winked at him, boorishly laughing as he beckoned another girl on his other lap. “Enjoy. If you want more, pick another one.” Pointing to the variety of selections.

Of course, he declined. He only needed one. Another one might make things more complicated. Then, he thanked his generous host for the night and left with his men. He proceeded to his waiting car with the girl’s arm wrapped around his.

Once inside, he looked at the other man sitting across from him and the girl. He was already waiting for him with his arms crossed along his chest and a smirk on his lips.

“What is with the babe?” Mike asked, raising his brows at him while winking at the beautiful blonde.

He could tell that his friend was interested. It would not be the first time he would suggest he shared the girl with him. Life in their world was all about acquiring tons of money, selling drugs, and guns, killing, and a lot of fucking beautiful girls.

It was the life that Mike loved in their underworld business. But did he like it as his friend did? Or was he forced into this world without any other option but to believe this was all he got?

What if Dani and Laura were right about him? That he could change and have a different path.

Should he still live in the world his father taught him? Or should he follow the different life his biological father wished him to have? It was a question that he still could not answer.

"A gift." He answered with a look that told his friend that he needed to shut up. Then, the car started moving on its way to his home. He was tired, and he badly needed a shower.

The woman stayed glued to his side, attempting to seduce him but stopped when he firmly told her he was not interested. She sat quietly on the side, probably contemplating what she would report to her boss.

When he stood outside his apartment building, he pulled Mike aside where nobody could hear them, leaving the girl inside the chauffeured driven car.

"Take care of her. Make sure that she is satisfied and would not breathe a bad report to her boss." Gerald instructed his friend.

Mike would know what to do with her. If they could flip her to their side, that would be better. She could become one of their informants inside Don's organization.

In times like this, he needed guarantees that nobody was double-crossing him. He might have the most powerful position in their rank, but he also gained the most enemies who would want his head on a platter.

Chapter 1015: An ally or an enemy?

He was on his way home when a man blocked his path as he entered the main lobby. He was familiar, seeing him before on more than one occasion.

"Excuse me, Sir, but my boss wishes to have a word with you." The man said as he gestured that he should follow him back outside.

He debated whether to indulge his boss's request as he gauged the man before him. He could say no, but that would raise red flags that might ruin the plan he was still concocting in his mind.

In the meantime, he needed his enemies to think that he was still clueless about their intentions. He did want them to be suspicious and alarmed. He needed the element of surprise to work in his favor.

"Lead the way." He finally responded, allowing the other man to go ahead while he followed behind.

He did not see anyone outside upon arriving at his building. He did not notice anything that could have raised his suspicion. Therefore, someone might be following him and tailing his whereabouts. Or it could be another inside job.

Whoever it was, he had to find the culprit before he destroyed his plans and the entire organization. This business was his empire, and he had to protect it from the people who would want it burned to the ground and turned into ashes.

.....

"How long have you been working for your boss?" He was testing if this man was someone who would rather keep his mouth shut or talk like a mockingbird. "If I am not mistaken, he trusted you more than the rest of his men."

He would prefer the latter, wishing to get some information and hopefully bond with the guy. He needed to see how much the man knew about his boss's underground operations.

Even if he did not answer with words, his body language alone could be enough to tell him what he wanted to know. A few questions here and there would seem innocent enough, but that was how you bait someone to loosen up and slip.

"Long enough." The man answered, seemingly proud of himself. He knew that his pride would make him talk. "I am his righthand man for a reason." He continued with a smug look on his face.

He walked beside him, making him feel that he respected him for whatever he had accomplished. "I can see why he would trust you." He could see that he wanted to say more, but they had no more time.

Still, he believed that he had established a connection with him. He could explore that another time if given a chance.

A car suddenly pulled up as soon as he exited the main door, and the man gestured that he should enter. Inside, he could see the man that wanted to see him waiting, sitting comfortably inside.

He did not have a second thought as he joined him. He would also like to know what this was all about, but he might have some suspicion. Still, he would let his instinct control his action. Some said that curiosity killed a cat, but he was not one.

He might be curious, but he was very cautious. He would not let his guard down under any circumstances when dealing with his allies, especially his enemies.

"It is nice to see you again, Gerald. You have to forgive me for the short notice. I know that you are a busy man. So, I took the only time you are available." A friendly face smiled at him, but he knew what hid behind those devious eyes.

The older man puffed his cigar inside the car, filling the air with the irritating smell of nicotine. He was a mafia boss, but it did not mean he also indulged in the bad habit.

He preferred to die with a bullet than a disease that had no cure. It was just stupid to live on the edge only to lose to an enemy he could not beat. But, of course, he would not tell his customers that. That would be terrible for business.

"I am sure if you had set an appointment with my secretary, I would have made time for you." He answered the man, who had a friendly smile on his lips. But he doubted that it mirrored his intention for coming to see him.

He could tell there was a more profound reason for his visit, but it had nothing to do with pleasantries. He could think of several possible logical explanations, but he doubted it was his only purpose.

"Well, I don't think your office is the ideal place for this conversation. I would have visited you at your apartment where we could talk privately, but my daughter is already upstairs, apparently waiting for you." The man informed him.

He could guess all night what this man was whining about or ask him straight so as not to waste their time. He was tired, and as his host pointed out, his daughter was waiting for him as he had already expected.

"Then, I guess this is a better place than any. So, what is it, Alfred?" He asked as he felt the car move. He could tell that it was not something he wanted his daughter to hear.

He was not afraid of this man or his men. He could easily take them down. Besides, his security would not be far away, following them close behind. Therefore, he relaxed in the backseat and waited for the man to discuss his motives for meeting him.

"I am still waiting for you to marry my daughter. I can't let you keep dating her and then dump her once you are elected governor. I told you I would only support your candidacy if you marry her." Alfred reminded him of their agreement or what he wanted from him.

He never conformed to that arrangement, but the older man assumed he did. He could marry her, but that would put her life in danger. But was her life even in any peril in the first place?

It seemed her father had her covered, knowing who he was in the underworld. Alfred would not insist that he married his daughter, knowing she might get hurt if he had no backup plan.

"Are you saying you will pull out your support if I don't marry Haley?" Gerald would like to hear him say his threat out loud. He dared him.

He would like to determine if the woman he would marry had anything to do with this. He would only know the truth if this man would somehow slip up. It was not very likely, but he was good at breaking people until they made a mistake.

Still, he could not make him suspect that he knew he was working for the other side. He would use this man to get to the bottom of their operations. It was the only way he could beat his enemy and eliminate them once and for all.

"Of course. My daughter is not a toy you can play with and return once you break it. I will not have that." The man slightly raised his voice to make his point loud and clear. "Either you propose to her this end of the week. Then marry her within a month, or all deals are off."

He could see the seriousness on his face but could not tell if he was bluffing. He could not read from his poker face what he was thinking. But he knew that it was a warning that he had to heed.

But how much did he want the Governorship position to let this man bully him into taking his daughter as his wife? Although his entire organization agreed that taking that office would give them leverage, was it worth dealing with this devil?

"What else do you wish to discuss with me?" He was sure that this marriage business was not the only topic on his plate.

He might not be able to read him, but his instinct had never failed him when faced with a cunning man. He was sure his future father-in-law still had another one or two questions he would like to ask him.

Regarding the marriage, he was not answering it right away. He had to think it through before making a final decision. Besides, the man gave him a few days to decide on it.

"I had done some digging about you. Of course, you will understand. I need to know the man that my daughter is marrying." It sounded noble in his ears, but he doubted it was the intention.

"You can say I discovered a few things that had caught my attention and raised some flags." Alfred finally put the fire out of his cigar on the ashtray at his side and blew the last remaining smoke inside his mouth.

"But before you say anything, let me finish." The older man stopped him from asking questions, but he believed where this line of conversation was going. "I know you are not who you appeared to be. But that is not a problem. I assure you."

He wished the other man would get straight to what he wanted from him instead of being theatrical with his words. But now that he revealed what he knew, he could only ponder what this man was planning.

"What about Haley? Does she know any of this? He had to know her involvement in her father's schemes. It was the only way he could deal with her accordingly.

Moreover, he had to know if he was marrying someone who loved him or someone who would stab him in the back.

Was she an ally or an enemy?

Chapter 1016: A stepfather

Finally, she could easily breathe as she dropped her shoulder bag on the floor and took off her shoes. The entire day was an experience she could add to her unforgettable ones.

She was exhausted, because of the trip, her nervous breakdown, and the welcoming dinner that their client hosted for them. Thankfully, the meal was superb. Her stomach was certainly not complaining as she tapped her belly.

Then, "Damn!" She scrambled to her feet as she remembered something. She snatched her bag from the floor and quickly dialed a number. She thumped her foot on the carpeted floor as she noticed the time.

It was late.

She hoped that she could still catch him awake. "Hello, Sasha. I'm sorry. I hope I did not disturb you." She exhaled, glad to hear her voice. "Can I speak with Edison?" She asked in a hurry.

She knew that his son could hardly keep his eyes open as soon as the clock stroke eight, but maybe this time, he had made an exception since she was not there to tuck him into his bed.

"Hi! Ms. Ria. How was your trip? I hope it was pleasant?" The young girl asked in return, seemingly very enthusiastic. "Let me check on Edison." She answered as she waited for her to answer her question.

.....

"It was tiring, but the people I met today are very kind and accommodating." She cut her story short, omitting the portion that almost ruined this trip. Luckily, she had some help.

"Don't worry about Edison because he had a great day today. Just worry about how you can relax. They said the beaches there are to die for, so I hope you will take some pictures." The kid rattled on how she could enjoy her vacation.

How could she make them understand that this was not a vacation but a business trip? She could not go out parading in her bikini when she had a job to do. But the thought of frolicking under the sun was indeed tempting.

When was the last time she had a vacation? Easy, never. She believed her parents did take her a couple of times, but she was very young then. After that, she hardly remembered it at all. So, she guessed it did not count.

"I will try." She answered her instead of making excuses. Debating with a teenager was like going against the wind.

Sasha might appear to be listening, but she would not understand half of it as the rest of her words escaped in her other ear. Then, she would insist on what she believed was right.

"Mom!" Sasha shouted over the line. But she heard her mother silence her.

"Not too loud. You will wake up Edison." She heard Lourdes speak mildly to her child.

That went her chance of hearing her baby's voice. Of course, she could not ask them to wake him up. He would become grumpy if they disturbed his sleep.

"I guess I will call again tomorrow." She had no choice but to miss hearing his son's sweet voice. But at least he was not giving them a hard time.

After a few more questions and answers, she finally felt satisfied. She hoped it would also be enough to give her a good night's sleep. She had gotten used to caring for him when she was at home.

They had a routine she followed every morning and night before going to sleep. Now, she had nothing to do as she stared at the four walls of the beautiful and luxurious hotel room.

It was weird.

"A long hot bath." She uttered in the silent room. Yes, the room was quiet, and she was alone.

She might as well enjoy it while it last. When did she have a bath where she did not feel like she was in a marathon? It was a luxury she did not have. Maybe she could also order a snack. She could have a movie marathon before going to sleep.

It would be a welcome change to watch some movies appropriate for her age. It was hard when Edison was around. She could only view some educational movies or something suitable for a child.

“Why not?” Ria told herself as she checked the mini-fridge, stocked with an assortment of drinks. Then, she opened the cabinets. It was like opening a treasure box as her eyes darted at the chocolate bars and the junk foods.

“It is just for today.” She said, suddenly feeling guilty that she was indulging herself too much. When could she possibly do something like this again? Probably never. That was if she decided to quit.

She took one bar and proceeded to the bathroom. She was like a child who received an early Christmas treat as she excitedly prepared her bath and munched on her chocolate, drizzling a few of the aromatic oils she found in the bathroom.

After filling the tub more than halfway, she quickly removed her clothes and emerged her body in the bubbles. The warm water gradually eased her tension. She could feel her muscles relax as the hot temperature seeped through her skin.

“Maybe I should have one installed in my bathroom.” She told herself. After all, if she took the job, she would have an increase in her paycheck. She would have enough to buy things for herself.

She never touched the child support that Edison’s father sent to her account. At least not for her needs. She only took what Edison needed. Then she saved the rest for her son’s future needs.

She never liked using his money, not when it was clear he never believed that he was his son. It was the main reason she wished to work and earn for her and Edison so she could stop asking for his dole-out money.

She wanted to sever all her ties with him. She never wanted her son to know who he was. He was a spineless, heartless prick. He did not deserve to have a son like Edison.

“Stop it.” Why was she even thinking about him? Because you were trying to decide whether you should continue to work.

Her mind was right about him. He was one of her motivations for striving to make a future for herself and her son. That was one factor. But what about her son? How could she balance being a good mother and a career woman?

A few seconds later, her doorbell buzzed. At first, she thought that she might be hallucinating. It was late, and she was a bit sleepy. But it rang again, the second time.

“Wait!” She shouted but realized that the person on the other side of the door might not hear her.

Quickly, she grabbed a robe from the counter and wrapped it around her body. She would dress up but whoever it was behind the door was persistent as another ding echoed inside the room.

However, she had a slight situation. As she was walking and securing the robe around her naked body, she noticed that the robe was far short than what she wanted. It was barely covering her upper thighs.

She tried to pull on her hair, dripping on the carpet and then on her robe as it hiked up with her movement. It was ridiculous. Who would wear a robe like this? Of course, many but not her.

“Wait!” She shouted again by the door, not wanting to hear the bell again. First, she peeked at the peephole, determining the person’s identity on the other side of the panel.

Safety was her number one priority. As a single mother, she had learned how to fend for herself and her child. At least she had secured the doors. Then, she had everything she would need if somebody dared .to enter her apartment.

Surprise! “Zach?” She whispered to herself as she blinked her eyes and peeked again.

She was not expecting to see the man standing before her. What was he doing? She knew his room was just a few doors down the hallway. Still, she wondered what he wanted.

“I am sorry, Ria. I know it is late, but I was wondering if you still want to review the presentation for tomorrow.” He asked when she still had not opened the door. “If you are already tired, we can do it tomorrow.”

She slowly opened the door, finding it rude to talk to him with the door closed. After all, he had been kind to her the entire trip, helping her with her anxiety attack.

She doubted that he would attack her. Suddenly, the incident in her apartment came to mind. She remembered he could not run fast enough when he learned she had a child.

“We can do it now.” She remembered that she suggested that before they met with the clients.

She did not want what happened in their past meeting, where they presented two different views. This time, they had to close this deal without any hitch.

“Aren’t you going to let me inside?” He asked when she had kept the door slightly ajar. Now, she faced another dilemma.

Should she allow him inside her room? It was either here or in his room. It seemed there was no difference in that. Besides, as she had said, she believed she could trust him. After all, they had made a truce.

“Come in.” She opened the door, allowing him entry. But when she saw his eyes rake her body. She realized another mistake. His eyes registered surprise, nothing else. At least, she hoped that was what she read.

“Excuse me. I was in the bath and had to rush out...” She trailed off with her explanation as she rushed back to the bathroom.

Then, she quickly came back out. “I forgot my clothes.” She told him as she pulled her entire suitcase inside the bathroom.

She had no plan to rummage her things in front of him. Moreover, she did not trust the robe she was wearing. She could have a sudden wardrobe malfunction.

The last thing she needed was for him to think she was out to get him. She was not looking for a relationship. She was also not desperate to find her son, a stepfather.

Chapter 1017: On a tailspin

Gerald quietly walked into his apartment, knowing she was already inside, waiting for him. However, he also knew what awaited him once he saw her. In truth, he was getting used to it.

He would not be this late if not for the unexpected visit he had. He intended to have dinner with his other guest. But judging from the time, the meal would probably be cold.

"Haley!" He called into the hallway, but no one answered. Once he reached the living room, he knew why. And just like before, he found her lying on the couch, fast asleep.

She must have dozed off watching a movie while waiting for him to come home. It was her habit to drop by his apartment without notice, but she never demanded his time.

She never texted him asking where he was but waited till he came home to surprise him. He thought he would grow tired of her, and she would find their arrangement bothersome. But somehow, he looked forward to seeing her at his apartment.

"What are you doing to me?" He asked the woman, who had her eyes tightly closed.

He knelt before her, tenderly touching her cheeks with his fingers, wondering what to do with her. Then, he leaned closer until his lips gently touched hers, not to wake her up.

.....

He refused to think she could betray and use him for her father's ambition. He wanted to believe that she was here because she loved him. But did he love her? Was this love that he felt for her?

"Shit!" He silently cursed. He was angry not at her but at the circumstances he faced.

He liked what they had. But how long could they keep this up? Everywhere he looked, someone was trying to outmaneuver him. He could protect himself, but what about her?

Then, he decided to leave her be for a few more minutes. As he had assumed, he walked into the kitchen to find the table set for two. But the meal she had prepared was already cold.

Was she sent to him as punishment for his crimes? Somehow, he realized he had found the woman who had managed to keep him interested. She had all the qualities he never even thought he liked.

But could he marry her because of an arrangement with her father? But if he could be honest with himself, if he did want to marry anyone, it would be her. But would that mean he loved her?

"Are you fucking crazy?" Gerald mumbled as he took the cold meal from the table and started reheating it in the oven. Why was he even considering if he loved Haley?

What did he know about love? He knew his mother loved him, but his father negated that by how he had raised him. He had a brief glimpse of what love could be when he met Ethan, but it was short-lived.

Then, he was back to this darkness, that the only way to survive was never to trust anyone. Haley was the only light left in his dark world, but current events had also tainted that with suspicion.

"Hey! Why did you not wake me up when you arrived?" A soft sleepy voice called out to him. He was just done with the meal and about to complete it with a chilled wine when he turned around and found her walking towards him.

She was indeed stunning, even with her face bare of makeup. She could have been a model with her height or an actress with her looks. She could have any man at her disposal, but she chose to be with him.

"You look so adorable when you are sleeping. It seems a crime to wake you up, especially when you snore." He wrapped her instantly in his arms as she leaned closer to him. Then, he planted one intense kiss on her lips to wake her up.

"I don't snore." She complained when they finally came up for air, punching his chest with her dainty hands.

It did not hurt, but he flinched upon contact. It was not the pain but how he liked the way they acted around each other. There was familiarity, comfort, and easiness. It felt like home to him.

"Ok, you did not snore, but you certainly had a few drools staining my couch." He reacted with slight teasing as he touched her chin with pillow marks as his evidence.

She made his lifeless apartment into a home without him noticing it. It used to be a space he went to take a bath and sleep in when he was in the city. But now, looking at the different things that had changed, it felt like this place had come to life.

"I was tired." She acted defensively, not denying that it might have happened. Finally, they were both laughing while still in each other's arms.

But was it just the place that had changed, or did he? Was this a phase that had him thinking he might have a shot at happiness? But soon enough, he would learn the sad truth that nothing about this was real.

"That is why I already prepared dinner for us. I meant reheated." He quickly corrected his statement, seeing how her eyes changed to complain. "Come on, sit down and let me be at your service."

He guided her back to the table as he served the meal before her. Finally, he took the chilled wine and poured her glass. Then, he came again to another resolution. He had never served another woman in his life, except his mother, when she was still alive.

Did it mean he was also ready for a domesticated life where he could be happy with just one woman? He doubted as his mind reminded him of who he was and his responsibility to the organization.

Again, was he overthinking all of this because of the pressures placed on his shoulder? That could be it. It was nothing else but tension. Once he had worked her out of his system, he could finally focus again on his goal.

"I am pregnant." He heard her. At least, he believed that was what she said.

"What?" He had to ask again because he felt like his entire world suddenly went on a tailspin.

Chapter 1018: Meant to be

"I am pregnant." She knew her initial plan was to have dinner and eased her way into telling him about her condition. But somehow, the words just slipped from her lips without her stopping it.

Haley could not even call it a surprise since she was unsure if he would like it. A surprise was something that you planned meticulously to give to another, but this was unexpected.

“What?” She could hear the shock in his voice. And she believed that it took a lot to make him feel that way.

Gerald was a man who seemed to be always in control of his situation. Nothing seemed to easily faze him, not even a few death threats he received, which was part of his job as a high-profile litigator.

One time, she found an envelope addressed to him at his table. It was partially open, so she took a peek. She had to drop the letter, suddenly afraid of its content.

Then, she confronted him about it, and he assured her that those were idle threats to make him surrender to their demands. It was nothing that she should take seriously, and she believed him. It was part of his life as a good lawyer, defending the innocent.

“I am pregnant. I am going to have your child.” She repeated, using a gentler voice, hoping her situation would finally sink into his mind.

.....

She would not say she did not want to get pregnant. Of course, she wanted to have a baby, especially from a man she loved. But they were not yet at that point in their relationship where they were ready to build a family.

She had yet to say that she loved him and for him to say it back. At this point, they were just in a comfortable relationship where they were at ease with each other’s presence. But things could suddenly change direction, and they could end up separating ways.

“Oh!” It was not the ecstatic and overwhelming response she wanted to hear. But she understood his point of view. She was not, over the moon, thrilled, just like him, when she did the test and found it positive.

But after a while, she realized she wanted this baby, even if it was completely unexpected. Eventually, she sensed what every mother should feel about the growing life inside of her. She had to protect her child.

He could be a part of their child’s life or not. But no matter what happened, she was keeping their baby. She would raise her and fill her with love.

“I am not forcing you to marry me or to take responsibility for this child.” She quickly uttered what she had been rehearsing since she discovered her condition. “But I intend to keep her or him.” She told him before she forgot them.

She believed it was not easy to tell someone about something he never wanted in the first place. She always knew that he might be very attracted to her, but it did not mean he loved her.

And it did not equate that he would want to marry her and start a family. She was also not in a hurry since they were only beginning to fall into this stable relationship. Now, she was rocking it with this explosive news.

“How can you be sure that you are pregnant?” Gerald suddenly asked as he sat down opposite her. The food seemed temporarily forgotten. “I mean to say, have you seen a doctor?”

She could see his eyes were in a great deal of turmoil. What did she expect when she dropped a bomb like that in front of him? She was still waiting for it to explode. Then, what would be his reaction then?

“I only did the test kit, but a woman knows if something is wrong with their body.” She explained to him. She was conclusive about her pregnancy, even without confirmation by a doctor.

“And I also don’t know how I become pregnant.” Answering what she believed, he could not ask directly but what he wanted to know.

She was not expecting that she would conceive with his child. After all, they had been careful. She was on the pill, and he usually used protection, except for a few occasions. It was a very slim chance, almost negligible.

But things happened without a clear explanation as to why. And this was one of those moments. All they could do was face it and the consequences.

She hoped that was how he would see it because the last thing she wanted was for him to feel obligated to take action due to this child. As she had stated to her father, she would not force him to marry her. But she would accept whatever he decided with no hard feelings.

“Does anybody know about your condition?” He suddenly asked, looking a bit concerned.

“I have not told anyone. I wanted you to be the first one to learn about it.” She wondered what was going through his mind at that very minute.

Would he find her news good or bad? Would he want any part in his child’s life? Many questions lingered in her mind as he continued to look more bothered than excited. But she did not want to jump to any conclusions.

“Good.” He seemed relieved. Then he focused his eyes on her, which looked calmer compared to a few seconds ago. “Have you decided what you wish to do with the baby?” He asked. Then, “... our child?” He abruptly corrected himself.

It seemed that he was giving her the option. Was he asking her if she wanted to terminate her pregnancy or something else? Of course, there was only one thing she wanted.

“I will raise our child.” She finally answered him, slightly offended by his question. Or was she overreacting to it? “Let me make myself clear. I am keeping this baby, but you are not under any obligation to marry me.”

“But you can be a part of our child’s life if that is what you wish.” She added for clarification.

She loved him, but it did not mean she would want to trap him in a marriage just because they were expecting a child. As they said, if she loved somebody, set him free. If he stayed, then they were meant to be.

Chapter 1019: The company perks

She woke up slightly disoriented as she looked at the bright light from an unfamiliar window. She stretched her body and felt something different with her pillow and the blanket warming her body.

She blinked her eyes twice, thrice, but the view did not change. She doubted that this was a dream. Then, the memories returned to her gradually as she stared at her beautiful room.

“Good morning!” She mumbled in the air, knowing no one would hear her. She was alone. Her son was not here to wake her up.

Then, the thought of calling her son came to her mind. “What time is it?” She could not help but ask as she stared at the sunshine radiating through the window.

It was so bright that it almost made it difficult for her to stare at it without blinking and partially covering her eyes. It could be midmorning by the look of the sun’s rays.

“Damn!” She abruptly sat up from her comfortable bed, realizing she had overslept. She snatched her phone from the side table and looked at the time. She was not mistaken.

Damn! What did she do?

.....

She ran towards the bathroom to get herself fixed. They had an early breakfast meeting with the other team, and she had slept through that. She wondered if she could still catch up with them.

She remembered that Zach had come by her room last night. They discussed the plan that their boss required for the final negotiation. Their meeting did not take long since they both agreed on almost everything.

“This is your fault.” She chastised her image in the mirror as she applied mild makeup on her face, seeing a trace of an eye bag on the bottom of her eyes.

She should have been relieved and immediately gone to sleep when he left her room early last night. But she had to toss and turn on her bed and end up watching a movie to get him off her mind.

Was she expecting that something would happen? For example, he would say he was sorry for his reaction the other night. Then, he would take her in his arms and kiss her.

She was gravely disappointed because he only came because of the meeting and left as soon as it was over. Nothing about his actions seemed to remind him of that kiss.

“You should stop thinking about him and forget that unfortunate accident.” She pointed at her reflection. “Because that was all it was, an accident.” She repeated the last word. “An accident that he probably regretted.”

She closed her eyes and shoved the memory into the very recesses of her mind. She had to focus because she was wasting valuable time. She was already very late.

She managed what she could do with the short amount of time, putting her hair in a messy tie because there was nothing else she could do at that moment. Then, she quickly dressed up to make herself presentable.

"What now?" She heard the bell ring as she ran out of her bathroom in a hurry to get her things.

She could not help but wonder who it was. It could be her partner who was finally checking on her because she did not attend the meeting. Or it could be hotel staff.

She quickly opened the door to find her first guess to be the correct one, discovering her partner at the other side of her door. He looked different from what she expected to find. He wore casual clothes as if he had not gone to the meeting but was about to go out to the beach.

"Zach!" She greeted, a little out of breath. Because she was running, not because she found him attractive in his black shorts and white-fitting shirt. "How was the meeting? Why did you not wake me up? What is going on?"

She rattled her questions, not giving him time to answer. She was rambling like an idiot because she could feel her heart beating more than it should.

Why was she even nervous upon seeing him? Or was it even fear or something else causing her skin to shiver? It did not make sense, but her mind was nagging at her.

However, it did make perfect sense, but she refused to acknowledge what she felt. Because that would mean she could get hurt. It was clear now that she was attracted to this man, but it seemed he did not feel the same.

"Good morning, Ria." He greeted her without answering any of her questions. Then, he looked at her from the top of her messy hair down to her shoeless toes. She was about to wear her shoes when she was interrupted.

"First, You need to change since you are not dressed appropriately for the occasion. There was a change in plan." He continued after sizing her up. "The clients canceled the meeting this morning. Instead, they wished for us to join them at the beach."

She could only stare at him as if he was some alien giving her instructions. "But I did not pack anything for the beach." The words slipped out of her lips before she could stop herself. Well, she was surprised by the suddenness of the situation.

Suddenly, all their comments about considering this trip like a vacation came crashing down on her mind. Maybe she should have taken them more seriously, making her regret not taking any casual clothes with her.

Before she knew what was happening, he entered her room and grabbed her keycard that was on the side table. Then, he quickly glanced her way before he moved further inside and picked up her shoes on the floor.

"Come on, put on your shoes." He instructed, kneeling before her.

"What are you doing?" She asked him, slightly embarrassed to see him shoving her shoes at her foot. "Stand up."

Suddenly, an elderly couple walked by her door and looked in their direction. They smiled as if they enjoyed the little show, making her more mortified with their situation. She could already imagine in her head what they were thinking.

“Lift your feet so we can go.” He adamantly commanded, ignoring her protest. “We will be late if you keep fighting me on this.”

She could kick him out of her room, but that would sound childish. Nevertheless, how he was behaving toward her was not appropriate either. What was wrong with him?

“How did you know about the change of plans?” She could not help but wonder because she did not recall anything about that last night before he left her room.

“If you bother to check your email, you might have seen the notification.” He informed her, making her remember that she barely looked at her phone except check the time.

Now, she felt guilty that she had not called her son again. She planned to phone him when she woke up, but the meeting had her jumping out of bed and into the bathroom. Soon, calling him was the last thing on her mind.

“Where are we going anyway?” She finally conceded, allowing him to assist her with her shoes.

But relief was the last thing she felt when he stood up and dragged her outside her door, locking it behind her. First, she did not have her phone, and her bag was inside the room. Then, her keycard was inside his pocket, out of her reach.

“Wait!” She shouted as she tried to open her door. “I left my bag and my phone inside.” She complained to him, wanting her card so she could get it.

“That could wait for later.” He looked at his watch as if he was counting the minutes. “As I said, we will be late if we do not hurry.” He repeated as he continued to walk down the hallway with her dangling along.

“Where are we going again?” She asked, still puzzled by his behavior. She tried to pull at her hand, but he firmly held it in his. It was not too tight that it hurt, but it was not loose enough for her to get away.

Or was she pulling enough?

“We are going shopping.” He finally said as they waited for the elevator to open that would take them to the lobby or wherever he was planning to go.

“No, we are not.” But before she could say another word, he pulled her hand and entered the elevator.

She could not do anything as she watched the doors closed on them. First, she needed the clothes, knowing she could not attend the event in her business attire.

But she did not want him to pay for her clothes, thinking she did not have her purse. But what else could she do? She could demand that he should take her back to her room. But she doubted he would oblige.

“Yes, we are. Consider this one of the company perks.” He offered with a wink of his right eye, telling her that the debate was over.

Chapter 1020: Dangerous territory

He could feel his heart thumping hard inside his chest as he finally realized he was still holding her hand. The sensation of her palm against his had sent shockwaves throughout his body.

It made him more and more aware of her presence as the elevators moved downwards. He knew he should let go of her hand since there was no more need for him to do so. But he could not, enjoying it while it lasted.

“Can you let go now?” Ria looked down at their entwined hands, reminding him he was still holding them firmly. “I don’t think I am going anywhere.” Looking at the four metallic walls around them.

Zach wished he had some other reason not to let go of her, but unfortunately, he had none. Regrettably, he had to abide by her wishes and do what she wanted. “Oh! Sorry. I hope I did not hurt you.”

Although he avoided holding her too tightly, he still gripped her firmly, not wanting her to escape his grasp. He still could not understand what forced him to act impulsively, dragging her along. But he could not say he regretted it one bit.

What was it about her that had him obsessing about her? He had tried to forget her, avoiding her after the incident in her apartment. But he could not stop thinking about that kiss.

She had a kid, for fucking sake.

.....

He did not date a woman who already had commitments. It was not in his book. It meant trouble, spelled with a capital T.

“No, you did not. But you could have asked nicely.” She told him as she pulled her hand to her side, tucking it safely away from him.

Yes, he could have, but here he was. He could not even take his eyes off this woman. What was he doing? What was she doing to him? He believed there was nothing special about her.

Indeed, she was beautiful, but he dated much more attractive women than her. So, what was wrong with him? Why did he still want her despite what he had learned about her?

Was he ready to commit himself to this messy situation? Of course not. He was not that responsible. How could he even consider it, even silently in his mind?

“Well, I don’t think you would have come willingly.” He pointed out. “And truthfully, we are running out of time.” That was not a lie. Then, the elevator doors opened,

He ushered her out this time without holding any part of her body, leading her to a clothing shop on the other side of the lobby. He would have accompanied her into a boutique, but it would take them several minutes to get there. At that moment, this small shop was their only option.

“Go on. Pick what you like, and I will pay for it.” He suggested, pointing her to the women’s section of the store. “Don’t worry. I will reimburse it in the company expense.” He told her when he saw her frown at him.

No, he was only helping her out. After all, they were a team. Whatever he felt for her was nothing more than just confusion. Eventually, he would wake up, discovering she meant nothing to him, and then move on.

He was only going through this phase in his young life as he figured out his priorities. After all, since working for this company, many things about him have changed.

"I can pay for my clothes if you just let me get my purse." She protested, not wanting him or the company to buy her anything. "But just give me the receipt, and I will gladly reimburse you the amount." She suggested instead.

That surprised him since most girls he knew would jump at the chance to get a free expensive gift. Was this girl for real? But then again, he remembered where she lived.

Either she was a wealthy heiress, disguising herself as a commoner, or she might have someone else financing her bills. But from the wage they received from their internship, he doubted she could afford a luxurious apartment.

Maybe the father of her child was still in the picture. He had not considered that before since he never saw her with anyone. He only assumed she was single since no one sent her flowers or came by to show interest.

"There is no need to pay it back. It is part of our expense account. If it would make you feel more comfortable, I will buy something for myself to make it even." He offered, but in truth. There was no expense account.

He planned to pay for them with his money. It still baffled him why he was doing this, but he had already said it. He could not back out of it now. He did not want to appear like he was lying, even though he was.

"I still would like to pay." She insisted as she finally found a sundress on a rack that was perfect on a hot day.

But when she went to try it on inside the fitting room, she was shocked by the staggering amount on the price tag. It was just a piece of clothing, but it screamed extravagance.

She never actually bought anything in an expensive boutique. Most of her clothes came from a thrift store. Then, the beautiful and expensive ones were gifts from her few friends.

"Hey, are you done in there?" His voice reverberated outside the small room. "I think you should also try this one." He knocked on her door, waiting for her to open up. "I believe we may go swimming."

She partially pulled the door wide enough to peek at him. Then, she finally saw what he was dangling in his fingertip. It was a pair of red bikini suits that barely covered her private parts.

"I am not wearing that." She answered him, slightly embarrassed that he was picking her undergarments. "And I am not going swimming." She added as she closed the door at him.

Besides, she never learned how to swim. She barely remembered going on vacation or even going to a swimming pool. So, there was no opportunity for her to learn.

But now that she thought about it. Maybe it was time that she changed that. She should plan a vacation or even a swimming lesson for her and Edison.

It would be a nice bonding moment for the two of them. It would be a way of making it up to her son for being away for a long time.

"It might be rude to decline their offer. After all, we are here to please our clients." He argued with her, breaking her reverie. "I would not want you to end up in your underwear because you came unprepared."

She did not bother to change into her original clothes, deciding to buy the sundress. It might be pricy for her taste, but she had no other option. Then, she went out to face the man with his flimsy idea of a swimming suit.

"I think you are right about that, but I am not buying that." She pointed at the skimpy bathing suit.

Instead, she walked back to the swimsuit section and chose a decent one-piece suit that she might be more comfortable wearing if necessary. It was again another expensive piece of clothing, but it was something she could gift herself, remembering her plan.

"I think this will do." She took it out of the rack and checked the size. After careful inspection, she was satisfied with what she had chosen. She mentally calculated the cost of the two clothes she bought and planned to pay for them afterward.

"Aren't you even going to try it? I can tell you if it looks nice on you." He proposed as he gestured for the fitting room. "I promise I have good taste."

"I don't doubt that. I can tell that you are an expert in anything perverted." She turned away from him as she scanned for anything else. But it was the best choice she had.

"Ouch! That hurts. I was merely offering my expertise." He said, but she could tell he was only teasing her. "Are you sure? I think this is way better than that." He lifted the bikini in his hand, arguing his case.

"Then, you wear it." She answered him, taking the suit she had chosen into the counter. She did not need to try it on. She knew it would fit her just fine.

However, she had no choice but to wait for him since he was paying. Then, she was surprised to see that he still held the undergarment in his masculine hand. "I said I am not buying that." She reiterated when he shoved the material together with her clothes.

"And you are not. I am buying it for me." Zach responded with a devilish smile. "Don't you think red is my color?" He continued, acting playfully.

If she did not find him ridiculous, she would have ignored him, but she could not help but smile. What was he planning to do with them? Wear them?

But it was those rare moments that made him more attractive. That boyish grin with his playful banters and silly sense of humor. He was dangerous when he worked on his full charm.

"Maybe after you tried it on, I can tell." She replied, looking at the red bikini and picturing him in it.

It was a thought she did not want to explore as she pictured his body almost naked in her mind. That was dangerous territory, branding it as off-limits.