

Royal Contract 1051

Chapter 1051 Impending death

Darkness!

That covered most of the old playground. During the day, excited kids probably filled this place with their bright smiles and waves of laughter. But on a night like this, it was him, his friend, and some men hiding in the shadows.

Did his friend betray him, or was he unaware of the threat he sensed around them? He had not seen a sign of anyone else, but he could feel it in his gut that they were out there.

"Gerald?" His friend called again, and he finally decided to approach him with extra caution. "I knew that was you. But you still frightened me." His friend clutched into his chest as if he was nervous, but he still displayed a smile on his face as he calmed down.

That was another sign of something amiss as far as he could tell. His friend was not easily spooked unless something was wrong in this picture. Alarming bells were already ringing in his ears, but he still could not point out where the enemies were.

"Mike, what is it?" He finally asked when he was close enough to his friend as his eyes kept scanning the vicinity.

But based on their position, if there were other people out there to get them, they were sitting ducks if they decided to strike. They could cover behind the chairs or the slides, but he doubted that the bullets in his gun would be enough to protect them.

His mind calculated their position, finding the quickest escape route if he just headed for an ambush. But then again, the question remained. Was his friend innocent, or was he part of this plot against him?

"I think someone is setting you up," Mike whispered as if he did not want anybody else to hear him. "But it is not me. I am sorry, man, but I have no choice."

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His words confirmed some of his fears as he pushed his hands underneath his jacket to get his gun. But before he could pull it out, Mike pointed a gun at him.

Even if he could successfully get his gun, Mike would have pulled the trigger before he could fire it at him. It seemed that his friend had exchanged their friendship for a few pieces of silver coins.

"Everyone has a choice, but you choose the wrong side." He knew that even if he died at this spot, his friend had made a mistake by picking the other side.

No one would ever trust a traitor. If he managed to betray him, his enemies would never completely trust him. They would keep him alive as long as he still had used to them, but he would surely die a painful death afterward.

But he guessed his father, Joaquin, was right about one thing. He could never trust anyone, not even his bestfriend. Still, he would want to know what his enemies were planning before he attempted his escape.

“Not this time,” Mike uttered like he was genuinely sorry as he extended his hand and pointed the gun at his head. “You have served your purpose, and now you need to die.” He said, louder this time as if he wanted someone else to hear him.

“Why are you doing this? I made you rich. Enough for you to live comfortably for the rest of your life. I gave you power. What else did you want?” He asked since he did not understand the reason for his betrayal.

Despite his father’s warning, he did not want to believe it. He always gave Mike the benefit of the doubt. He valued his friend that he treated him like a brother.

Therefore, it was still hard to accept that he could treat their friendship like trash and throw it away when he had no more use for it. However, this was not the time for sentiment. He had to think fast, or he would die on this pavement.

“More money, more power,” Mike answered, more agitated than before. He could see that his hand was starting to shake, meaning it could be his opportunity to strike or escape.

“Who is behind all this? I am sure you can tell me since I am dying anyway.” He needed to distract him and rattle him a bit more.

Besides, if he had a chance to save his life from this situation, he would still need to know his enemies.

He had to know who else was on his side and formulate a plan to fight against those who went against him. That was the only way he would survive this situation.

“It doesn’t matter because you would not be going after them when you are already six feet under the ground.” Then, Mike looked at his watch as if he needed to be somewhere else.

“Maybe we can talk about this. I can offer you something bigger.” He still needed to buy a few more minutes.

He already spotted two men scooped down on his left. He wanted to know if there were men on the other side of the courtyard. He needed a route that was clear of his enemies.

He doubted he could return to his car. Nevertheless, he could still find a way to escape this if only he could be lucky to have an opening. But as his eyes glimpsed at the other spot, he noticed a movement in that area.

It seemed his enemies had the entire area covered. He had no way out unless he could make a diversion. He was not giving up. He had to find a way to live.

“I don’t think so. It had been nice to be your friend while it lasted.” Mike used his other hand to salute him like a soldier, honoring his commander. However, his other hand moved while his finger pulled the trigger.

The resonance of the gunshot echoed in the air as his body slightly catapulted backward. He knew the bullet hit him, but where he still had to find out as he felt his body fall to the ground.

Was he dead? He doubted as he heard voices around him. But he could not seem to move. Then, he tried to open his eyes which he did not even realize had closed.

It partly opened, but he hardly saw anyone, just shadows that moved but nothing else. It was so brief that he could not recognize any of the men that had joined his friend to rejoice in his impending death.

Chapter 1052 Back on the street of the living

As his father told him when he first pointed out that he would rule this underground world someday, you would live with a gun in your hand and die with it. His father seemed right about that as he felt the cold metallic piece in his hand.

"I thought you would have cold feet." A deep, baritone voice talked to Mike as more footsteps approached them.

"I was ready to shoot him if you lost your nerve." Another man arrogantly interrupted.

"Is he dead?" One more joined them as they converged around him.

"Of course! He is." Mike's voice confidently answered with a series of laughter. "Do you think I will still let him live after I betrayed him?" That seemed logical, he thought. His friend should guarantee his death.

Because if he did survive this, the first thing he would do would be to hunt his friend down. He would make sure to make his friend suffer before he took his last breath, killing him with his bare hands.

"Go check if he is dead." His friend instructed one of the men.

"I think he is dead." The man said. "Look, he is not breathing." He could still barely hear their conversation as he fought the darkness that seemed to consume him.

That was news to him as he still struggled to move or open his eyes again. But his efforts were futile as his body remained immobile. Then, he concluded one thing.

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After that, he did not understand the rest of the conversation, but he remembered their laughter and the voice of the last man who spoke before he blacked out or probably died.

He was not entirely sure since he had never died before. Anyway, it felt like he was only sleeping as he still heard voices inside his head after a while. But it could be a dream. But did dead people still have active thoughts? How would he know?

Still, he could be dead, whatever that meant. But he remembered that they said the past and the present would flash in his eyes once he was on the brink of death. Was he about to recall everything that had happened to him since he was a child? Was this it?

Then, the thought of her pushed to the forefront of his mind as her image swirled before him. What would happen to Haley? Would she be safe now that he was gone? He hoped so, or else his sacrifice would be in vain.

“Wait! Did I just let myself get killed for her?” No, that was not it. Why would he do that? It did not make sense. His friend betrayed him that was why he died, not because of her.

However, it did finally make a lot of sense. He could not deny it anymore. He loved her. And if death could be the only way he could save her, he would die a million times for her.

And his son. He wanted him so much. He wished to hold him in his arms. But what life would he give him? Not this life. He would not want him to grow up like him. His son would be better off not knowing a father like him.

“I guessed I came here to die. I already knew that it was a trap. Yet, I still pushed through with it.” What a crappy way to die?

He admitted that this was not how a mafia leader should be thinking. But he was a man in love who only wished to protect the woman he loved and their unborn son. That was the difference.

He had worked hard to become the King of this City. Now, he was a speck of dirt on the floor, ready to be thrown away among the garbage. But did he regret it? He guessed not.

At least he believed Haley and his son would be safe away from him and his world. She could either raise his son on her own. Or find a man who would love her and their son and treat him like he was his son.

However, that thought did not feel right to him. Why did he suddenly think that he had made a mistake? Because, in all honesty, he did not want to leave her.

He wanted to be with her and raise their child together. He wished to marry her and build the white picket fence she dreamt of to be their home. He could not wait to be a father to his son when he first heard she was pregnant.

Damn! Was he wrong?

He should not have died.

But how could he change all of this when it was too late? How could he tell her that he loved her and would have married her right then and there? Instead, he left her without telling her that he loved her.

Now, she would live her entire life not knowing how much he wanted to be with her and their son. But it was too late because he already thought using his emotion rather than his head.

Now, he was in this limbo, floating in the darkness. Where was he going? Was there a way to go back? After all, they said miracles happened all the time. Would someone grant him one of those?

“Whoever is out there, maybe you could grant this criminal a second chance in life.” He found himself talking to no one in particular. He was alone. Therefore, he sounded like a lunatic talking to nothing.

He remembered reading something from ancient history and some news articles. How miracles always happened. But could they bring back the dead to life? Could they grant his wish to live again?

Still, he prayed if that was what he was doing. For Haley and his child, he was willing to change. He wanted a second chance to be there for them as her husband and their child's father.

But he doubted that someone would hear his plea. Who would grant him another chance? Who would want a criminal back on the street of the living?

Chapter 1053 A mother's instinct

He could only stare at the waves as her question reverberated in his brain. What was he doing? He had already decided not to mess with a woman with responsibility due to its complication.

But what was he doing now, sitting right next to her? Why was he taking her to his favorite spot? Because what? He dreamt of kissing her and giving her the most romantic experience.

If he wanted to get laid, he had many women lining up at his feet. He did not need to woo her, involving himself in her complicated life. Truthfully, he was not ready for another man's child.

"I guessed caring for a child is far more difficult than having a pet." Zach acknowledged, but deep down, he wanted to kick himself in the ass for that question. Why did he open a can of worms when he had no means of dealing with it?

He even doubted he was ready to have his child. He was just too young and irresponsible for such a responsibility. He still could not see himself as a family man.

But he did wonder how she coped working, at the same time, caring for a child. She seemed too young to have a kid. But from what he had seen, she appeared to manage it just fine.

"I would not know about animals, but having Edison was no piece of cake," Ria answered, but her face did not show any signs of regret.

On the other hand, she seemed to think of his son fondly as he observed the curve of a smile on her lips. She seemed delighted to have him in her life. He could not help but wonder what had happened to the father since he doubted he was still in the picture.

"I am sure you are doing a great job." He commented, not knowing what else to say. But his curiosity seemed to get the best of him as the question spilled out of his mouth before he could filter it. "But where is Edison's father?"

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Still, he could not blindly hate the man without knowing why he was missing from their lives. The father of her child might be dead for all he knew or away for the time being.

He could be judging the unknown man, only to learn that he had a valid reason for his absence. Still, subconsciously, he could not deny he wanted to hear her answer.

"My ex?" She asked as if surprised by his sudden inquiry. "The bastard could not run fast enough when he learned I was pregnant." The bitterness in her voice was evident of her contempt of the man.

"Oh! I am sorry." He expressed, unexpected her reaction. He had never seen her in such a state, but maybe he still had a lot to learn about her.

"Why are you sorry? You are not him. Anyway, I am glad that he is out of our lives. I believe my son is better off not knowing him." This time, she smiled as if she did not care about whoever was the father of her child.

"So, you never asked for child support." Zach unwittingly pried, wanting to know if there was still communication between her and her ex.

He just assumed he was not around anymore since she had never mentioned his name or the man never came by the office to see her. But still, they could have some arrangement even if she hated his guts.

Nevertheless, what kind of man would do such a thing? Did he need to ask, knowing he might be just like him? But no! He refused to believe he could be anything like that man.

He might be scared of the responsibility, but he doubted he would run away from it. If Edison was his son, even if he did not want to marry Ria, he probably could not abandon his flesh and blood.

"I did, but he initially refused to help, denying that Edison is his son. But a friend helped me to demand support." She responded with a sadness that enveloped her face. She looked like she remembered a memory that had caused her so much pain.

"How else do you think I can afford to live in my apartment? My salary is not even enough for Edison's hospital bills." She added as she focused her eyes on the darkness that surrounded them.

That answered his question about her living arrangement. Therefore, the bastard provided them with a home. But he doubted his fatherly obligation ended with that. However, her last statement caught his attention.

"Hospital bills?" He asked, slightly showing some concern.

He could not help but think if his son had a critical medical condition. Suddenly, his curiosity had reached another level, as he wanted to know more.

"I think you don't want to know every gory detail of my life." She suddenly shook her head as if she did not want to share her life anymore. "Besides, my life is not that interesting."

But something clicked in his mind as he looked at her. He could not stop until he found more information about her. After hearing all these things about her, he seemed interested in learning more about her.

"But..." He wanted to beg to disagree with her.

"Hey, I think the mother turtle is moving away." She pointed to the dark shadow that was slowly progressing toward the water.

She interrupted him, standing up and slightly moving away from him. He knew it was her way of telling him the conversation was over. She might have realized that she had shared more than what she intended.

"I think you are right." He also turned in the direction of the mother, who abandoned her kids. But this was different. It was how the mother turtle protected her babies by burying them in the sand away from the predators that might harm them.

Now, he believed he slightly understood more what Ria was trying to do. She was just like the mother turtle, doing her best to protect her child against the people who could hurt him, including him. Call it a mother's instinct.

Chapter 1054 An incredible woman

She did not know what possessed her to share more than she intended when she mentioned his son. Maybe the tension of the entire day and seeing her ex had required her some form of release.

She would admit that talking had helped her. It relieved some of her stress and the burden that was weighing heavily on her shoulders. But she had to stop before she revealed too much. She did not need this man's sympathy or pity.

"Do you still wish to see my surprise?" She could tell it was late, judging by the positioning of the moon up in the sky. "Or, would you rather go back to the hotel?" He questioned.

Although it might be beyond midnight, she did not feel like returning to the hotel, not just yet. She still deemed it unsafe, knowing her ex was not far away.

"We already waited this long. I might as well see what you have been keeping out there." She pointed to the dark path, not even waiting for him to lead the way as she strolled on the coastline, allowing her feet to get wet again.

"Ok! If that is your wish." He walked beside her, quietly gazing at the sandy path. The little light coming from the moon seemed to be enough to guide their way.

"Careful," Zach suddenly warned her, although they were still a few feet away.

He was meticulous, avoiding damaging the freshly dug-up sand, believing other mother turtles might have laid eggs and buried them underneath those nests.

Then, she noticed a few white objects peaking above the sand, believing those were the eggs the mother failed to cover and hide. Immediately, she knelt with him and helped him protect the eggs from predators, fixing the sand to cover it thoroughly.

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"Sometimes, the wildlife team would also build a fence around the nesting area to prevent rodents from digging it up." He explained to her.

"Oh! How many turtles do you think laid their eggs in this part of the beach?" She asked as she tried to strike up another conversation with him.

It was a legitimate question, but she was only avoiding talking about her personal life again. Nonetheless, she could not help but wonder about his life. They had talked much about her but nothing much about him.

Was his life anything as gruesome as hers, or did he grow up in a white picket fence? But she would bet that it was the latter. Nevertheless, no matter how curious she was about him, she could not snoop on his private affairs. She did not want him to misconstrue her curiosity as interest, even if it was the truth.

"I believe it is just the start of the season, so probably just a few." He answered her as they continued their leisurely walk along the coastline.

"Are we still far?" She asked since all she saw were shadows ahead. She could not help but muse if the view might have been more spectacular if they had come here in the morning when there was more light as he first suggested earlier.

"It is just over there. Do you see it?" He pointed at something that seemed to be floating in the water.

As they neared, she realized it was a moderately-sized hut drifting on the tide. It moved as the waves came in and swayed as it returned to the sea. It was still slightly dim, so she could not fully appreciate its beauty.

"Are we planning to board it?" She asked since it was the only logical explanation for coming this far.

"Yes, are you afraid of the water?" His voice seemed to carry a challenge.

"Of course not, as long as you can guarantee that thing will not sink." She responded with a warning.

"Come on. Don't be such a wimp." He teased her as he climbed aboard and waited for her to join him.

"Watch your step." He cautioned her as she followed him. He extended his hands to her and assisted her out of the water.

She looked around the slightly wide floating shed built from what she believed were trustworthy materials. She finally concluded that the place would not suddenly disintegrate into pieces with the slight wind blowing its way.

"I think it is sturdy enough to carry us for this trip." Then, Zach suddenly moved to the side and disengaged a rope holding the hut in its place.

"What are you doing?" She said, watching as their craft sailed away from the coastline. "What trip?"

"Don't worry. It is not far. I assure you, we are safe here." He announced as he moved toward the center of the squarely built platform and turned on the lights.

Suddenly, she could not believe the effects of the various bright lights illuminating her surroundings. It, somewhat, created delightful patterns on the nearby water that made it look magical.

Her eyes finally saw the entirety of the small world around her, finding a picnic mat, some soft cushions, and food at the center of the place. It was indeed a charming surprise.

How did he manage to do all of this in a short time? She could only speculate, remembering the phone calls he had to make with the caretaker.

"What do you think?" He finally asked as he assisted her on one of the cushions and asked her to sit down.

"I am utterly speechless." She had no words to describe it. Nobody had done something this extraordinary for her before, not even her ex, Ryan. "Why?" She did not understand. Why went to all this trouble to surprise her? It just did not make sense to her.

“Because I think you are an extraordinary woman. You are special.” He sat opposite her and grabbed a bottle she did not notice was sitting on an ice bucket on his side. “Do you mind if we make a toast to that?” He handed her a glass of the champagne he poured and raised it to her.

“I think you are making a mistake. I am just plain and ordinary.” She placed the glass on the mat, thinking she did not deserve such praise, as she looked away, avoiding looking at his face.

She refused to believe his words because those could easily mislead her to believe in something that was not there in the first place. She did not want to pretend that he genuinely liked her because she knew it was a lie.

Then, he leaned forward while his fingers held onto her chin, gently forcing her to look into his eyes. “You are an incredible woman. Never doubt that.”

Chapter 1055 Off her system

The whole place was incredible as far as her eyes could see and what he did for her was entirely unexpected. But that was not what surprised her the most as she stared into his eyes, feeling them boring deep into her soul.

“You are probably thinking of another woman.” She responded, slightly uncertain about his compliment. But something in his expression told her that he genuinely believed his words.

What about her? Did she believe that she was an incredible woman?

She did, back in the days, when she had not stumbled into her ex. When all she could focus on was building her future. She thought she had everything figured out when she had no responsibility other than herself.

She was a rock star, earning a full scholarship for her hard work. She had been a consistent honor student, most of the time, topping her class. She would not say she was the most intelligent, but through diligence and perseverance, she had reached success.

But she met Ryan, and everything went spiraling down for her. Allowing him into her life had been the worst mistake that could happen to her life. But also the best, because he gave her an adorable son. She guessed that was the only saving grace in their relationship.

“Yes, you are.” He responded as if assuring her that he was right. “I witness how hard you work to earn your position. I saw the sacrifices you make to do a good job. And I can also tell that you are a good mother.”

Then, a strong wind swirled around them, not enough to rock the boat but more than enough to make its presence known. But the waves remained still, as silent as the night, as they steadily cruised by the bayside.

“I guess I did work hard and tried to be good enough for my son. But incredible is such a strong word. I don’t think that is me.” She said as she felt the wind blowing her hair across her face.

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She was about to fix it when his fingers beat her to it. He slid her hair to the side without breaking their eye contact. She wanted to look away, but he had her trapped in her place.

"Why?" He questioned as his brows frowned at her. "Why do you keep doubting yourself?" He seemed to stare at her like she was a puzzle he could not solve. "Tell me what is wrong, and let me help you."

This time, she finally forced herself to avoid his gaze, shifting her sight to the darkness, staring at nothing but the void that imitated what she felt. Suddenly, she remembered the nights that she could not help but cry.

She loved her son. She believed he should be enough to make her happy. But she could not help but long for more. She wanted what the others had, selfish as it might sound. She yearned for love.

She wanted a family that could fill her heart with happiness. She wished for a husband to share not only her joy but also her pain. And the bonus of warming her bed during those cold nights.

Overall, she wanted more of what she did not have. But dreaming about it was different from getting it. She thought she almost had it but looked at what chasing for love got her.

"You." She finally said, without looking at him. "You are what is wrong with me." She suddenly felt a tear attempting to escape her eyes. "I am not your problem to fix. I don't need your pity."

Why was she even crying? But deep in her heart, she knew why. Because she liked him, but on the other hand, she knew it would never work out for them.

"Me?" She could hear the surprise in his voice. "I only want to help."

"You don't know what you want. And you are not helping." She turned to him and looked him in the eye as a tear finally dropped down her cheeks. "What is all this? Do you even know what you are doing?" She pointed to the whole enchilada.

"I want to surprise you. I guessed I want to make you happy." He tried to explain, still confused by her reaction. "I don't understand. Why are you crying? Why are you mad at me?"

"Tell me." She quickly wiped the wetness in her cheeks. "What is this to you? A date." She finally voiced her thoughts about his invitation to show her around. "Have you dated a woman with a child?"

"No." He replied but quickly changed his answer. "Yes, I guess this is a date, and no. I have not dated a woman with a son. But it..." He confessed, but she interrupted him before he could finish his sentence.

"Well, this is what you should know about me." She paused for a second, needing to breathe as her eyes began to blur, realizing that tears had started to fall from her eyes like a waterfall.

"I don't date because I don't want a man who thinks he could get inside my pants and then leave afterward when the going gets tough." She continued as she tried to keep her emotions under control.

When she saw that he was about to respond, she stopped him. "And it is always tough." She pointed her finger at him. "I don't think you would want to be in my life because you will not last long. So, stop whatever you think you are doing because I will not have my heart broken again."

She finally buried her face in the palm of her hands as she attempted to rein in her emotions. She had no idea why she suddenly had an emotional breakdown. Maybe it was the stress of seeing Ryan again. Or because she was missing her son.

Another factor that she had been ignoring could be. She wanted this man so much but knew she could not have him. But whatever it was, she had to fix herself. She had to get him off her system.

Chapter 1056 Was this love?

Who knew that silence was more deafening as he kept his mouth shut and allowed her some time to finish whatever she was going through? But as he stared at the night sky, he mulled over the words she had said to him.

He guessed she had every right to question his motives. He silently admitted she was correct that he had no idea what he was thinking, bringing her here and setting up this surprise.

Yes, it was a date, no matter what his excuses were. Pure as his intentions might initially be, the result was still the same. He was not even sure if he was ready to go forward.

Then, the last part she said to him. It hit him like an arrow going to the bullseye. It went straight to his heart. Was he ready for a serious commitment because that was what she was asking him?

Did he only want to get laid and get this woman off his system? He doubted, but where did he think this would go? Could he consider marrying her and wanting to be the father of her child?

"I am sorry. I did not mean to get upset." Zach finally heard her speak after she considerably calmed down. "I..."

"No, don't be sorry, Ria. I think you were right about everything you said." He stopped her before she could say more. "And you have every right to be mad at me for always messing up."

Then, he reached for her hand, not caring if she slapped him in the face for daring to touch her. All he knew was that he had to tell her what was going through his thoughts or he might regret missing the chance.

"Do you mind if it is my turn this time to talk?" He carefully watched her reaction, wondering if she would demand that he take her back to the hotel and never speak to her again.

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But she only nodded, agreeing to listen to whatever he had to say. Therefore, he carefully thought about it, not wanting to waste his only opportunity to correct his mistakes.

"Thanks." He said as he took a deep breath, searching for the right words to say to her. "First, let me admit that I am very attracted to you. You are constantly in my mind that it is driving me crazy."

He could see that her eyes registered a slight surprise, but she kept silent as she listened. He thought it would be easy, but the words seemed to elude him as he stared at her tear-stained face.

He grabbed the napkin and lightly dabbed it on her face. Suddenly, the thought of making her cry did not sit well with him. He wanted her happy and smiling, just like earlier when they took care of those eggs.

"But you were right. I did not know your world. I have no idea how complicated your life could be." He moved closer to her as he knelt before her. "Maybe you are right."

"It might be more than I am bargaining for." He held her eyes that appeared astonished as his words started to sink into her mind.

"But the shocking thing is..." He squeezed her hand and placed a single kiss on her knuckle. "I want to understand your world if you let me."

"What are you saying?" She finally reacted to his statement, appearing confused and hopeful.

"I can't promise more than what I can give. But I like you a lot to give you up that easily. I am willing to try this relationship with you and your son." He knew it was a big step and a huge commitment, but he was ready to take it if she was.

"Are you sure you are ready for that?" She sounded skeptical. But could he blame her after what she had been through in her life? "Because you are not only building a relationship with me but also with my son."

He understood what she was saying, and after careful consideration, he believed he knew what he was getting himself into by entering this kind of commitment.

"I think I understand it perfectly." He answered her as he moved closer again, but cautious not to scare her away. "I want to try to make you happy. That includes your son."

He could finally hear her soft breathing as their faces were inches away. Still, he waited for her to push him away and tell him to get lost. But instead, she smiled. Her face seemed to light up as she tilted her head toward him.

He knew it was an enormous responsibility that he was putting on his shoulders. But it was something he was willing to do for a girl like her. He firmly believed that she was an extraordinary person, and he was not ready to lose her.

"But..." He could see it in her eyes. "You are still afraid. Funnily, I am too. But what is life if we don't take a few risks? At least, this time, we are doing it together." He wanted to assure her, but what better way to show her? He guessed he just needed to prove it to her.

He finally closed the gap separating them, allowing his lips to communicate with her supple ones. Then, he wrapped his arms around her body, savoring her warmth against his. He hoped that maybe his action would speak louder than his words.

He was not expecting this relationship would be easy, but he was willing to give it a shot. He would not know if his best would be good enough, but he would try his damndest to make this work.

This time, he knew his life would not be the only one affected if this relationship failed but hers and her son. Maybe he was growing up since he was not only thinking of himself. But he hoped it was enough.

“Are you willing to take a chance with me?” Zach finally asked her when he came up for air.

He could still see a slight hesitation in her eyes as she thought about his question. But when she finally spoke up, he knew she had finally made a decision.

“Yes!” Ria finally answered with a bright smile on her lips.

He did not know that such a simple word could have such an immense impact on his heart. It was like he had won the lottery as he felt overjoyed.

Was this love?

Chapter 1057 The luckiest man on the planet

He woke up with his arms slightly numbed from cradling her head and shoulders. His eyes blinked a few times, wondering if this was a dream. Then, last night’s event rushed into his memory, reminding him of everything that happened.

He stared at her face, noticing how young she looked when she did not seem to carry the world on her shoulders. Technically, she was too young to have a child, but fate did a number on her. Or rather, whoever that guy was.

“Hey, Ria.” He whispered as he attempted to wake her up. But she only stirred a little but did not open her eyes. He let her sleep a little more since he figured it was still barely dawn.

He carefully untangled himself from her body and then fixed the blanket to cover her body. Then, he stood up and stretched his sore muscles while scanning their surrounding, concluding that the sun would rise soon on the horizon.

He cleaned up the slight mess they made, remembering the late snack they shared as they talked about a few things about themselves. But mostly, it was stories about Edison that he could not wait to meet.

“Hey, what time is it?” She asked, making him turn to look at her sleepy face. “You should have woken me up.” She mumbled as she quickly struggled to stand up from the makeshift mat and cushions where they had fallen asleep.

Luckily, he thought of blankets, or they might have been cold from the slightly chilly breeze of the morning dew. But it was not that cold that they would freeze to death. Maybe just enough to catch a cold if they were not careful.

“It is still early but just in time to watch the sunrise.” He pointed at the colorful sky on the east side of the ocean. It was like a kaleidoscope of colors that created a beautiful colorful pattern in the sky.

The bright, colorful shades changed as the sun carefully made its presence known, taking its place as the King for the day. It was enchanting, just like the woman that stood by his side.

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“It is indeed captivating.” Ria could not help but gasp at the magnificence before her. She had seen pictures of sunrise but had never experienced anything like this.

“Do you think Edison will enjoy a place like this?” He asked, slightly surprised by his question but, at the same time, curious about her answer.

He watched her face light up after hearing her son’s name. He noticed that she became lively and excited when they talked about him. Maybe she was right. He still had much to learn about dating a woman with a child.

But was he truly ready for such responsibility, or was he jumping the gun because he was afraid to lose her? But there was no point in questioning his judgment since he could not back out now.

But how hard could this relationship be?

“I think he would like the water.” She commented as she finally turned around to look at him. “Thanks for doing this for me.” She lifted her hand until it rested on his cheek.

She eventually tiptoed to reach his lips, letting him feel her appreciation for all his efforts. It took him a second to respond to her kiss, but he took it as an invitation to deepen it to the next level.

Last night, they barely kissed since they spent more time talking and getting to know more about each other. Truthfully, he hardly said much since she did most of the talking. He learned that just a few glasses of alcohol and her tongue easily let loose.

Then, the tide started to shift, making the water create some waves. A slight wind picked up and blew in their direction. The boat mildly shook, notifying them that it was time to move.

“I think that is our cue to get back.” He reluctantly pulled away from the kiss, enjoying how her lips fit perfectly with his. Sadly, they had no choice.

Although they designed the floating platform to float freely on the water, it still had an engine attached to the rear portion of the craft. The motor would push the vessel back to the coastline.

In a few minutes, he was ushering her down the sandy shore and guiding her back to the main house. He did not exactly plan to sleep on the boat, but it had been a new experience, spending it with her.

“I had a great time, but I am still sorry for the...” She was about to apologize again for her breakdown, but he would not have it.

“Let us just focus on now and having a great time.” He told her, not wanting her to feel guilty for whatever she said. The way he saw it, she only spoke the truth.

Besides, if they were going to make this relationship work, they would need to be honest about each other and tell each other how they feel. Going into a relationship was hard enough, but keeping it was worse.

“Ok.” She finally agreed with an adorable smile. He realized that he loved watching her happy. Therefore, he intended to do that as much as he could.

“Come on. We don’t want the entire hotel staff to form a search party for us because we went missing the entire night.” He jokingly said as they rode back to their hotel.

“What time is our flight back?” She asked, suddenly looking anxious as they traveled on the open road.

He could tell she was slightly nervous from how she held her hands together on her lap. He could only attribute it to their new relationship. Then, she probably was thinking of her son.

He reached out one of his hands and pulled hers into his lips, quickly glancing her way before concentrating back on the road. He wished to reassure her that everything would be ok. Now that they were together.

He could not help but wonder why a man would leave a girl like her. She might not have come from much, but whatever she lacked, she made up for her other incredible qualities.

Suddenly, he felt like he was the luckiest man on the planet.

Chapter 1058 At least not today

"I will be back, Ria." He told her as he stood by her door while she inserted her card key into the keyhole. "Pack up and be ready to leave in twenty minutes."

Immediately, he had his hands pushing her into the door jam when she finally succeeded in opening her room. His lips locked with hers as they continued what they did not finish earlier.

She had never felt more liberated than today. She was on a high, and she never wanted to go down. Being with this man made her feel safe and protected. As if nothing could harm her.

"Yeah, but it is down to fifteen." She jokingly said to him when he finally let go of her.

Then, she watched him walk away before she closed her door. He was only getting his things. Then, they would be heading back home. After that, she had no idea what would happen next.

But like everything else, she had to remind herself that this feeling was temporary. Once the excitement was over, everything would be back to normal. Problems would arise. She doubted if they would survive.

"That is just what life is. Don't expect much, so you don't get your heart torn into pieces." She looked at herself in the mirror, giving herself advice on how to proceed with this relationship.

She knew it was a pessimistic point of view, but she had to prepare herself for the worse. She believed that Zach was a good guy, but he was naive to assume he could handle her situation.

She could already see the future, determining that her new boyfriend would not last long. It was not just the two of them they had to consider in this relationship.

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First, there was her son, Edison. She could not picture Zach taking care of him and taking responsibility for another man's child. Then, would he last long with a child when he could be partying with his friends in a club?

"Give him some credit." Her mind pointed out. Of course, she did. That was why she was giving him a chance to prove her wrong.

Still, there are other things to consider, like what about his family? On her other end, she had nothing to worry about since she was an only child with no living parents.

But he told her briefly about his parents, not enough information. But the fact remained, they were still very much alive. What would they think? She doubted they would open their arms to a woman with a bastard for a son.

There were just too many factors to consider in going through this relationship. And most of them did not seem promising for a girl like her. But anyway, she had promised to give this a shot, but she was not keeping her hopes too high.

"I am just keeping it real." She muttered one last time before turning away from her reflection and gathering her things.

There was not much to pack anyway, so she finished by the time the bell rang. If she was fast, she believed he was faster. She hurriedly strode toward the door, anxious to leave early.

She still wanted to be as far away from this place as soon as possible. There was still the likelihood that she would bump into her ex, which was the last thing she wanted.

"Hi, Ria." A familiar voice greeted her when she opened the door, but it was not the man she had expected to see. On the contrary, it was the one she did not want to stand before her.

She was about to slam the door in his face, but he was quick, jamming his foot before the door could shut close. Then, he pushed the door open, but with his superior strength, she was no match to him.

"That is not a nice way to greet the father of your child." He said as he invited himself inside her room and shut the door.

She had no choice but to step away from him and step backward. She would have run away, but there was no way out except that door or the balcony, which was too high to jump.

"You are not welcome in my room or our lives, Ryan. There is the door, you are free to leave and never come back, or else, I will report you to the authorities and have you arrested." She threatened him, hoping, somewhat, it would work.

But that was naive thinking. A man like Ryan did not respond well to threats. She should know. He was the one who threatened people who crossed his path and not the other way around.

She was lucky she won her case against him before, but she might not be so fortunate the next time. But would she easily give up her fight against him? Of course not. She would fight tooth and nail if she had to for her son.

"Go ahead. Call. But do you think the cops would believe you over my words?" Ryan continued to advance into the room, looking around as if searching for something. "So our son is not here, but it seems you are already on your way out."

He stared at her packed bags in the middle of the room. "Aren't you even going to say goodbye to me and leave me a contact number so I can see my son." He shook his head, looking disappointed at her.

"As I said before, you have no son. Edison is not your son." She hissed at him, angry that he would make such a claim.

“So, his name is Edison. I like that.” Ryan said, but before she knew what he planned, he crossed the small space that separated them and grabbed her by the arms.

“He is not your son.” Suddenly, realizing her mistake. “And let go of me.” She flung her arms, hoping to break free from him. But the more she struggled, the tighter he buried his fingers in her skin.

“Don’t you even miss me? I did. You know what, we can get married so that our son can finally have a complete family.” Ryan stated as his eyes sparkled like it was the best idea.

“You are insane if you think I will ever agree to that.” Her hatred for him fueled a rage inside her as she searched for an opportunity to finally kicked his ass.

“You are certainly driving me crazy. When did you turn to be so hot?” He whispered in her ears when he forced himself closer to her.

Then, when he tried to hug and kiss her, she took it as an opportunity to pull her knees up as forcefully as she could, putting much energy into it until it hit his manhood.

And just like a sack of potatoes, he fell hard on the ground, holding on to his prize possession. “I wish I could do more because you do not deserve to have a child, you asshole.” She shouted at him, leaving him agonizing in pain on the floor as she grabbed her things and locked the door behind her.

Fortunately, Zach was just on time.

She quickly grabbed his arms and led him to the elevators. She did not need him to witness what happened to her room. It was her problem, and she had dealt with it her way. She did not need a man to save the day. At least not today.

Chapter 1059 Nothing else would come first

She barely slept last night after leaving his apartment. She immediately locked herself in her room, not wanting anyone to see her. She could not stop the tears from falling from her eyes, knowing it was over between them.

“He doesn’t love you.” Her mind kept reminding her. She wanted to believe that, but a small portion of her heart still hoped she was mistaken.

A deep part of her wanted to return to his apartment and begged him to reconsider. But what good with it do if he did not love her? And when he did not want to have anything to do with their child.

She would only force him into this relationship that had no future in the very end. It was a lost cause no matter where she looked at it. He would never love her the way she loved him.

He was gone, and she had to find a way to accept it. Then, life should move on for her and her child, even without him. She could already predict it would be hard. But she would do her best.

Even though she still had to get tested, she already felt a new life growing inside her. And she needed to be strong for her baby, even if she could feel her heart shattering into a million pieces.

“Aaahhh!”

She wanted to shout, but she kept her frustration to herself, knowing that stressing herself would not be advisable for the baby. She had already cried enough for her lost love. Now, she had to focus on her child.

She did not want to get up, but she had an appointment with the doctor. She could not neglect that. If she was pregnant, she had to consider her condition, meaning taking care of her unborn child at all costs.

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She quickly took a hot shower, wanting the fatigue from the lack of sleep to dissipate with the water. She did not need the others to notice her condition until she was ready to tell them about her child.

Slowly, she made her way downstairs, avoiding the dining area where she believed her father was taking his breakfast. She did not want any company and the conversation that came with it.

But, "Haley." She heard her father call her when she passed by their living area. She did not expect him to be there. But alas, it was not her lucky day. If she had known, she would have taken the back exit.

"Hi! Dad." She had no choice but to greet back. "I am sorry, but I need to run because I have an early appointment." She was not lying but just omitting some details. Besides, she did not feel like talking to her father.

She noticed her father was entertaining two guests that she did not recognize. But it could be new clients or old friends she had not met before. Whoever it was, she could not ignore them. She had to meet them, even if it was the last thing she wanted to do.

"I am glad that you are up. Come and join us. It would only take a few minutes before you leave." Her father waved to her, insisting she should welcome their guests.

She walked over to them, plastering a fake smile on her face. Then, she politely greeted their unknown visitors. "I want you to meet my only daughter, Haley." She heard her father introduce her to the two men.

The older man was the first to stand and shook her hand. "This is Mr. Don Lorenzo." She heard her father mention his name. Then, the much younger man followed behind, also taking her hand.

"I am Michael Prescott. Mr. Lorenzo's partner." He introduced himself. But instead of shaking her hand, he took it to his lips and mildly grazed her knuckles with a gentle kiss before letting her go. "It is a privilege to meet you, Ms. Haley Rosley. I heard great things about your work."

She could not remember seeing them anywhere, but it seemed they had done some research about her work. She could only conclude that they might be new clients who needed their services.

"It is both nice to meet you." She gracefully answered, forcing another smile on her lips. Then, she looked at her father as if asking permission to leave. "I am sorry, Dad, Mr. Lorenzo, and Mr. Prescott, but my previous engagement prevents me from staying."

She did not want to be rude to their guests, but she was not in the mood to entertain them and their possible questions. Under any other circumstance, she welcomed new clients, but not today.

"Can't you reschedule your appointment for another time?" Her father asked her, silently telling her that it was not a request but a command. "I will need you here since Mr. Lorenzo has some big projects he would like you to work on."

It was what she thought, but as she had decided earlier. Her child was her priority. She was not postponing determining the condition of her pregnancy, but she was not telling her father that.

Instead, "I am sorry, but I already made a promise. I can't break it. But it is nice to meet you both. I am sure that if you set a schedule with my assistant, I will get back to you as soon as I can."

She did not allow her father to bully her into staying even for another second. She could discuss business when they had set an appointment with her secretary, but not today. She had already instructed her assistant not to bother her for the entire day.

"That is ok. Mr. Rosley. I am sure the project could wait until your daughter is available." Mr. Prescott responded with a nod in her direction. "We will see you until then."

Quickly, she excused herself, leaving the three men in the living room, and proceeded to her car. She had to get to the hospital before she missed her appointment. She was already running late.

From now on, she decided that the baby and nothing else would come first.

Chapter 1060 Something horrible

She still had a few minutes to spare when she arrived at the hospital. Luckily, traffic was light today, and she did not encounter many red lights on her way. But she could still be earlier if her father did not stop her.

Now, she waited outside the clinic with the other pregnant patients for her turn. The other couple who went before her were taking some sweet time with the doctor. But that was fine. They must have many questions that need clarification, just like she had.

She could not help but feel alone since two of the other patients had their partners with them. But, at least another was on her own, just like her. She wondered why the other patient was not with anyone, but that was not her concern. Still, it was a good distraction while she waited.

"Ms. Rosley. The doctor will see you now." The woman at the desk called her attention when she saw the couple leave the office with cheerful smiles on their lips.

She quickly made her way inside as she remembered her friend who also recently had her baby. She remembered that her friend and her baby might be going home today.

She mentally noted to drop by their room before going home. She could also use that as a cover-up story as to why she was in the hospital in the first place if somebody would see her.

She was not ashamed of her condition or for having a child without a father. But she would like to reveal her situation when ready, not before. Besides, in the deep recesses of her mind and heart, she still hoped that Gerald would have a change of heart.

"What brought you in here, Ms. Haley?" The woman in her white gown faced her. It was her first instance meeting the doctor, but she heard she was one of the best in her field.

"I think I am pregnant. At least the kit said it was positive." She told the doctor, slightly feeling nervous.

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She could have made a mistake. Did she perform the test correctly? But she used five different test kits. They all gave her the same result. It was positive. She was pregnant.

"The kit is most likely correct. But for us to be on the safe side. I suggest we do a blood test. And we will know more about your condition after we have the result. Is that alright with you?" The doctor asked.

Of course, she would like more concrete proof of her pregnancy and the current condition of her child. But the doctor also checked her physically for any body changes.

"Do you feel any changes in your body?" The doctor asked her all sorts of questions. She answered all of them, hoping that it would help her condition.

"From my observation, I believe you might be pregnant. But we know more after we get the results." The doctor informed her.

She could not wait for the result, but the doctor informed her that it might take a few days before they would know. Unlike the urine test, it took longer to test the blood because they also had to determine a few other things, like her child's health condition.

She did not mind waiting since the doctor assured her that she had not seen anything that would indicate anything was wrong with her pregnancy.

"I hate to ask, but these are just standard questions. Will the father be helping you with this pregnancy?" The doctor asked.

She had been expecting the doctor would ask about the father, but thinking about it and voicing it out loud was not the same. "I..." She could not even say that he was out of the picture.

"I am only asking this because pregnancy is a complicated health condition." The doctor probably noticed her discomfort about the question. "I will suggest that you have a support system that could help you through this pregnancy."

She could understand her concern. She had read that pregnancy was not just giving birth to another life. It was rearing a life in her womb for nine months, guaranteeing that the baby was safe and healthy. But it was also risking her life as well in the process.

Pregnancy could take a tremendous toll on her body, both physically and mentally. Without someone to help her through this condition, she might find it harder to get through the entire nine months.

"I understand." She finally said, without going through any details.

She would try to figure this out. But today, she had to focus on her baby and what was needed. Tomorrow, she would plan for her next steps. At least she had money and friends who would stand by her through this ordeal. She knew she would not be alone even if he had left her.

She left the clinic hopeful and happy. But, of course, she would know more when the results returned. For now, she had to visit her friend. But she wondered if she should inform her or hold on to her secret for just a few more days until she had figured out her plans.

She had walked passed the lobby on her way to the other wing of the hospital when she heard a commotion on the other side. She intended to ignore it when she heard something that did not seem right.

"I need to see my friend." She heard a familiar voice, but that was not what had caught her attention. "Gerald Brown." The man was frantically shouting at the woman behind the information desk. "Somebody called me... He was..." The voice paused, then, "An ambulance brought him here this morning."

Quickly, she moved toward the man, who looked very agitated as he stood before the counter while waiting. On the other hand, she could feel her heartbeat going through the roof with every step she took closer to him.

But she still tried to calm herself down. She had no idea of what was happening here. She could have heard it wrong. But she would find out soon enough as she faced her ex-boyfriend's bestfriend.

"Mike, what is going on here?" She asked as she waited for him to look at her. When their eyes met, something told her that her assumption was correct.

He just confirmed her fear. Something happened to Gerald. Something horrible.