

## Royal Contract 1131

Chapter 1131 To explore other possibilities

The ride home was entertaining as he sang along with the soundtracks on his phone, which he attached to the built-in speaker of his car. As she discovered before, he was indeed a great singer.

He could have a career in the music industry if he did not make it in the business world. He was that good. Besides, he already had that look that would make the fans crazy about him.

Eventually, they had finally reached her apartment, where he parked the car on the street and killed the engine. Then, he turned to face her. "I hope you had a good time, despite..." Zach said, but she did not let him finish as she put her fingers on his lips.

She knew what he was about to say, but that was not an issue with her. "I had a great time," Ria answered him, this time replacing her fingers with her lips.

Soon, what started as an innocent kiss, turned into something more. Hunger and longing consumed both as they sought satisfaction. But, of course, kissing would never be enough as they both returned to their senses and stopped.

"Would you like to join me for coffee?" She knew that drinking was the last thing on her mind, but she did not have the guts to say the words.

She suddenly remembered what Brenda had said to her. She could not make him wait that long, or he might look for it somewhere else. Then, the woman in the restaurant flashed in her mind.

She realized that many were already lining up to be with him. Was she ready to lose him because she could not decide whether she should take it slow or not?

"I love to." Zach excitedly responded, kissing her again, but just a mild one before he exited his car and helped her out.

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She could only guess that he also had the same thing in his mind, seeing how his eyes glittered when she invited him to join her. She could only assume she was not ready to lose him with her ridiculous rules.

Then, he followed her into her apartment. But only to remember that she had a son waiting for her inside with her friend. Tabby texted that they would be hanging out in her apartment after dinner with Sasha and her family.

"Zach," Ria stopped him by the door before she unlocked her apartment. "Do you mind making the coffee? I will just put Edison to sleep." She said, suddenly feeling awkward that he had to make him wait.

She wondered if he would find her situation a turn-off. She had seen how having a kid could make a man change his mind about a relationship, especially if he was not ready to become a family man.

"Ok." He said as he put his hand on her cheeks and stared into her eyes. "I know what I am getting when I enter this relationship. So, you have to stop worrying about what I will think. I am not going away."

He must have noticed her agitation, but she could not help it. The earlier incident reminded her again of who he was and what she was up against, seeing the young single woman who vied for his attention.

Although he did not entertain her for long, it still showed her that many more girls liked that one would probably show up to see if they had a chance with him.

How long could she hold on to a man like him?

“Ok.” But she guessed she had to learn to trust him, or this relationship would be doomed to fail.

She found Tabby sitting in front of the television, sleeping. Her son lay his head on his lap, also fast asleep. It was an adorable sight, but she felt guilty that he had to take care of Edison for her.

Still, she was thankful that she had reunited with an old friend.

Then, Zach excused himself to go to the kitchen and fixed the coffee. He needed something to do anyway while she dealt with Tabby and put Edison in his room.

“Tabby,” She gently tapped him on the shoulder, feeling sorry that she had to wake him up. He looked so tired.

But she knew he would not be comfortable sleeping on her small couch. Suddenly, she remembered Zach had attempted to sleep on her couch and had a sore back. He ended up sleeping in her bed.

“Hey, you are back.” He opened his eyes and tried to straighten up a little. But Edison impeded his movement as he avoided waking up her child. “I hope you two had a great time.” Then, his eyes went over her shoulders.”

“Where is Zach?” He asked, expecting that he was with him.

She guessed that was the norm as she helped move Edison gently out of his lap so he could stretch and stand up. Then, she carried her child, allowing his head to rest on her shoulders.

She realized that he was getting heavier and heavier every day. Soon, carrying him in her arms would be much more difficult. But maybe by that time, he would be a big boy, and being in her arms was the last thing he wanted. She could not help but dread that day.

“He is in the kitchen,” Ria told him as she fixed Edison in a more comfortable position in her arms.

“Do you need help? I can carry Edison to his room.” Tabby offered as he walked closer to her.

“Don’t worry. I can manage.” She politely declined the offer. “Why don’t you help yourself with the coffee Zach is making.” She suggested instead as she moved along the hallway toward Edison’s room.

It would be nice if Zach and Tabby would get along. She knew that she wanted both of them in their lives. So, it would help if they could also become friends.

Besides, she wanted some alone time with her son. He might be sleeping, but she knew he felt her presence. She did not want him to feel neglected now that she was spending more time at work and dividing the rest of her time between him and Zach.

"I love you, sweetheart." She whispered into his ears, hoping even in his subconsciousness, he would hear and feel it in his heart. "No one could take your place in my heart." She said, knowing that no matter what happened, she would love him and Zach equally.

What about if she had another child? She could not discount the possibility since she was still young. And if she continued to have a relationship with Zach, maybe they could build a family.

Would that be nice? She mentally asked Edison. But, of course, his son was too young to understand such matters. She hoped Edison would be open to a new father and other siblings. But she could not see that as a problem.

"Goodnight. See you in the morning." She muttered to him in a soft voice.

Suddenly, she wished she had a voice of an angel, like Zach. Then, she could sing to her son some beautiful lullabies, but she did not have such talent.

She slowly moved away from Edison after turning on the night light. Then, she switched the lights off before leaving the door slightly ajar, just in case Edison woke up in the middle of the night.

Soon, she joined the two in the kitchen, seemingly having a heart-to-heart talk, but when they noticed that she was coming, they seemed to change the topic. Or she only thought that.

But she did not hear their conversation, only saw the expression on their faces. Therefore, they might be discussing anything under the sun or arguing about something insignificant, but both smiled when they turned to her.

"Do you like a cup of coffee?" Zach offered as he took another cup from the shelf.

"I guess I will have one." She said as she joined them and sat beside him, facing Tabby on the opposite side of the counter. "What are you two talking about?" She finally asked, letting her curiosity take the lead.

She did not want to be the only one out of the loop. Probably, it would be nice to talk about something else besides the office, Edison, and the two of them.

"It is just some silly baseball game." Zach was the first to answer before Tabby agreed with him.

She guessed it was a sport she had heard about several times this week at the office since they seemed to have a championship coming up, but she had no idea how the game worked.

"Can you tell me more?" She was genuinely interested since it might be a game that Edison would be interested in the future. "At least I should learn the basic rules of the game." She told them.

"I have a better idea. Why don't I get us tickets to the game? Then, we can all watch, and you can see firsthand how it works." Zach excitedly offered.

"That is a good idea, man. I always wanted to watch a live baseball championship." Tabby seemed to be ecstatic with his suggestion.

She guessed what better way to learn than by experiencing it. Besides, Edison might enjoy it as well. She had never brought him to any sports activity since she never had time for it, and she was afraid it would not be advisable for his health condition.

But now that the doctors assured her that Edison could live a regular life just like the other boys his age. She wanted him to have an opportunity to explore other possibilities, just like what she was doing now with Zach.

#### Chapter 1132 Pent-up desire

Finally, alone at last.

He had been waiting for this moment to be alone with her. He could not contain his excitement and could not wait to have her in his arms again. It might be just a few days, but it felt like a lifetime.

He believed he could not contain his need for her anymore as he grabbed her hand and pulled her into his body. Without a word, he slammed his lips with hers, feeling the need to satisfy his hunger.

Everything else would have to wait.

Soon, he felt her undeniable response to his kiss. She reacted with the same intensity as she pushed her lips against his, then she opened her lips, giving him access to the inside of her mouth.

In a few seconds, their tongues danced to the tango tune, perfectly synchronizing in rhythm. But that was not enough to satisfy their longing for each other.

Eventually, he landed on the couch, pulling her with him. She ended up sitting on his lap, feeling her core, landing on his already stiff member.

“Damn, that feels so good.” He thought, blinking his eyes closed for a second before grabbing the back of her neck to pull her gently closer to him.

He knew he would not last long if he could not control himself around her. He wanted to be gentle, knowing she was not as experienced as him. Besides, he wanted her to enjoy this as much as he loved having her in his arms.

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A few seconds later, his lips traveled to her ears, nibbling and biting, stimulating her desire. “Oh! You are driving me crazy.” He whispered, telling her how much he wanted her.

She rewarded her with a sweet moan that almost made him want to take her at that very moment on the couch. But he had to hold on, understanding that she was not yet ready.

“Uuuuhhhmmm!” She softly whispered in his ears as her hands started exploring his chest.

He believed she was becoming bolder, less shy than before as her hands gripped his shirt and started pulling it out of his body. Then, he bit his lower lips, feeling her fingers touching his nipples.

Maybe, knowing that she had never done this with another man. It was suddenly making him this turned on. Technically, she had sex with a guy, but he believed she had never made love to him.

Because this was making love, there was no other way to describe how he felt about this. He would never consider what they had as nothing but sex because he knew that it was all passion and love.

"I want you too." She finally said, kissing him under his chin and on his shoulders as her fingers continued exploring the rest of his upper torso.

Eventually, he decided to shift position as he picked her up and lay her on the couch. Then, he quickly moved on top of her. But they had to stop as some squeaky toy made that high pitch sound.

"I am sorry. But I don't think we should be doing this in here." She suddenly stood up from the couch.

He almost felt disappointed, thinking it might have ruined the mood, but when she grabbed his hand and dragged her into her room, he knew he might still have a chance.

He guessed she was right. They did not want Edison to accidentally walk on them both naked as they did the deed. How would they explain that to a child without traumatizing him?

As soon as he closed the door, he did not wait to step further into the room as he pulled her again into his arms, pushing her to the wall behind him.

"Take off your clothes." He huskily ordered as he also started unbuckling his pants and hurriedly pulling them down until he was butt naked.

He watched her lift her shirt off her body and rapidly unbutton her pants, but he grew impatient, not waiting for her to finish. He moved forward and bent down until he had his lips wrapped around her breast.

Suddenly, she stopped removing her pants as her hands gradually moved around his neck and shoulder as she supported herself. "What are you doing?" She asked, but he knew it was more rhetorical than an actual question as pleasure registered on her face when he looked up.

"I want you to tell me what you want." He muttered between kissing and sucking her nipples, wondering what sexual fantasies were forming in her head.

She might be shy, but her body was very responsive to his touch and kisses. He loved how she passionately moved her body against him. And the sounds she made were additional stimulation that only increased his desire to make her feel better.

"I don't know." She innocently said as her breathing became uneven. He could feel her pushing her body against him, wanting more of what he was giving her.

"Ok, then," Zach huskily muttered as his arousal increased by the minute. But he knew he had to wait. This moment was not just about him but more about her need. "Tell me if you want this or not."

He allowed his free hand to move downward, skimming along her silky skin until it passed her belly button. He could hear her breathing hitched as he broke the barrier of her underwear, letting his fingers slip through until he reached their first destination.

"Aaaggghhh!" It was just exactly what he wanted to hear from her. It meant that she liked it in not so many words.

“Do you like it?” He asked, wanting to be sure. As he said, this was more for her, more than it was for him.

He increased the speed of her fingers as he stroked her desire, hoping to create a burning sensation that would carry her to her breaking point.

“Yes!” She finally hissed through her lips.

He guessed that was his cue to move to the next level as he pushed her fingers downward until he found the center of her core. His fingers entered her, increasing in their momentum.

“Ooohhh!” She was almost out of control. “Aaaggghhh!” As she moved her body with the rhythm of his fingers.

“Damn, you look so beautiful.” He uttered as he watched her facial expression. He could feel his body burning up each second he looked at her face.

“Please...” She begged him, but she seemed not to know what she wanted.

“Please, what?” He asked, wanting her to be more vocal about her needs.

He wanted her to be more confident about herself. He knew that she had to learn to fight for her right. She had been hiding in her shell, afraid of her past. It was time that she came out of the shadow and became happy.

“Please...” She pleaded with him as she twisted and pushed through his fingers as if needing something more.

“Not until you tell me what you want.” He insisted as he increased the tempo once more.

“Please, take me.” She finally said as she held on to him tightly. “I want you.” She added as she shouted, looking like she was already on cloud nine.

Feeling satisfied, he finally pulled out his hand and carried her to the bed. Then, he helped her remove the rest of her garments. Without waiting for a second longer, he positioned himself between her legs and pushed himself inside her in a one-swift move.

“Damn! That felt so good.” He hissed as he stopped when he was already inside her. “Is that what you want?” He asked her again as he refused to move until she answered.

“Yes!” She uttered in her husky voice. “Yes, I want you so much.” She said as she widened her legs to accommodate him more.

He could tell that if he started moving inside her, it would be over quickly for him. His body was already on the fucking edge, too strung out from wanting her so much that he might burst instantaneously. He just hoped that she was also ready to ignite with him.

“But I need you to lower your voice. We don’t want to wake Edison.” He reminded her as her moans increased its decibel. Then, she appeared to agree with him as she nodded, biting her lips to stop herself from shouting.

So, he began the rhythm of love.

He moved his hips backward, pulling himself out of her, and then pushed forward at a tempo that would satisfy them both. Then, he gradually increased as his need for release intensified.

Soon, he had finally lost control of himself as he thrust in and out of her, wanting only one thing in his mind. "I want you so much to be mine."

Yes, that was true.

He did not want to let her go.

He wanted her all to himself.

"Take me. I am yours." She heard him at the height of her passion as she finally shouted his name.

"Zach, I am yours."

He knew it was his time as he finally released his pent-up desire. "I love you so much, Ria."

Chapter 1133 The more, the merrier

He was not supposed to spend the night, but somehow, he ended up sleeping at her side and waking up, looking at her open eyes. He wondered if this was another one of his dreams as he blinked his eyes.

He could feel his muscles protesting in pain as he stretched his body, but when he looked again at the woman before him, sadly, she was still sleeping. Her eyes were closed, and her breathing was even. It seemed that it was just a figment of his imagination.

He wanted her to wake up so much that he kept imagining she would open her eyes soon. He was not giving up. One of these days, he believed it would happen.

"Good morning, sweetheart! Hope you slept well last night." He still greeted her, even if her eyes were closed, leaning over until his lips reached her forehead.

He realized he might have fallen asleep as he read a story to her last night, seeing the book lying on the floor at the bottom of his seat. It must have dropped from his hand when he dozed off.

He remembered being tired from yesterday's workload, but instead of going home, he thought of visiting her. Going home seemed so lonely without her. Besides, the doctor assured him she was doing much better every day.

Her stats had improved considerably during this last week. Therefore, it would not be improbable that she might finally wake up soon. But, of course, the doctors did not want to promise him anything.

"Hey! David. You're still here. How is my sister?" A familiar voice greeted him as she entered the room.

"So, the rumors were true." She suddenly added.

He turned to her, kissing her on the cheek when she moved to his side. He could see that she was extra cheerful today. That was a good sign that she had rested last night. He had not seen her around, remembering it was her off-duty night.

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“Good morning, Roseann. She slept like a baby. No fuss.” He jokingly said. “By the way, what rumors are we talking about?” He asked as he raised his eyebrows at her while stretching his neck and back, wanting to ease the stiffness he developed by sleeping on the chair next to the bed.

There was a comfortable sofa on the side where he could sleep, but he guessed his body wanted to stay close to her. Still, he did not mind the slight pain. Compared to what Rosella was going through, his was nothing.

“That you did not go home.” She answered him as she checked all the machines attached to her sister. “The nurses are talking about you again.” She remarked. “You are already becoming a celebrity around here.”

“I can’t stop them from talking. But what are they saying now.” David asked, slightly curious.

The first time rumors spread across the hospital about him, they sympathized with him for almost losing his fiancée. Many female nurses were swooning over him since he was a devoted fiancée who would not leave his fiancée’s side. At least, that was how Roseann recounted it.

Although some thought that it would be better if he moved on and gave up on Rosella, including his family. But he would never do that. He could never turn his back on the woman that he loved.

He did not care about what they thought of him. As long as he knew there was hope that Rosella would wake up, he would be here, waiting for her. He would never leave her side unless she left him first.

“These are from the good guys.” She answered him. “They think you are the sweetest and most admirable man they have ever seen. How they would kill to have a man like you by their side.”

He was flattered, but his heart already belonged only to one woman. He guessed he would give up everything to be with Rosella again. He would even give up his life if that meant a second chance for Rosella to live.

“My sister is lucky to have a man like you.” She continued as she moved to the other side and touched her face. “At least she looks better today.” She commented. “She must have enjoyed the book you read to her last night.”

“Sleeping Beauty...” She gazed at the title cover. “How befitting.” She frowned, probably wondering what he was doing with a children’s book. “But where did you get that?” She asked.

Of course, the book was not his. And it was not exactly a child’s book. It was a rewrite of the Sleeping Beauty story, adapted to the modern world. But it was still based on the classic tale of a Princess cursed to sleep for eternity unless a Prince who loved her would kiss her on the lips and wake her up again.

“Do you know the patient two doors down the corridor?” He asked, pointing to the left hallway. “The girl named Cherry.” At least, that was what he remembered.

“Oh yeah! Cherry.” Roseann’s face turned somber as she said the girl’s name. “Why? What about her?” She asked, looking curious.

It was the sweetest story, not the book but the young girl who gave him the book.



"She came by last night, knocked on the door, and asked how Rosella is doing?" He told her, recounting to Roseann last night's event.

The young girl showed up at the door a few minutes after he arrived at the hospital and in Rosella's room. She asked if she could sit with her. She was bored since she had been in the hospital for more than a week.

Her mother had to run an errand and had stepped out for a few hours. Now, she was under the care of the nurses, but everyone was busy. She was bored.

But from how he saw it, she also seemed afraid to be alone. But he did not mind the company. He intended to work until he got tired and went home, but having someone else to talk to, seemed interesting too.

"I heard that she was in a car accident and until now has not woken up," Cherry told him what she heard the nurses were saying.

He guessed he had heard all of them from Roseann. "Yes, what about you? Why are you here?" He did some prying too.

"Fortunately, I am not old enough yet to drive. But sadly, I have the big C. Therefore, I don't know if I will ever reach the legal limit to get my driver's license." She jokingly said, but he could hear the sadness in her voice, even if she smiled.

"The big C?" David asked the young girl, having no clue what she was talking about as he stared into her youthful face.

"Cancer. I have Leukemia, a form of Cancer in the blood." She explained to him.

"I am sorry to hear that." Of course, he had heard of Cancer, but he had never dealt with someone who had one.

It was sad to see such a young kid dealt with a terrible card in life. But he hoped that she would bounce back from this and recover. Miracles sometimes did come true. He was also hoping for one.

"Don't be. You did not give it to me." She shook her head as if tired of talking of her sickness. "Anyway, I did not come here to talk about me. What is your story?" She suddenly asked.

Somehow, he felt comfortable telling this young girl how he met Rosella and how she did not give up on him. Now, it was his turn not to give up on her. Maybe he was trying to give her hope or something.

"Wow! That was a lovely story." She dreamily said. "I dream of finding my own Prince Charming someday." Holding the palm of her hands into her chest. "Wait! I will be back."

She rushed out of the room as if she had forgotten something.

Then, she returned after several minutes with a book in her hand. "I just finished reading this. Maybe you would like to read it to her."

She handed him the book, a romance novel. He had never read a book in that genre before, but since he had nothing else to do, he tried to read the first lines.

"Keep going." She encouraged him. "I know she would like that." Cherry insisted before she moved toward the door. "I am returning to my room before someone notices I am gone. I will drop by tomorrow, and you will tell me more about your love story." She promised, but then she was out of his sight.

"Cherry left this, and I ended up reading it last night until I fell asleep. I just woke up a while ago." He explained to Roseann how he ended up with the book.

"Cherry is such a sweet girl. Unfortunately, her case is getting worse. The doctors keep her here for observation, hoping they could do more." Roseann told her. "But I am glad that you met her. She needs a friend at the moment."

"I am also glad that she dropped by last night. I enjoyed talking to her. She said she might come by again tonight. Maybe you should join us when you have time." He told her.

"That is a great idea. Maybe we can play some card game." Roseann suggested. "But first, you need to go home, eat and shower. You stink." She teased him.

"I think she is right. And did I hear card game? Can you count me in?" One of the nurses in charge of Rosella's care interjected.

"No. I don't." David countered, but he still tried to smell his armpit. "I don't stink." He protested, making them all laugh at his defensive action. But he still needed to go home and do what Roseann said.

Still, he believed Rosella's room would need some laughter and more people around. He could feel in his gut that she was close. She just needed a few more encouragement.

She needed to hear what she was missing, so she would finally wake up. She needed to listen to their voices and laughter, thinking the more, the merrier.

Chapter 1134 Another startling revelation

She woke up panting, but at least not screaming this time. She remembered a few nights she had horrible dreams, picturing her father with his goons of monsters killing Gerald.

They were not monsters but the two associates of her father. But she believed they might be the devil themselves. Nevertheless, today, she had a wonderful but tiring dream.

In her dream, she was running happily with Gerald and their son. She did not see Gerald's face but assumed he was that man. But her son was a replica of his father. His features were the younger version of the man she loved.

"I hope you look like your father," Haley whispered as her fingers made a circular pattern on her belly.

Although she had not seen the results of her test yet, they would not know the sex of her son in a couple of months. However, it seemed her consciousness had already decided that she would have a boy.

But whether it was a boy or a girl, she believed she would love their child the same. Even though Gerald never said love, she knew that deep inside, he loved her.

And she conceived their child out of love.

Then, she felt the grumbling of her stomach. "I guess you are hungry." She mumbled, slipping out of bed and preparing for the day. She could see that it was still early, judging from the sun's rays coming from her window. She hurried, wanting to catch Imelda still cooking their breakfast. She already learned a lot from her, not only cooking but also cleaning and doing the laundry. If she had to live in exile and away from her father's prying eyes, she had to maintain a low profile.

That means no more luxurious housing and maids to do all her chores. Then, she had to find a job that her father would not pick up on his radar. But to accomplish all this, she needed Mike's help again.

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"Hi, Imelda." She greeted the woman that was busy working in the kitchen, but her eyes scanned the rest of the place, looking for her friend. "Have you seen Mike?" She finally asked when she did not see a glimpse of his shadow.

She looked beyond the window, but he was still out of sight. She noticed earlier when she passed the living room that his car key was on the side table where he usually left it unless he had other cars that he used to go out.

"I saw him earlier in the garden," Imelda told her that Mike loved to work with his hands. She also learned he would lift dirt and toil on the land to break a sweat rather than go to the gym to work out.

"Did he already have his breakfast?" Haley asked the older woman as she stood from the stool and strode near the window.

"Nope. Mike went out early today. He said he had things to do." Imelda informed her.

"I think I will visit the garden and check if he is hungry so we can have breakfast together." She told her. Then, she strode to the back door, but not before grabbing a tasty toasted bread. She was starving and could not wait for later.

She leisurely walked along the pathway. She only explored the garden nearby the house but could see the entire estate was massive. She noticed two security men by the gates, which she believed was nothing out of the ordinary in a house this big.

At least, it was not the same in their house, where her father seemed to have an army of men. Now, she understood his reason. It appeared that her father was living a double life that she did not know.

"Mike..." She called out once in the garden but found no one there until the gardener showed up behind a large bush.

He slightly frightened her, but she quickly recovered, remembering seeing him before. He was not a bad-looking man, but the large scar on his face somehow made her feel uneasy.

Then, she recalled that he was working with Imelda's husband in tending to the garden. Imelda said that the scar was due to some accident. But he was a good man. If Mike trusted him to work in his home, she guessed she had nothing to fear from him.

"I am sorry, Miss." The man in a gardener's uniform, carrying a spade and pale in his two hands, spoke to her. "But Sir Mike is not here." He shrugged his shoulder when she asked whether he knew where he went.

She looked at the large area covering the place and debated whether to explore it. But the man could be anywhere. Suddenly, she could not help but wonder if Mike owned this entire land. The house alone was huge for a single man.

She decided to return to the house and asked Imelda if she knew where Mike had gone. She was starving and would also like to discuss a few things with him before he rode off somewhere again.

"If Mike is not in the garden, he is somewhere he did not want us to find." The woman said to her, making her raise her brow in question.

Judging from the size of this place, it could be anywhere. So, Imelda was right. It would be hard to look for him if he did not want anyone to find him. Still, would that stop her from asking questions? She did not think so.

"You said you have been working for Mike for a long time. Do you know if he bought this place or inherited it from his parents?" She asked as she took a bite of the delicious egg benedict placed in front of her.

"Did I say that? Sorry but sometimes my English could be wrong. I said I worked for this place for a long time. But Mr. Mike doesn't own this place as far as I know. Mr. Gerald did." Imelda told her.

She had to check her brain, wondering if she had heard her correctly. Did she say that Gerald owned this place, not Mike? She was not expecting that. It was another startling revelation.

#### Chapter 1135 Detective skills

She looked at the other woman, slightly shocked by her statement. It was like something was wrong with her mind as the words kept repeating in her foggy brain but failing to process them until it finally clicked.

"What?" She looked at Imelda with wide eyes, surprised by her revelation. She did not know that Gerald was this filthy rich. "Wait, Gerald owned this place." She clarified, still unable to comprehend the possibility.

She was practically living with the man but had no idea who she had been sleeping with for months. She knew he had a successful career and was wealthy enough to live luxuriously. But not this.

They might be out of the city limits, but a place like this would be worth millions. And she was not looking at a small piece of land. She would know its value since she had worked with top real estate agents for years.

"Si." The woman suddenly answered her in Spanish, which was her native language. "Well, I know Mr. Joaquin owned it before until Mr. Gerald inherited it from him when the old man died." She continued to explain.

Her curiosity had just gone on the roof as she realized that she had been living under Gerald's roof after all this time, and she never knew about it. Why did Mike keep that from her?

She guessed that would go up to the top of her list of questions that needed answers once she saw him.

"I did not know that Gerald owned this house." She mumbled, still baffled by her discovery. It would seem she barely knew the man that she loved. What else was he hiding from her?

She could only guess that there might be more. Remembering her father, she had been living with him her entire life, yet she had no clue what he did under her nose.

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Then, what did she know about Gerald's parents? Nothing. All he said was that they were dead. His mother died while he was still young, while his father not so long ago. But he never supplied the rest of the story.

"I believe he owned many, not just this place. He has another bigger house on the other side of this estate." Imelda added, proudly telling her how Gerald's father acquired massive wealth when he was alive.

At least what she heard since she barely knew the father of Gerald. But Imelda insisted that Gerald was a hard-working man. She had served him for years since she started working in this place.

But now, she had to serve Mike, who took over Gerald's property. "Since Gerald died, Mr. Mike took care of the estate. He also took care of our salaries." She continued with her story.

She wanted to know more. She had several more questions running through her mind. She was glad that Imelda was forthcoming with answers.

"And where is that other house?" She persisted as she felt the desperation to know more. It seemed that everyone had left her in the dark, learning that people around her had kept secrets this big from her.

"It is just right over that side." She pointed to the north perimeter of the estate, just beyond the massive fence.

She followed the direction of the woman's fingers. But she could barely see the perimeter fence since massive trees and other structures covered most of that other side.

"Imelda..." They heard a voice that made them look at the backdoor. "Can I speak with you for a minute?" Mario, her husband, asked her to come outside. "Excuse us, Ms. Haley." The gardener who managed the lawn and garden said as he opened the door for his wife to follow.

She could hear a partial argument that was going on outside. She guessed Mario did not like that Imelda was sharing too much information with her.

"Just shut your loud mouth before Sir Mike hears you blabbering stories." Haley heard Imelda's husband chastise her.

She could not blame Mario. They were not from around here. They might not even be green card holders, for all she knew. The last thing they needed was to get into a difficult situation.

She guessed if she wanted to know more. She had to do it herself. She did not wish Imelda to get in trouble. She already helped her. That should be more than enough detail for now.

But what would she find out if she kept digging? Would she like what she would learn from her snooping around? Probably not. She told herself, mentally preparing herself for the worse.

"But it is better to know than to live a lie." She thought to herself. She had to know what Mike was keeping from her. Why had he not mentioned that this was Gerald's property?

"I will probably take my breakfast upstairs." She told Imelda, who was coming back inside.

"I am sorry about what my husband said, but he was right. I think I am talking too much." Imelda excused herself and returned to her work.

"That is ok, Imelda. Don't worry. I will never say that I heard any of this from you." Haley promised.

She grabbed the fresh juice the older woman had prepared and the rest of her breakfast. She did not want to disturb Imelda anymore from her task. And she also had given up on Mike joining her. He was probably busy doing something else.

She quickly transferred to her room. But instead of eating, she looked outside her window and even went out of the balcony, hoping to get a glimpse of the property on the north side.

Unfortunately, her room was on the south, meaning she couldn't see the other side unless she went on the roof. Giving up, she returned to her room and sat on the table.

"Something is not adding up." She mentally tried to piece the information she gathered. Still, she was coming short.

She grabbed a bite of her remaining food, determined to finish it before deciding what to do next. She knew she could not wait and sit in her room. She had to do something.

After breakfast, she took a quick shower and wore some comfortable clothes. It was sunny outside, so she opted for a pair of denim pants and a plain shirt, tying her hair in a tight ponytail so it would not get blown by the wind.

"Now, what?" She asked herself as she moved toward the door. Looking at the time, she knew Imelda might have left by now.

So, the only person remaining in the mansion was her. Usually, at this time, she would go around the house and find something to preoccupy her mind. But honestly, it was driving her crazy.

On the other hand, outside, she knew two guards had always guarded the gates, but she had not seen any patrolling the perimeter. The only people she saw circling the area were Mario and his assistant.

That left her with an opportunity to explore the rest of the property. She believed it would kill two birds with one stone. She could see what the rest of this place had to offer. At the same time, it would kill her boredom.

Besides, she always wanted to test her detective skills.

Chapter 1136 Ready to move on to the next

He was on his way home even though all he would like was to stay with her for the rest of his life. Was he making hasty decisions? No, because he had never been sure of his plans.

For the first time in his young life, he had been thinking clearly about what he wanted for his future. Not only for his career but his personal life. It was as bright and evident as the sun shining above him. He wanted a family.

"I love you so much, Ria."

He remembered declaring his love for her last night after their passionate lovemaking. He might have said it during the heat of his desire, but he meant every word of it.

He finally believed that he discovered love most unexpectedly with an incredible woman that he wished to be the mother of his children. Yes, he was ready to build a family with her.

Unfortunately, she did not say it back to him. Instead, "Thank you, Zach, for everything." She said after she had come down from the clouds.

But he was not worried about her reaction. He knew she needed time to adjust to their situation. Besides, she was not only thinking of herself but also her son.

He knew that her past had scarred her heart, but he was willing to do everything to heal her wounds and make her whole again. He would not stop until he had proven she could trust him.

Now, he had to get home to shower and do some errands. But he promised he would return to have dinner with Ria and Edison and spend the night. He could only wish that he could stay with them for good. But he was willing to wait until she was ready.

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"That would be perfect." He thought as he imagined himself living with her as his wife and Edison as their firstborn. But he intended to add more.

He parked his car at his designated parking lot and rode the elevator to his penthouse suite.

But as soon as he entered his apartment, he knew something was wrong as he heard music playing in the background. Someone else was inside his apartment at the very minute.

He might have an idea who it might be, but he could already guess he would not like it. He moved toward the other side of the living and turned the music player off.

He was about to march upstairs when she suddenly appeared coming from the kitchen, carrying a bottle of wine and two empty glasses. "Hey, stranger. Where have you been?" She asked as she moved toward the living room, putting down the glasses and champagne in her hands.

"What is the meaning of this?" He asked, staring at his unexpected visitor. "What are you doing here, Blaire?" As his eyes scanned the robe she wore. It was his.

And from previous experience, he would suspect she was here to seduce him again with her manipulative ways. She had already broken his heart, so he was not about to fall for the same trap again.

After seeing her last night, he should have expected that she would do something like this. He suddenly regretted not changing his locks and informing the management that they should not let her into his apartment.

"I told you. I miss you, Zach." Blaire stated, unaffected by his cold demeanor toward her. "Come on, join me."

She sloppily sat on the couch, allowing the robe to hitch up, giving him a preview of what she was offering him. Then, she poured the wine into the glasses.

"You remember that we are over, right? So, you don't get to come and go in my apartment as you please." Zach coolly said to her, not appreciating her presence in his private space.

"I still remember that. But I thought that since we are still friends, we should reconnect. Come on, drink with me, and let us celebrate your new love. Tell me all about her." Blaire patted the seat beside her as she raised the glass to him.

"Blaire..." He was about to tell her to leave, but she cut him off.

He would be a hypocrite if he said he wanted to have any involvement with her again, even friendship. But he guessed he did not hate her anymore, although she deserved it.

After meeting Ria, he did not care about what Blaire did. He was over her and ready to move on with the woman he truly loved. He was committed to starting a life with her.

"Don't tell me that you still hate me that much for leaving you." She looked regretful. "I already said sorry so many times. When will you ever forgive me." She drank the red alcohol in her glass and finished with several gulps before putting it down.

She was about to drink the other glass when he stopped her, grabbed the wine from her, and put it on the table. He did not want her to get wasted in his apartment.

"I don't hate you, Blaire. Not anymore." He looked into her eyes, hoping they could finally move on with their lives separately. "But after what happened to us, I don't think we can even be friends."

He could honestly say that Ria helped him to understand what true love means. Therefore, he could safely say he was happy with his current situation. He did not want anything to ruin that.

"You don't mean that, Zach. You know I love you." She spoke in denial as she stood from the couch and grabbed onto his shirt.

Without wasting a few seconds, she had her lips on his, catching him off guard. She swiftly untied her robe and was naked before him. It happened fast as she pushed him onto the couch.

In instinct, his hand moved to stabilize himself, holding onto her body as they both fell into the soft cushion. She winded up straddling him, with her lips moving on his lips, along his jaw and neck area as she tried to elicit a reaction from him.

But he was not falling for her seduction. It would not work on him anymore. At this very moment, he only wanted one person. Unfortunately, that was not her.



“Stop it, Blaire.” He responded as he gently pushed her off his body, holding onto her arms at a safe distance. “Don’t disgrace yourself by doing this. I don’t love you anymore.”

“But I still love you, Zach. I can’t live without you.” She persisted as she pushed her body against his arms and hugged him tightly. “I am sure we can fix whatever I did. I am willing to change for you.”

He waited for that to come out of her mouth when he was heartbroken. But now, he did not need her empty promises. He found something better, so much better than her.

He stood up, pulling her to her feet. Then, he grabbed the robe and wrapped it around her body. “Please, Blaire, get dressed and leave my apartment and my life for good.”

He did not want to be rude, but he could not tolerate her behavior. She could not keep showing up, thinking that it was ok. He had to stop this before it became a problem for him and Ria.

He was through with this chapter of his life. He was ready to move on to the next.

Chapter 1137 Sounded like paradise

She sneaked out at the backdoor by the kitchen, not wanting anyone else to see her. Anyway, if anyone noticed, she would say she was exploring the garden. Or come up with something more convincing.

Nevertheless, she intended to be as stealthy as possible, wanting to determine if Mike was hiding something else from her. She already knew that he had neglected to tell her about this property.

Whatever he was keeping from her, she would find it. She was tired of being the last one to know. But she would be careful, not wanting any harm to her child. Besides, she doubted that Mike was as dangerous as her father.

He might be a womanizer, but he was no criminal. Was he?

“Nah!” She thought to herself, shoving the idea away as she pretended to walk along the gardens wondering if anyone was around.

But when she noticed the coast was clear, she had not seen any movement from her position. She quickly dashed toward the north side, wondering what she would find there.

She could hardly see anything as thick, shady trees covered most of that area. Then, two structures seemed to block her line of sight. It could be a storage area or something, but she could not see the inside since the doors and windows were closed.

It was still a long walk toward the perimeter wall, but she was determined to see what was on the other side. It could be nothing. The other house could be miles away from the fence.

She did not have the chance to ask Imelda since her husband interrupted them. But it was not stopping her from seeing for herself. But as she closed in on the first structure, she stopped, feeling her heartbeat escalating to a higher degree.

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Of course, she was nervous.

"Come on, don't chicken out now." She challenged herself as she forced her legs to make another step.

She had no intention of entering the house but to go around it. She wanted to see the other estate that Gerald owned. Why would they need all this space?

But as she stood facing the tall fence, she only felt disappointed. It was a high wall, just like the others she had seen around the area. The only things she saw on the other side were the branches and leaves of more trees that littered the other side of the estate.

She concluded that the other mansion might not be visible from this side of the fence. What was she expecting? She could waltz into the other side and demand an explanation from Mike. Was he even there in the first place?

"Damn!" She was even afraid of her shadow as she accidentally stepped on a stick and was startled by its sudden cracking noise.

Immediately, she turned around and was about to return to the mansion when she felt someone else's footsteps behind her. But she felt relieved when she heard a familiar voice.

"Haley, wait up." He said as she heard him closer to her side. "What are you doing here?" He asked as he walked along her side.

"I was bored inside the house, so I decided to walk and ended up here." She explained, hoping that was a good enough excuse. "Anyway, where did you come from?" She looked behind her, wondering if he was in that building this entire time.

She hoped that by diverting the attention away from her, he would stop suspecting anything was wrong. But from the look of things, he seemed to have no clue about her intentions.

"I was checking some things." He did not elaborate on his whereabouts. "I am sorry if I failed to join you for breakfast." He added as they continued to the house.

"That is ok. But I wish to talk to you if you have time." She decided to use the opportunity to discuss her plans. She might not have time again later.

"We can do it now." He offered as they entered the house from the other side that would lead to his private office.

They walked to the hallway until he opened the door to the room and ushered her inside. It was not her first time in this area of the house, but now, she wondered if it was his office or Gerald's.

She scanned the room for any signs or hints indicating ownership, but most of its content was what she would usually find in a room like this. Nothing seemed to belong to Gerald.

But remembering her boyfriend, he was not the typical man who liked to leave memorabilia in his place. His apartment barely had anything that indicated he lived there. He did not even have pictures of his family or himself.

"Please sit down and tell me what you have in mind." Mike offered as he took the other seat beside her.

She contemplated whether she should ask him about the house. But that would make him suspicious that she had been snooping around. Maybe she could wait till he supplied that information voluntarily.

In the meantime, she had to deal with matters that needed her immediate attention, like the future. She guessed that was more important than knowing the rest of Gerald's secrets.

"I know you are trying to help us because of Gerald, but I don't want to continue to be a burden to you." Haley shifted in her seat until she faced him. "So, I am wondering if you can help me create a new identity for us." She referred to her and the growing child in her belly.

"I am also thinking about how we..." Then, he stopped. "I can help you with your situation. I also noticed that I can't keep you a prisoner in this house." Mike finished.

She noticed how he changed his pronoun, but it could be just a mistake on his part, not wanting to make a big deal out of it. Instead, she focused on the part where he understood her dilemma.

"So, what can you suggest?" She asked, determining that staying in this house for much longer was not an option for her.

She was about to lose her mind if she could not find some form of normalcy in her daily routine. She needed her personal space, a job, anything as long as she could talk to other people.

"What about living on a tropical island in the meantime." He offered as he tapped his feet on the floor, waiting for her answer. "Just while I sort things out for you? You can supervise the remodeling of a private resort owned by a friend."

It sounded like a good idea. "But this is just temporary?" She asked, clarifying his plans.

"Yes, just until we find a more permanent solution. This way, you will be far from your father, and you can take care of your baby without thinking of all the problems you left behind here." He continued, sounding more and more convincing.

"I assure you that the place is fantastic for you and your pregnancy. And besides, I will have an excuse to take my much-needed vacation on the beach." He relaxingly sighed.

He put his hands on the back of his neck and reclined on the chair as he closed his eyes. He appeared like he was already sunbathing under the glare of the sun.

It seemed nice as she imagined it in her mind. It sounded like paradise.

#### Chapter 1138 Inescapable past

Her eyes darted across the room, looking at her son, who had been cranky since he woke up this morning. He seemed to throw his toys around, looking like he was in a terrible mood.

She left the laundry on the table, leaving them unfolded to attend to her son. She quickly picked up the toys he threw on the floor and returned them to the box.

"Hey, buddy!" Ria immediately called his attention. Then, she knelt before her son, who appeared frustrated and sad.

She could not help but smile a little as she stared at his small but handsome face. Somehow, she saw how she felt in his expression. She also missed Zach, and they barely separated for a few hours.

"Look at what I found, Edison." She showed him one of his favorite cars that she found under the chair, attempting to distract him.

Usually, it worked, but he ignored her and continued sulking on the floor. "Do you want some ice cream? She tried again, hoping that would cheer him up. "I can call Sasha, and the three of us could go down the block."

Sometimes, bribery also worked with Edison, but there were just those few times that he could be stubborn. She guessed he got that from his father's genes.

But it did not matter if he had a few features of his father. She loved Edison because he was her son, too. And if he grew up looking like his father, she would still guarantee that Edison would be a better man than his father was.

"I want Zachy." He told her, looking very disappointed that he woke up without him. "He promised to play ball."

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Since Zach showed him a game in baseball, Edison would not stop talking about it. Zach ended up promising him that they would play. But of course, he had to buy the toy first.

But the boy was impatient as he waited for Zach to return. But she was not expecting Zach until later that afternoon. So, she had to find a way to entertain her son while Zach had not arrived.

"I know, baby. I want him too. But let us watch a movie while we wait for Zach to return." She turned the television on, putting the channel on a child-friendly show.

Eventually, she managed to coax her son to cooperate with little more encouragement. Parenthood was not easy. Since she never had a parent as a role model, she had to rely on instinct and what she learned during the years.

She could only hope she was doing the right thing for her child. The last thing she wanted was for her to ruin his future because she did not raise him right. Or she made a mistake in her decisions.

"Do you still want that ice cream?" She asked as she finished folding the clean clothes scattered on the table.

He seemed to change his mood as he nodded in her direction while laughing at whatever was happening on the screen. Then, he ignored her again, jumping up and down on the couch, forgetting his tantrums earlier.

She quickly called Sasha. So she could buy the ice cream while the young girl looked after him for a few minutes while she was gone. It only took Sasha a few minutes to come to the apartment.

Soon, she was picking the two kid's favorite flavors. She scanned the choices, hoping to pick one for herself, wanting something cool and refreshing. Sometimes, she liked to experience the things she missed out on when she was young.

"Ms. Ria. I think you should try this." The girl selling the delicious cold treat pointed to a new flavor.

Of course, she would like to try something different. Then, she quickly strolled back to her apartment while licking her four-season ice cream composed of four assorted tropical fruit flavor creams.

She did not like to leave the two kids alone for a long time. Although Sasha babysat for her, her mother usually assisted her. The kids were never on their own.

"Sasha, Edison..." She called out as soon as she entered the room, carrying the cup of ice cream she bought for the two to share in one hand while holding her unfinished cone in the other.

"Mama..." She heard Edison shout, but as she turned to look at them, her eyes widened in shock. She almost lost her balance, but the cone in her hand landed on the floor with a splat.

"Ms. Ria, you have a visitor." Sasha's words confirmed what she feared. He was not just her imagination. He was present in her living room, talking to her son.

Sasha moved closer to her. "He just arrived a few minutes before you. I said you are not here, but he insisted on waiting. I was about to call my mother, but I am glad you are here now."

Ria could see the child's agitation. She could not blame her. This man was a stranger and should not be inside her home. "That is ok. I know him." She was not about to frighten the child further by telling her who he was.

"Mama..." Then, Edison interrupted them, tagging on her pants. She momentarily looked down at her son, taking her eyes away from the man that seemed comfortable sitting on her couch.

"Yes, Edison." She answered, giving him her attention. But her eyes still darted back and forth at her unwelcome guest.

"You throw... ice cream..." He pointed at the melting cold delight on her floor. "Ayan..." He pointed to the man. "...gave toy car." Edison showed her the new shiny metallic toy in his hands.

"That is great. But I bought you ice cream." She lifted her hand with the cups she bought for the kids. "Why don't you eat this in the kitchen?" She instructed Sasha, who took the bag in her hand. "Go with Sasha while I talk to my guest."

She watched the two kids happily move over to the kitchen. At least they did not look traumatized by his sudden appearance. He could only hope that he did not say anything to them, especially to her son.

Still, she could not tolerate his behavior. He could not show up in their lives like this and disrupt their peace. He lost his right to be with his son when he signed those papers.

It would appear she did not have to confirm who was investigating her and her child. It seemed that he had already found them. It gave her no option but to face her inescapable past.

Chapter 1139 Over family dinner

Finally, he breathed a sigh of relief when his ex-girlfriend left his apartment without a fuss. The last thing he wanted was another commotion, controversy, scandal, and drama.

At that moment, he just wanted to shower, pack up an overnight bag, and finish his errands. Then leave his apartment and return to Ria and her son. The more he was away from them, the more he realized that he could not live without them.

He was about to leave his apartment, remembering he had to stop by a sports shop when he heard the doorbell ring. He was not expecting any visitor, but he hoped it was not Blaire changing her mind.

“Wait!” He loudly shouted, dropping his bag on the side of the couch, and went to check the door. He was surprised to see who was behind it.

“Mom.” He greeted first. “Dad. What are you doing here?” He asked, suddenly face-to-face with his folks.

The last time he talked to his father was when he sentenced him to work for Alex. After that, his father refused to see him. He used to be close to his mother, but after the Blaire incident, he tried to avoid her.

“We are in the vicinity, so we thought of checking if you are home.” His mother answered. “Aren’t you going to invite us inside?”

It was the first time his parents bothered visiting him in his apartment. Usually, they summoned him to go home if they needed something from him. Therefore, he was not used to seeing them around in his place.

“Of course, come in.” He opened the door wider, allowing his parents entry to his domain.

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His mother scanned his apartment, probably scrutinizing his taste. But his father would not be bothered as he went straight to the couch and sat like he owned the place.

“Do you like something to drink?” He knew his father would like a fine whiskey.

“No, maybe next time.” His father declined as he leaned on the backrest and crossed his legs.

“We are not staying long.” Her mother simultaneously answered. Her mother followed his father but sat on the long couch as she patted the seat beside her, indicating that he should join them.

But he also noticed that her mother was unsatisfied with what she had seen. It was a sign that she disagreed with his living condition.

Although he had an expensive apartment, it was still subpar to his mother’s taste. It was not the best. And his mother only wanted the best for his only son.

“So, what brought you here?” He finally asked, wanting to get through this unexpected meeting as soon as possible.

Besides, he had another appointment. He was supposed to meet with Tabby in an hour. He wished to discuss Ria’s situation with him. He wanted to know who was looking for Ria, especially if she and her son were in danger.

And why?

Although he already speculated that it might be her ex-boyfriend wanting to cause trouble. However, he would guarantee that the scumbag would not get near Ria and Edison again. Not if he could help it.

"We are here to see how you are doing. It has been a while since you last came home." Her mother replied, looking displeased with his choices of furniture. It was a bachelor's pad. Of course, his mother would not like it.

But it was true.

Since he broke it off with Blaire, he never bothered to go home and visit. He had stayed in his apartment, not this one, but his previous one, doing everything he could to forget her.

It was the reason he ended up working for Marcus and Alex in the first place. He had been drinking with his friends, doing shitty things, and asking for trouble. His life had been a mess until he met Ria.

As far as he was concerned, she saved him.

"I have been busy. If you remember, you force me to work for Alex." He sarcastically responded. But he guessed he should be thankful to his father. Or, he would not have met Ria in the first place.

"Of course, I remember, and I am so proud of you, my son." His father, Senator John Andrews, interjected. "You seem to be doing a great job."

He had never seen or heard his father talk to him in such a manner. Usually, he was disappointed and furious with his failures but never praised him for his hard work. Maybe this time, he finally did something right.

"I am just trying to clean up my act. I know this last year has been rough. But I am doing much better now." He admitted, glad he could finally talk to his parents again, especially his father. He always wanted to make him proud.

"I recently spoke to Alex, and he highly praised your performance." His father continued. "He said that you are almost through with your work there. He offered you a job, but you declined to take it."

He was not expecting that he would perform well in business. His father had raised him to become a politician. Although there were similarities, there was still a massive difference between the two.

"I don't think I want to continue working for him. But I am already looking for other opportunities." Zach answered his father.

Since meeting Ria, all he could think about was fixing his life and making a future for them. The family that he intended to build with her at the center. He had already made some plans, nothing concrete, but he was getting there.

"That is great." His father nodded his approval. "Maybe we can talk more about those plans of yours." He offered.

"I love that." He enthusiastically answered his father, knowing he could use the support of his father.

"We are having dinner later. Why don't you join us?" Her mother suggested. "We will love it if you will be there." Her mother seemed to plead with him.

He thought about it, thinking that he was supposed to have dinner with Ria and Eddie tonight. But he also needed his father's support for the plan he had in mind.

"Ok. I will be there." He finally made a decision, thinking this was for Ria and Edison.

His parents finally said their goodbyes, expecting to see him tonight. He suddenly wondered if it would be the perfect timing to introduce Ria to his folks over family dinner.

Chapter 1140 One dinner, not a date

She stared at the man that sat on her couch like he owned the place. Technically, she used his money to buy this apartment, but it still did not give him the right to come and invade her home.

She had kept her part of the bargain and stayed out of his life. She believed he should do the same. So, he had no legal claim to be the father of her child.

"What are you doing here, Ryan?" Ria finally asked when the kids were safely out of the room and out of earshot. "I already told you I never want to see your face again."

She made sure to lower her voice, not wanting the kids to hear their conversation and alarm them. The last thing she wanted was for Edison to hear that this man was his father because he was just the sperm donor.

"Visiting my son," Ryan proudly said, as if he did not care if the children in the other room heard them. "And that is not how you should welcome your future husband."

"But don't worry. I did not tell my son that I am his father." Ryan appeared proud of himself. "Not yet. I want you to introduce me to him." He suggested.

Suddenly, she regretted letting the kids stay. She should have asked Sasha to take Edison to their apartment. At least they would be far from the toxicity of this man.

She hoped she could speak with Ryan civilly, but she should have known better. There was no sense in talking to him, believing he was delusional. He had not changed. He was still the immature man that left her when she was pregnant with his son.

"I have no intention of introducing you to my son." She quickly reacted to his statement. "I think you should leave before I call the cops." She resorted to threatening him, knowing that politely asking would never work.

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However, he only made himself more comfortable in his seat, putting on that charming smile that had made her fall for him before, but fortunately, she had learned her lesson not to commit the same mistake again.

"Go on. Let us involve the cops in this." He took out his phone. "Maybe we should also call the press. I bet the media would have a field day when they learned that I have a son."



She had no idea if he was bluffing. But the last thing she wanted for his son was the attention of the press. She did not wish their peaceful existence bombarded by the nosy people who thought they had the right to another person's privacy.

"Should I call them now?" Ryan started dialing on his phone, but when she did not respond. "I thought so." He added, putting his phone back in his pocket. Then, he stood up and strode toward her.

She knew she should walk away, but she was also afraid of the consequence of what he was capable of doing. She knew he could, without a doubt, destroy her life and her son.

"I don't want any trouble. My son and I are already doing well without you. We don't need you anymore in our lives." She begged him, hoping he would stop this foolishness of wanting to marry and build a family with her.

She believed he was the last thing her son needed, a father that was not good enough. Besides, she also did not want him anymore. She was naive, foolish, and young when she thought she loved him.

But most recently, she learned the true meaning of love. Yes, she failed to say it to Zach last night, but she felt it in every fiber of her being. She loved Zach, and Ryan's presence now only confirmed it.

"But I need you. I need my son." He said as his fingers caressed her cheeks.

But she had to look away, flinching against his touch, knowing that he disgusted her. But she kept her position, not wanting to let him see how his presence brought fear into her heart.

"No, that is not true. You only think that now, but eventually, you will remember that Edison and I were the mistake you made in the past. That you are better off without us." Ria tried to convince him, using all her efforts to talk some sense to him.

"That is not true." He countered as he forced her face to look at him. "My mistake was listening to my father." He added as he stared into her eyes. "For letting him dictate my life and signing those damn papers."

She was not expecting to hear that from him. She always thought he alone had decided to leave her and their child. Nevertheless, she could do nothing about it anymore. It was already too late for them, anyway.

In her opinion, he could only blame himself for his decisions. He should have fought for her and her son back then. But now, he lost them because of his cowardness.

"I have regretted losing you, blaming myself for my stupidity." He continued. "Please, find it in your heart to forgive me. I still want to be part of your life and our son."

She wished it was that simple to forgive and forget what he did, but it was not. Maybe, leaving her was forgivable. But for him to turn his back on their child, who was fighting for his life. That was a different story. In her book, that was inexcusable.

And she would never forget that she almost lost Edison because of him. Fortunately, people like Miss Dani and Sir Alex helped desperate people like her. They provided the assistance she needed to save her son and turn her life around.

"I am sorry." She responded. "But it will take more than a lifetime for me to accept your apology." She finally pulled away from his touch, putting a distance between them.

Still, she feared she might anger him again, just like the last time she had turned him down. She prepared herself for his possible outburst, knowing he had a short temper.

But surprisingly, he stepped back. "I understand." He seemed to accept her decision with grace, which was odd. "But I am not giving up. If you need time, I will give it to you. I will beg for your forgiveness, even if it takes me a lifetime."

Still, she could not help but be skeptical as she looked into his eyes. It was not easy to believe that a man like him could change. But was it impossible?

"You don't have to do that. I suggest that you go on with your life. Find another woman to love and build a family with her. I think it will be the best for all of us." She still insisted, knowing she did not want anything to do with him.

"I can understand why you would feel that way. I only have myself to blame. But if you give me another chance, I will be a better man for you and my son." Ryan calmly promised, looking genuinely remorseful.

"Ryan, I think you are just wasting your time on me. I am not going to change my mind. Your chance has passed. It is time that we go on our separate ways." She did not want to give him more reason to continue with his fantasy that they could still become a family.

"No. I will not give up until you give me one more chance." He demanded this time. "Have dinner with me tonight in a public restaurant. Let me prove to you that I can still be the man of your dreams."

But she already had the man of her dreams. And they were having dinner tonight. She did not see the point of going out with Ryan because she already knew what she wanted in a man, and that was not him.

She could already discern that Ryan would never measure up to Zach, who was everything she ever wanted in a man. And the fact that she already loved Zach with her whole heart.

"I think it would be a mistake if..." But Ryan cut her off before she could reject his proposal.

"Think about it." He pulled something from his pocket, a piece of paper. Then, he handed it to her. "As I said, I only ask for one chance. If after tonight, you still feel the same. Then, I will disappear from your lives forever."

He left the card in her hands as he turned to leave. But when he reached the door, he turned to look at her one last time. "Call me. I will wait for you tonight." Then, he was out the door.

She did not expect that he would leave without scandalizing the house. But should she believe a word he said? Should she consider going out with him tonight? No. Her mind insisted, warning her that it was a terrible idea.

She decided that was the end of it. She had already answered her question as she walked to the kitchen and joined the two kids, who seemed unfazed by what happened in the other room as they laughed at whatever Sasha was showing Edison on her phone.

“Did you leave something for me?” She asked, remembering that she was unable to finish her cone. It was still a mess that she had to clean later.

“Sorry, Mama,” Edison said as Sasha showed her the empty container.

“That is ok.” She tapped Edison on the shoulder, assuring him that everything was fine.

But was she telling the truth? Did she have the situation under control? Or was she merely buying them time until the next bomb exploded in her face? Or should she finally stop this nonsense by giving in to his proposal?

It was just one dinner, not a date, right? What could be the worse that could happen in a public place? Still, her gut said it was a bad idea, deciding to reject it again.