

Royal Contract 581

Chapter 581: End up in a pile of carnage

"That is what I am talking about." Rick expressed in his loud voice, clapping his hands as soon as the cars passed the finish line.

He started congratulating the team, who had performed well with their individual task. If not for their tremendous effort, the race would not have run smoothly.

Still, they had more things to work on. Rick still spotted areas where they needed to tighten the screws and grease some parts. It would help them in the actual race eventually. If they wanted to win by a significant margin.

"Good job, Rick. You are still the best." One of the pit crew said as they patted each shoulder before another one of them said the same.

"You all did well." Rick complimented the entire team, giving them the praise they deserved. It was the boost they needed for the next rounds.

Everyone was overjoyed by the win. It was a chance once again to get back to the final event. Last year, they almost had it, but an unexpected mishap happened.

Nobody blamed anybody, but it caused them the championship. This time, they would work harder and fix the problems to clutch the title.

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"Oh, here comes our Champ!" Gian shouted as the car approached them after it had gone another lap.

As it neared and slowed down on their location, everyone started clapping and cheering, waiting to congratulate the man of the hour.

Instead of going out, he only waved at everyone but did not get out or did not seem to have any plan of stepping out of his car. He spoke on his mike, and Rick nodded his head in agreement.

"Guys, we can celebrate later. Lance still had something to do." The man in charge chastised the men and women to stand down and return to their position.

"Ms. Harlowe, if you want your chance to talk to him. Now is the time." Rick gestured for her to enter the passenger seat as he opened it for her.

It was what Lance had told him on the headset. He was just a messenger and nothing more. But he could not help but smile at the fate of the reporter.

He could not wait for the end of their interview. The prince would surely give her the ride of her life that she would never forget. He believed this would be exciting to watch.

"What?" Eida exclaimed, a little bit surprised, not expecting the interview would take place inside his car.

However, she would oblige his request if he felt more comfortable talking to her in the tiny space. She did not mind since it would give her some privacy compared to just talking to him on the side of the tracks with all the noises as their backdrop.

Moreover, she badly wanted the interview from him. Therefore, she would do anything to get it. Even if she had to do what he was asking as long as reasonable.

"Well, either get inside the car or go home," Rick said as he held the door for her.

The rest of the crew and even Gian were silent as they observed their exchange. The prince stayed inside his car without saying anything else.

"Then, I guess I have no choice but to get in." She smiled at the big man as she entered the small space.

She noticed it was cramped inside with all the metals and the belts attached to the seat as she tried to make herself comfortable. There was little space for her legs, not that she would need much anyway. At least she could stretch it a bit.

She looked around, curious about the inside of the car, but there was nothing much to see. It was all reinforced metals and not much room for anything else but the engine probably, she thought.

"I think you should buckle up." Lance finally spoke for the first time and turned to look her way. "That is if you want to live."

Then, Rick closed the door shut from the outside. He had to make sure that the doors would not dislodge while the car was cruising at high speed.

"What are you doing?" Eida asked as she turned around to see Rick waving goodbye to her. Then, the engine revved up in a loud and noisy way.

She was caught unaware as everything happened too fast. She did not expect that the car would suddenly come to life, and the next thing she knew, it was starting to speed up on the tracks.

She quickly grabbed the seat belt on the side and tried to figure out how to lock it. It was a bit more complicated than what she had in her sports car.

"Need any help," Lance turned to her, checking her status.

He could see her struggling with the buckle. It was made differently, and the locking mechanism was designed to withstand tremendous pressure compared to an ordinary car.

Although he was speeding up, they were still at a comfortable speed that he could easily manage. Besides, he could drive this car even with his eyes closed, figuratively speaking.

"I got this." She was not letting a damn seat belt beat her, she thought to herself as she finally nailed the locks. She checked again, and she was secured in her seat. "Told you." She said proudly. "Now, put your eyes fixed on the road."

Eventually, her eyes also focused on the view outside the front window. Then, she turned to her side mirror, noticing the slowly fading people left behind on the pit.

“Good.” He responded, picking up speed as they approached the curved. “Well, ask your questions away,” Lance said in a louder tone so she could hear him over the roaring engine.

Usually, ordinary drivers would slow down when there was a turn, but not him. He liked to speed it up a little bit more before drifting his car, creating a burning tire sensation in its wake.

He expected that she would not mind that kind of speed since she also drove a fast car. Therefore on his next lap, he picked up the phase, increasing the velocity of the metallic monster.

“Now?” She was a little bit disoriented. She was not expecting that they would conduct the interview while the car was in constant speeding motion.

She thought that he was just giving her a tour. Letting her get an idea of what it was like to be in a race car. Although she was a bit surprised at first, it was quickly replaced by the thrill of going beyond what she was able to do.

However, she was not intimidated at all by his tactics. If he thought that he could avoid her questions by putting her in a speeding car, then he was in for a treat.

“It is a good time as any. Fire away because by the time we are through with five laps, well, the interview is over. I still have other prior commitments.” Lance informed her as she looked at him with a gaping mouth, not foreseeing his plans.

He quickly glanced at her, wondering what she might be thinking, but he was not disappointed as her eyes turned blazing hot with fury. Her surprise was replaced by her anger.

He smiled as he returned his vision on the road ahead. They were about to make a turn again, and he had to concentrate, not wanting them to end up in a pile of carnage.

Chapter 582: Great white whale

“If you think you can scare me away from demanding what you personally promised me, then you have something else coming your way.” She almost shouted at him in her rage, but she did not.

She only raised her voice a few octaves so that he could hear her. She could not help it when it was clear that he was not taking her seriously. Putting her in this ridiculous situation was a perfect example.

She quickly thought of her story and the questions she had prepared. She was not allowing distractions to deter her from her task, not when she could help it.

“I have no such intentions to do such things.” He said in a loud voice. “I doubt that anything could scare you.” He mumbled the last part, clearly fascinated with the female reporter.

He did not lie to her. He believed she was the kind of woman who did not easily get spooked by just anything. However, he was tremendously curious about her persistence, tolerance, and limitations.

What would she do for a story? What would it take for her to give up? What else would she sacrifice to get to the bottom of the truth? Would she compromise her morals for fame?

“Well, I heard that.” She commented, not letting him get away with anything. “Well, it would take more than your little stunt to drive me away from this story.” She confirmed his statement.

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She tried to find a more comfortable position, holding her hand onto something every time the car swerved from side to side. She was not afraid, just not prepared for the unexpected movement that the vehicle made.

On the contrary, she was actually enjoying the thrill of the ride. She found herself wanting to try her hand on the wheels. She wanted to test her limits on how far she could go and how fast she could drive such a machine.

"I am glad. Then, you will not mind if I pick up a notch." He stated, adjusting the engine for the next gear as he stepped on the clutch and then on the gas again.

Now, it would seem that she would go beyond his expectations. If his assessment was correct, she was actually enjoying the experience of riding at top speed. She did not seem fazed at all.

Most would be experiencing nausea and dizziness at this speed, but she seemed to be doing alright so far. However, if he pushed to another level, she might finally give up.

After all, that was for the experts only. Sometimes, professional drivers also had bad days and could not stand such tremendous pressure. He opted not to put her in such a risky move.

"Go ahead." She challenged him as adrenaline rushed to her system. She could feel her heart thumping, accelerating with the drumming of the engine.

It was indeed faster than what her car could do, but she still could manage it somehow. Now, she had more appreciation for what a race car driver could do.

It must be a pure talent to possess such high concentration on the road ahead. An ordinary spectator would not realize the tremendous strain driving a car this fast could put on a body unless they experienced it themselves.

If she was not used to driving fast, her heart might have exploded at the tension it was subjected to. She could feel every nerve ending of her body on heightened alert. The experience was extraordinary.

"So, let me hear your questions while I show you a glimpse of my life in the fast lane." He told her loudly but in a friendlier tone, giving her a megawatt smile as he glanced her way.

He was fascinated with her the first moment he caught her eavesdropping in their meeting. However, he had never dated a reporter before or anyone in the media business.

He had bad experiences with a few press people in the past, and he never trusted them that much after that. Although he might be seen in many news items or magazines, he never really liked doing interviews unless it was an official statement.

Most of his pictures scattered in the media were taken by paparazzi who never knew their limitations. Media people who had no care about the privacy of other people.

"Well, let me see." Suddenly her mind went blank after his one hundred eighty degree shift in attitude. Then, her eyes fixated on that smile that had her captivated from the start.

She had sworn to lay low from men after her experience with Nick. She decided to focus on her career at the moment. Strike while the iron was hot. And her stories were selling like hotcakes in the market worldwide.

She could not lose her focus on her goal, not just because a man smiled at her. She quickly snapped out of her trance and rummaged her brain for all the questions she had meticulously prepared for since she had discovered the abduction.

"First, when are you setting up my interview with the couple?" She asked him since it was the first that popped up in her mind.

Out of respect, she did not want to ambush them by showing up unannounced. However, she really wanted to personally interview the couple about their experience in the hand of their abductors.

Many speculations were buzzing around, but the couple remained silent about the case. There was no gag order from the court. Therefore, she believed that talking to her should not be a problem.

"Give them some time. What happened to my cousin and his wife could not be easy to talk about?" Lance looked at her quickly with a plea for understanding.

Many already tried to ambush them for interviews, but luckily, their security was able to stop them. Both had already released an official statement, but the press wanted more.

There was an instant that a paparazzi even pretended to be a pro bono client and tried to get an appointment with Dani. Fortunately, it was discovered after a thorough review of his case.

"Fine. I am not a monster. I understand what the couple is going through. But make sure to set it up when both are ready to talk." She commented, agreeing with his statement, but she still believed they should talk to her.

Maybe somehow, she could also help them with the case. She was still continuing her investigation in all things about Nick. Personal life and business. Past and present.

She believed Nick should be brought down from his peg and pay for his crimes, not just for her but for all the women he had used and abused and what he did with the couple.

"Thank you." He mouthed as he turned to her quickly. She might not hear the sound, but she understood him, loud and clear, even beyond the noise caused by the roaring engine.

"But I still have several more questions to ask you." She pointed out, not wanting him to think that the interview was over. "Do you think Nick acted alone on this, or did he have some accomplice?"

She would chase this story even at the end of the earth or the deepest ocean. If that was what it would take to make Nick answerable to justice.

In truth, this story was not just about helping the couple or making a story. Nick had become her personal vendetta. He had become her great white whale.

Chapter 583: Acting on the attraction

He could see her determination to get the information about the case from him. But he was not authorized to disseminate any facts regarding the investigation.

He did promise her exclusivity in the story because of her contribution to the rescue mission. But as of now, he could not say more as the investigation was still in progress.

He could not compromise the current lawsuit by leaking it to the press. It might damage their defense and ruin everything that they were working on.

“Can I just tell you my personal opinion on this? Off the record, of course. I could not comment on the case or the opinions of the victims.” He offered since it was the best he could give her.

As much as he wanted to help her with her story, at the moment, his lips were sealed. He could only share his opinion and nothing else. He wished he would respect that for now.

“I guess I can settle for that,” Eida responded loudly. She suddenly realized the lack of need to increase the volume of her voice as the car had finally slowed down at the pit stop.

“But, it doesn’t mean that you are off the hook from our deal.” She said, adjusting to her normal voice.

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The purring engine finally had calmed down. Then, it was just a steady mild hum, echoing inside the small space. A few seconds later, they were parked again from where they started.

What she experienced seemed to be a lifetime, but it was just a matter of a few minutes. It would have been faster if Lance had gone in full speed. But she knew he had slowed down for her.

“Of course, I will not forget.” He promised as the doors opened and the entire crew suddenly turned silent.

He unbuckled his seat, ready to go down but noticed that she was still on her seat. He watched her for a few seconds as she struggled with hers.

Then, he leaned forward towards her when she seemed to be failing to take it off. “Do you mind if I help you with that?” He did not dare touch the buckle unless she gave permission.

He could see that the lock part was around her breast area, so unbuckling the belt would be complicated. He did not want his hands to be swatted away or accused of being a pervert.

“I think I am managing it just fine.” She answered as she clicked on the lock again, but it would not budge. She tried again, getting a bit frustrated as she finally blew some air in front of her face.

She had managed to click it in place earlier, then why would it not dislodge from its hook. She finally pulled on the belts, but she believed it had just worsened the situation.

“Come on, let me see if I can remove it.” He offered again, seeing that she was just being stubborn.

He believed he knew what was wrong with the lock. It had been acting up for a while now. But he had forgotten to have it checked since nobody sat on it anyway. Not until now.

He did not move from his position as he waited for her to acknowledge his help. Otherwise, he believed she would be stuck on the seat for a long time.

"Fine." She finally gave up since she already did all she could, but it still did not work. She had no choice but to accept his offered help.

She leaned backward on the backrest, hoping to create more space between her body and the belt. The belt was crisscrossed on her chest, where the lock was located just between the valley of her breast.

She noticed that it was not like it was very retractable like in ordinary cars. It was adjusted to fit her size, more or less. Probably for safety precautions.

"Sorry about this." He apologized for the problem, and in advance, in case he accidentally did something wrong.

He reached his hands on the front portion of her body, careful to handle only the seatbelt and not touch any part of hers. But just like what he had suspected earlier, it was slightly jammed.

He could see that Rick and the crew were watching them, curious at what was taking them so long. But there was no way he could remove the seatbelt without applying a bit of force.

"What is wrong?" She finally asked when his first attempt did not work.

"I think the lock is jammed in the inside. The hook would not dislodge from its position. I will have to do something else." He explained to her.

Then, he leaned a bit more until he was almost on top of her. He could see that she was on guard once he moved closer, but there was no other way.

"I am sorry about this." He said again as he moved in a tighter position.

The space was too cramped, so his face was only a few inches away from her face. He could mildly feel the air she was breathing on his face as he forced the buckles to separate.

"Just take it off." She said as she ended up looking directly into his eyes as he worked on the synthetic fiber wrapped around her body.

After a few more tweaking, he finally released the belt free. He was supposed to move away, but his hands ended up planted on the side of the backrest, holding on to the edge of the seat for support.

While she was supposed to protest that he moved out of her way. But both suddenly found themselves trapped in each other's eyes, feeling the tension of the closeness of their bodies.

"Ahem!" Rick suddenly spoke up by the door, checking if there was a problem.

Judging from what he was witnessing, he was the problem. He just interrupted something that was about to happen. Suddenly the two occupants of the vehicle became aware of his presence.

"The seatbelt was stuck. I just helped remove it." Lance quickly said, moving back to his seat. "You should have it replaced." He added.

He was sure he was about to kiss her, but luckily he was interrupted. He did not know how she would react if he did get the chance.

He was not a womanizer who would just kiss and say goodbye. But he was definitely certain now that he was attracted to her. However, acting on the attraction was a totally different matter.

Chapter 584: Traveling at high speed

“Can you assist, Ms. Harlowe, out of the car? I just have to check on something.” Lance instructed Rick, who looked at him curiously.

He stared at the old man to beat it. He did not want to make an issue of something that did not happen. He knew that he almost kissed her, but he did not.

Besides, he was not even sure if he wanted to date her. He had sworn never to go out with anyone from the media business. He just never liked how they operated.

He believed that the press used their massive influence and social reach to create money, exploiting other people’s lives. Then, denied any responsibility when they made mistakes.

“Thanks for the help.” She finally found her voice before she stepped out of the car and landed her feet on stable ground.

Her muscles might be a little soar after the few bumps, but she felt ok, much more than she expected after the joyride. However, she felt a little uneasy, finding the place too quiet.

She noticed that everyone was watching them. She wondered if they saw their little scene. She would have been embarrassed, but she was used to being in a compromising position. It would take more than that to lose her composure.

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Then, she observed that they had been carefully watching her as Rick stood by her side. It was as if they were waiting for something to happen as they whispered among themselves.

“Don’t mind them.” Rick finally told her as Lance finally showed up and moved to her side.

Then, something clicked in her mind. “How much?” She asked out of the blue, directing her question to Rick.

She could see in his eyes that he was hiding something. The entire team was too quiet. It was unnerving. It was as if they knew something that she did not.

“And who won?” She was not definitely sure if her suspicion was correct. But judging from their faces, she might be onto something.

She could see the conflict in his eyes as if he was thinking deeply. She was positive that he was guilty of something, and with a little more push, he would finally spill the beans.

“What?” Rick looked at her as if he had no idea what she was asking. But she already saw through his facade.

"How much did you bet?" She tried to spell it out for him, so he could stop pretending that he did not understand her question.

"Was it how many laps I could take before I puked my guts out? Or, how long before I fall into your boss's charms?" She asked Rick, who was clearly turning red in embarrassment.

She turned her head to the other man who had never spoken a word yet. But his face remained impassive, neither admitting involvement nor denying it.

"It was the first one." Rick finally admitted as he scratched the back of his head, knowing there was no use denying it. "We are sorry. We did not mean to disrespect you or any woman in that case." He continued with an apologetic smile.

"It was just a friendly game to pass the time and entertain ourselves." Rick quickly added, hoping that would help plead their case.

He and the crew did not see a problem with making a bet on her since they never thought she would find out about it. Then again, he remembered that she was a reporter. She was good at investigating and reading people.

"Then, who won?" She asked Rick again, who never answered her first question. Returning her attention back to him.

She was curious if someone would bet on her or, at least, put some faith in her ability. Usually, men and even women would look down on women who tried their luck in a men's world.

This was what she was talking about. They had easily assumed that she would fall on her ass and cry like a little girl. Well, she had proven them wrong. It would take more than that to make her give up.

"He did." Rick gestured to the man that was standing quietly beside her. "He bet that you would do just fine. All of us had bet that you will puke or faint after the first lap."

He felt slightly ashamed for his behavior, participating in such nonsense bet against her. Well, only because they were caught doing it. He felt bad after seeing her accusing eyes.

But if he was honest and this situation would ever happen again, he would probably join once more because it was fun as long as nobody was hurt.

"I am sure that you can see the humor in it. We really meant no harm." He tried to defend his action and his team. As the leader of the group, he felt he should be responsible.

"It is just friendly jesting among the crew. Don't take it personally." Lance finally spoke after a while of listening to them.

He did not see the point of making a big deal out of a simple matter since it was just a nonsense bet among peers. He did not want his team to feel bad and break their morale because of this tiny incident.

"Of course, you will defend them. After all, you were the one who probably started this all." She pointed her finger at him, poking them on his muscular chest.

She could tell that he was as guilty as the rest of them. She could only wonder how much did he win after the stunt he just put her through.

However, she could tell that he was not sorry, one bit. She was fuming that he had dismissed the issue as if her concern was nothing.

If this was all a joke to him, she was not laughing. She could not tolerate his behavior towards her anymore. She thought that he was different, but he was just the same as the rest of them.

“Wait, Miss. You...” Rick was about to tell her something, but she cut him off.

He did not get the chance to explain anymore. He decided to keep his mouth shut instead, afraid to be caught in the middle of the fight.

“No, you don’t get to defend him. He should take responsibility for his actions.” She said before raising her hand at him as it quickly landed on his cheek. “That is for making a fool of me.”

She did not know what came over her as she stared into his face. She could not understand the rage that overtook her. But she could not stop her hands from flying in the air and landing on his face.

“Will you at least let me explain?” Lance said, holding on to his cheek, still burning from the impact. He could not blame her for being mad, but she should still at least listen first to his explanation.

“No need.” She said to him. “As for you, you should know better to listen to him.” She pointed to Rick, who had been silent on the side.

She could see the shocked faces around her, but she did not care as she turned around and walked in the direction of the building where she had left her clothes.

She was fuming, and her body was still trembling in rage. As she was walking away, she could feel her heart was beating loudly, as if she was still inside the car, traveling at high speed.

Chapter 585: The extra challenge

She continued on her path, not even looking back after hearing him call her name. She even walked faster, increasing her speed to get away from him.

“Hey, you did not give me a chance to explain.” He suddenly appeared on her side, matching her every angry stride with ease.

He knew he should have just let her leave, but Rick was right. It was still their fault that she felt that way. He should at least reason with her.

“There is nothing to explain. You had your fun, and everybody had some good laughs at my expense. I am happy for you.” She answered him sarcastically as she continued without looking at him.

Then, he suddenly stopped her by gripping her arms. He pulled her to the other side of the building, where there was no one to see them or hear their conversation.

But she did not come along with him without a fight. She struggled to break free from his hold, but he was stronger. However, he made sure that he was not hurting her, at least not too much.

"Can you just hear me first?" Lance said, making her stop from struggling and protesting. "Just give me two minutes to air my side."

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He actually had no idea why he was trying to clear his participation in this bet. But he guessed he had to. For an unknown reason, he felt obligated to fix things between them.

"I only bet with the guys because nobody would bet on you. Everybody was saying that you did not have what it takes. But I have seen you drive your car, so I know you can handle it." He quickly related to her the story of what happened earlier when he told the crew of his plan.

He usually did not join in this nonsense, but he did not stop his team from practicing the game either. Most of the other crews also liked to bet on different things. It was just a silly game to release the tension with the pressure of the competition.

"If that is true, how much did you win?" She asked, still skeptical about his story.

She could not believe that he did not mastermind this whole operation. But seeing the sincerity in his eyes, she was starting to change her mind.

"One pack of beer." He smiled at her as he said this, running his hands in his already long hair.

He kept reminding himself to get it trimmed, but he never had the time. But he still looked good in it, so there was no problem. He was not a vain person, but he still needed to look presentable every time he went out of his house.

"What? That is all I am worth." She shouted in surprise. If she was mad earlier, she was irritated this time. Then, she started laughing at the absurdity of the bet.

"I'm sorry, but that is all I can afford. At least we can have three bottles each." He added when she started bursting into laughter.

He could not help but smile, too, realizing the silliness of their situation. They were actually fighting over those damn beers. But those beers were all worth it, seeing the hanging faces of his team after he beat them.

"I guess three bottles would be good enough." She admitted, finally stopping as tears moistened her eyes from laughing too much.

Suddenly, all her anger disappeared. Actually, she did not understand what she felt earlier. It was as if she was possessed by an unknown force, and she could not see reason.

She did not get emotional like that in any other circumstance. She would have probably laughed about the bet. But somehow, she found herself blowing out of proportion.

"Does this mean that we are good?" He asked, still standing close to her.

He still had no idea why it was such a big deal that he had to fix things with her. He could have just let her walk away, and his problem was solved.

But then again, she was a reporter. She could make up a story and make his family look bad to the press and the world. She was indeed an influential figure in the media and the masses.

"I guess." She accepted his explanation with a grain of salt.

She figured that she still needed him for her story. She still had no concrete information. She was still aiming for a personal interview with the couple. He was still her ticket to that.

But was that the only reason for her willingness to forgive and forget him that quickly. She immediately squashed the idea forming in her mind. The image of him lowering her face and kissing her.

She shook her head, trying to clear her mind. She did not want that mental image to haunt her, not in her waking hours or even while asleep.

"Are you alright?" He asked her when he failed to respond to his previous question.

He noticed that she had been silent and appeared that her mind was in a daze. He would shake her, but he was afraid she might slap him again.

Not that her slap had caused that much harm on him. He just did not like to anger her again. He was, after all, trying to ask her to forgive him even if he had not done anything wrong.

"Oh, sorry!" She finally realized that he was talking to her, and she zoned out. "I think my head just had some buzzing. It is probably from the sounds of the engine."

"Well, I think I lost you for a few seconds there. But it is perfectly understandable. You are probably adjusting to your vertigo." He explained her condition, seemingly buying her excuse.

He was alarmed for a moment when she seemed to faze out. But when he continued to catch her attention, she finally snapped out of it.

"Were you saying something?" She asked, thinking that she might have missed something important. She chastised herself for getting out of focus.

She just did not need the distraction right now. She had to concentrate on her career and her stories before giving in to any of her carnal desires.

Besides, she was unsure if the prince would like a casual fling on the side. Because she did not do commitment. She could only provide a no-string attached relationship. And, it had to be mutual.

"I asked if you might be available tomorrow night. I think I owe you three bottles of beer." He repeated what he told her earlier.

He thought it was only fair that he should give her what she deserved. And at the same time, the talk that he promised her. A few bottles of beer would not be considered a date.

"Well. I think I can manage it tomorrow night." She mentally checked her schedule and then ignored it. She could cancel whatever it was if anything was on her calendar the next night.

Her meeting with the prince would always take precedence since he was the source of her future story. She kept telling herself that to assure herself that she would not be diverted to something else.

“Good. Then I will text you the address.” He suggested to her as he looked into the watch on his wrist. “I am sorry, but I really have to go. I still have another appointment.”

He did not attempt to shake her hand, not wanting physical contact with her. He was already afraid of the attraction that he had with her. He did not want to turn it into a full-blown obsession to have her.

It was enough that they were going out to finish his obligation to her so that he had no need to see her again ever. He could already sense that she would be too much on his plate, and he did not need the extra challenge.

Chapter 586: Ten seconds to spare

He stretched his body, still lying flat on the soft mattress on his back. Not at all, preparing to leave his position. He was not sleepy, but he had other things in his mind.

Instead of moving out of the bed, he shifted to his side. He tried to be more comfortable as he watched his wife move around the room, preparing to go out.

“Are you sure that you want to do this now?” Alex asked her, still not agreeing with her plan. Then, she disappeared inside the walk-in closet, probably picking up some clothes to wear.

Last night was magical, and she had kept him awake almost at the break of dawn. He planned not to move out of bed all day because he was making up for all the lost time.

After all, they never had the honeymoon he had been looking forward to. Therefore, he would settle for every opportunity to be alone with his wife.

“I am positive.” She responded with a bright smile painted on her lips, returning to the room, carrying some clothes. “Aren’t you moving out from that bed?” Dani stopped and dropped the clothes at the foot of their bed.

She placed her closed palm on both sides of her waist and stared at him with furrowed brows. Showing her displeasure at his current behavior.

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It was the first time she was excited about doing something other than her work. Usually, her mind was occupied with her pending cases, even on the weekends, but not today.

She woke up this morning, sensing that something was different about her. She smiled at the new day with only one thought that ran through her mind. She could not wait for the day to start.

She quickly stood up and strode to the balcony, allowing the sunlight to glisten on her face. The wind breezed through her hair, making it fly behind her back. It was a perfect day.

“Only if you will return at my side and join me for breakfast.” He challenged her, not, in the least, affected by her scary demeanor. “We can do that later.”

She had already told him what she wanted to do today, but he also craved something else. He was not talking about food at the moment, remembering every second of last night.

Smelling her hair was the last thing he could remember before his eyes succumbed to darkness with her head cradled fittingly on his shoulders.

However, he woke up with an empty space beside him, running his hands on a cold sheet. His wife was already missing from the other side of the bed. Then, only to realize she was in the shower.

“Unfortunately, that is not the breakfast I have in mind.” She retorted, not budging with her decision. Her mind was already set.

She stepped a couple of feet away from the bed, knowing that her husband had that naughty glimmer in his eyes. She prepared herself, not wanting to be caught by surprise, thinking he might suddenly lunge after her.

Once he had her in his arms, she might not be able to resist his charms. Therefore, she created a safe distance, not wanting him to win this round.

“Will you change your mind if I promise to make it worth your while?” He enticed her with his sexy tone, putting his bare chest on display as he plopped himself on the pillows, allowing the sheet covering him to drop to his waist.

He tapped the side of the bed beside him, beckoning her to join him. Usually, it worked on her, but there were times that she had resisted his temptations.

“You can make it up to me later. As of now, I wish for you to move your ass out of that bed and take a shower.” She ordered, tapping her feet for emphasis that his methods to seduce her were not working. And, he had to hurry up.

It was already almost late in the morning, and she did not want to waste any more of their time. With the traffic and other factors against them, they might be late for their appointment.

She was lucky to get this schedule at short notice, knowing the long line in their list of clients. She did not want to waste anyone of their time by showing up late to the meeting. Or worse, not showing up at all.

“Ok. I am moving.” Finally admitting defeat, but not without a bit of mischief.

He stood from the bed, letting the sheet slide off his body, shamelessly showing his butt-naked chiseled physique as he strode off to the bathroom.

“Maybe you might like to take a shower one more time?” He tempted her again, trying his luck for the last time. “I promise to scrub your back.” He added, posing at the side of the door with a towel in his hand.

He liked to tease her from time to time. Most of the time, it worked in his favor. But, there were times she could be stubborn despite his efforts.

It was a battle of will that he loved to take on as a challenge. But he willingly surrendered if it would make her happy. Not everything in the relationship should be about winning. It was about a balance between giving and taking.

"If you finish in five minutes top, I will be the one to make it up to you tonight." She finally made a deal, or they would not be leaving this room in time. "How does that sound?"

She checked on her watch, noting the time, waiting for him to accept her deal. She watched his face brighten up, and his lips curved into a victorious smile.

She knew that she had fallen again into his trap. Unfortunately, she had already given her word. She could not do anything about it now. She had no choice but to accept her defeat at this round.

"I like the sound of that." He quickly disappeared into the bathroom, leaving her to ponder her loss.

He was done in three minutes with two minutes to spare. He walked straight into the cabinets, whistling as he passed by and swiftly changed into denim pants and a black shirt. With ten seconds to spare, he had his shoes on and was ready to leave.

Chapter 587: Just a big house, not a home

She marveled at how fast her husband or men, in general, could quickly prepare for their day and still looked at their best. She actually envied them for the simplicity of their lives.

While many women would take almost an hour to prepare just to look at least half-decent. Although she might not be so vain, she still took longer than him to prepare for the day.

"Shall we go?" He broke in her thoughts as he stood in front of her, ready to leave.

Now, it would seem that she was the one that was not prepared yet. At least, she had changed into her pair of jeans and shirt. She grabbed the hair bond lying on top of the dresser and ran her fingers through her hair to tie it in one ponytail.

"Just give me a second." She said as she dashed into the vanity mirror to fix herself.

She could see the smirk on his lips as if he just had made another point. She would admit, she could not beat him when it came to how much time was spent picking up the clothes to wear and how long she stayed inside the bathroom.

With a quick dabbed of powder on her cheeks, a slight application of lipstick on her lips, she was done. All that was left to do was put shoes on her feet and her phone in her bag.

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"Done." She announced, hanging her bag on her shoulders as she moved closer to him.

Suddenly, her hands covered her mouth, and her eyes had gone wide. "I forgot all about breakfast." She looked at him, realizing that in her haste and excitement. She actually forgot to prepare something to eat.

This day was starting to turn into a disaster for her, but she was not giving up. She could still turn this situation into something productive, positive, and fun.

If he would see it that way once he learned what she had planned for today. She tried to open up to him earlier, but she decided to do it later.

“Never mind. We can grab something on the way.” He told her, seeing that she was serious about going to this meeting.

He was too busy earlier with his thoughts to put much weight on her plans. He finally stopped fooling around and wished he had cooperated with her sooner.

Although he still had no idea of who she was seeing and why. But he would just tag along if that was what would make her happy. Besides, it must be something important if she was this excited about it.

“Again, where are we going?” He finally asked, curious about their unexpected trip downtown. “And, who are we meeting again?”

She talked about it earlier when she walked out of the bathroom after her shower, but he was not paying attention. He was still sleepy, and his mind was floating somewhere else.

He did not get the chance to ask again as he started fooling around. Then, she became irritated by his immature actions. And the rest was history.

“This time, let it be my surprise.” She answered him, withholding the information from him.

It was her form of penalizing him for not taking her seriously. She had wanted to talk about it, but she stopped when she noticed that he was not listening. Now, he had no option but to wonder who and where they were going.

After almost an hour, including the traffic and other circumstances, they finally arrived in a fancy tall building covered with mostly glasses.

He recognized it as one of the leading architecture firms in the city. Now, he was curious about the reason for their visit. He should have really paid attention earlier.

After a few minutes, they were quickly shown to a large conference room and offered some refreshments, which they both declined.

“Can I venture a guess that this has something to do with our dream house?” He whispered near her ears as they sat side by side on the long elongated table.

It was the only plausible explanation he could think of on why they were sitting in this office, waiting for an architect to meet with them.

Or else, she might have another house being built somewhere else, outside the city. But he doubted that possibility. He would assume that this was about his gift to her.

He wondered if she did not like his plans about the house and wanted something changed in it. Or she just wanted to redo everything. Whatever it was, he would be willing to compromise. After all, the house was hers.

“Your guess is correct. Now, would you listen to my proposal?” She asked him, turning to him. She took a deep breath, gathering a slight momentum to get the words out of her mouth.

She remembered looking up in the sky earlier, then the house immediately occupied her mind. She could not stop thinking about it. Then, something popped up in her thoughts.

It was beautiful according to the plans he had shown her. An ideal home for a starting family like theirs. She actually loved it, at least the idea of it.

It had a good neighborhood and would be excellent for kids if they finally had one or more. It was a good place for raising a child.

"I am listening." This time, he had his full attention, turning to face her. He was not making the same mistake twice.

Luckily, he had married a wonderful and understanding wife who always put up with his mischief. Something that he would be eternally grateful for.

But he was bracing himself for what she had to say. Judging from her facial expression, it could be anything. It might be good or not.

"I think the house is perfect. Your design is just what I imagined my house would be when I was young." She started to explain.

She remembered describing her dream house to her mother. It was not a fairy tale castle but still a big manor with many rooms and a massive garden.

Somehow, she had described the house, which was the same as what her father had built for her mother. The one that she had grown up with.

"But..." He did hear the hesitation in her voice. "You can tell me if you don't like it. I will not mind because I only want you to be happy with our new home."

She loved it, but there was something else that she was reluctant to tell him. He could tell from her eyes that there was something more.

He had bought the land and its dilapidated house way before he had met her. Then, he had abandoned the construction until now.

He felt that he should provide her a decent home where they could build their family. Therefore, he had hired someone to proceed with the plan.

"I love the idea, but it is not what I want for us." She finally said it, casting her eyes down to her lap, afraid to look at his face. "It is not the home I envisioned now for us, and if ever we will have kids."

She could tell that he had put a lot of effort into this. She felt terrible that she did not share the same view as him, but she had to be honest with him about it. She could not lie to him about how she felt.

After careful deliberation about it, she could not accept his gift despite how beautiful the house would be. It was not a place where she would like to raise their family.

For her, it was just a big house, not a home.

Chapter 588: The purest heart

20*588 – The purest heart

He was not expecting that kind of reaction from her. Not after she said that she loved the house when she first saw it. But then again, he should have known better than to jump to his conclusion.

He should have consulted with her and shared his plans before proceeding with the construction. He only had himself to blame for putting her in an awkward position of declining his gift when clearly it was not what she wanted.

"Please, don't feel bad about it, Dani. I only thought that you might like it." Alex could only reprimand himself upon seeing the conflict in her eyes.

It must have been hard for her to admit to him that she did not like the house. He could not even imagine what she must be going through at the moment.

He did not mind losing the house since he only bought the place as an additional investment. He had no emotional attachment to the property.

He could buy her another one that she preferred. This time, he would allow her to choose a place where they would build their family. It would be their home.

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"No, I actually love it. But, I don't think that is the house for us." Dani repeated her earlier explanation, hoping she was not hurting his feelings by saying no to his gift.

There were just too many things that she had considered about it that did not fit her criteria. Although as she said earlier, it would be a good home for someone else. But not for them.

"If you think it is not the perfect fit for us. Then, we could just sell the place and find something else." He offered to her. "It is really not a big deal. I only want to make you happy."

He took her hand, enveloping it in his, assuring her that he was ok with the idea of letting go of the house. He might have liked the concept of building a family there, but her happiness was more important to him.

She would always be his home, and where she was, then that was where he would be. He could never imagine a future without her in his life.

"Really?" Dani looked at him with hope in her eyes. She suddenly felt glad that he did not take her rejection as a sign that she did not appreciate his present to her. "You are ok with that."

She was not expecting that he would simply concede to her wishes. She thought that he might put up a little fight and argue about the merits of the house. But she was glad he understood her.

"Of course." He assured her, kissing her hand to prove it. "Now, tell me. What are we doing here if you did not like the house?"

He was still curious since they should have seen a real estate agent if they had no more use for the house and not an architect. There was no sense in building it if they were not living in it.

"I was going to talk to you about it earlier, but you were busy with something else." She reminded him about his earlier behavior.

She could see the guilty look on his face behind that boyish smile. How could she ever be mad at him when he was too charming for his own good.

"Yeah, about that. I am really sorry for not paying attention. I was still sleepy and disoriented." He reasoned with a pleading look, hoping that she would forgive him for being inconsiderate.

He would have said horny but then again changed his mind when he saw her face. It was not a good time to be funny. She might not take it in a good way, not when she was being serious.

"Anyway, never mind that." She suddenly changed the subject, checking the time. She still had a few minutes to spare. "About the house."

She had already told him that the house was not ideal for them, but how could she tell him that she had something else in mind that would be more suitable to build on that property.

She guessed telling him the truth was the easiest way. She just had to brace the impact of his reaction. That would be if he reacted negatively to her recommendation. But she doubted that, knowing the man she married.

"What about it?" Alex asked, encouraging her to go on, not knowing if he should be excited or afraid from the expression on her face.

She did look thrilled about an idea that was going through her mind, but she was hesitant to share it with him. But he would support her whatever it was she was planning. Knowing her wife, she only had good intentions.

"I was thinking of donating the property to my friend's foundation." She looked into his eyes, trying to guess what he might be thinking with her suggestion.

She could see a smile forming on his face, so she thought it was probably a good sign that he was not outright rejecting her idea. Maybe he would find her idea a good option for the idle property.

"We are meeting her now, so she can explain it to you further about her current project. I believe it would be perfect as a new house for foster kids." She kept rambling on, hoping that he would also agree with her idea.

She was helping her friend on her foundation about building several homes for kids who could not find good homes. So far, they had already constructed two units. One was already operating under the care of some volunteer nuns.

She was inspired to be a part of this nonprofit organization because of her friend Jacky. Her experience, together with Andy, had opened her eyes to the sufferings that these kids were going through.

He placed his index finger just on top of her lips, effectively shutting her up. He had heard enough. "Yes!" Alex answered even if she did not ask her any question.

He agreed to her a hundred percent. He could see why she would suggest the idea to him. That place would be better of as home for these kids.

He felt overwhelming joy, proving, once again, that he was a lucky guy. He did not only marry a gorgeous, strong-willed, determined woman. But she was also a woman who had the purest heart.

Chapter 589: A bullet right in between the eyes

"It is nice to see you again, my friend." He greeted his long-time colleague, shaking his hand, as he settled on the seat reserved for him in one of the finest restaurants in the city. As he joined his guest for lunch.

He preferred to conduct his meeting in places such as this one. It was a legitimate establishment where many negotiations and businesses were usually discussed and closed.

No one suspected that many underground activities were also executed and planned in this place, right under the noses of the authorities and enemies.

"The pleasure is all mine." He greeted back, signaling the attendant to take the order of his friend. "It had been a long time. I was wondering if you even remembered me." He jokingly said as he returned to his drink.

He was first to arrive in their appointed schedule, not wanting to be late or for his friend to wait for him. It had been a while since they had seen each other, although they did communicate through other means from time to time.

Still, he was excited to finally see his friend in person again as the new Don of their underground association. As he promised, before they went on separate ways, if he called, he would answer.

"Who can forget a man like you, Mike?" He asked, a bit sarcastically, but both just laughed at their internal joke.

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He could never forget the brotherhood they had formed back in the days. Mike was assigned to work with him as his trainee. He was against having one, but the rules required that he took the young rookie under his wings.

He thought the rookie would only hinder his career as he struggled to make a name for himself. But this young man's brilliance only highlighted his own. Together, they were unbeatable.

Now, Mike was making a name of his own. He could not be prouder of the protege he had created and molded through his image. If he wanted someone to surpass his achievement in this industry, it would be him.

"I am glad to hear that. But honestly, I miss the old days." Mike said, slightly reminiscing the past when he was just starting out with his career.

He could still remember how his boss would lash at him, ordering him around, making him quit every chance his boss could get. But he was determined to prove that his boss was wrong.

In the end, this man finally realized his worth to his work and his organization. Mike had proven that his contribution was more valuable than the rest of his legal team combined.

"Well, now that you are here again. We might be working on some new projects again, or rather, against each other." He corrected his statement.

He was working in the private sector, and his friend was now with the District Attorney's Office. There was a likelihood that they would be going against each other.

He could still remember when he asked him to take a job offered to him with another firm in another state. He was furious since they were already making a lot of progress with their tandem.

But he had a different view of progress. A future that did not only involve the small world they had dominated. He was looking at a bigger picture which could only happen if they would explore their potential separately.

"I am actually looking forward to beating your ass in court," Mike said to the slightly older man in front of him, unafraid of his reputation inside a courtroom.

He might be one of the best in this city, but he knew he was better. He just needed the opportunity to go against his mentor and prove that he was not the same man he had asked to leave his office.

He had no grudge against him. He only wanted to prove that he had improved since he had been away. He might disagree with him from the start, but he appreciated what he did for him all this time. Now, he was back to serve him again.

"Me, too, Mike. I heard so many great things about what you have been doing." He complimented his young apprentice. "I must say, I am impressed. I can not wait to face you in front of a jury."

He certainly would like the challenge of facing a worthy adversary. He might have been his mentor, but this younger man had worked hard to be where he was today.

He could not rob that victory from him. He deserved recognition for his achievement. He also earned the chance to face and beat him when the time came.

"Anyway, I already made a few investigations about the lawsuit against Nickolas Travis." He slightly lowered his voice, avoiding anyone from hearing their conversation.

It was a sensitive issue, and nobody must suspect that they had been discussing the merit of the entire case. If somebody would notice their association, they could easily explain their past working relationship.

"What is your status in the case?" He asked, turning a little bit serious this time.

He still pretended that they were discussing nothing of the ordinary. But he was interested to know the current situation on the other side of the fence.

He had nothing to do with the case since he avoided any involvement with the lawsuit, even when it was offered to him. But he wanted to keep track of everything that was happening.

"Unfortunately, I am still not the lead prosecutor for the case. But I am working on it." He informed him of the latest development in his situation with his new office.

He was new, so it would take him a while to work his way to the top of the ladder. But, he was confident that he could manage to snake his way to leading the prosecution team against Nick.

“What have you heard so far?” He asked, wanting confirmation that the reports of his other teams were accurate.

He could not afford any mishaps at this point. Or else, his entire plan would be ruined. Even his delicate position as the new head of the underworld would be compromised. He could not let that happen.

“Nick had not breathed a word about you as far as the reports indicated. Nothing also about the underground organization.” Mike assured him. “But I still need time to dig more on his case and talk to him personally to confirm all this.”

He could not trust the papers sent to him. The other member of the prosecution team might still be withholding information. A hidden bomb that he had not seen that could suddenly blow off in their faces.

“What about Samson?” He heard the big man was only pointing at Nick this time, but he wondered if there was a chance that he might give his organization too.

He liked the big man when he first met him. He had actually met him and talked to him, but Samson was not aware that it was him. His big boss. Samson thought he was only helping a man having a bad day. But it was a long story for another time.

Usually, he would have ordered the execution of Samson for knowing too much and betraying him. But he owed him his life. For that, they were now even.

The next time Samson dared to cross him, he guaranteed to put a bullet right in between the eyes of the man who betrayed him. But not before he executed his family in front of him.

Chapter 590: Dream house

“Can I invite both of you for lunch?” She looked at her watch, surprised, seeing that it was way past noon. She had been carried away with her presentation that she had not noticed it was already lunchtime.

In her excuse, the unexpected meeting was not on her schedule for the day. Therefore, she had not prepared anything for her guests.

Finally, she decided that treating them outside for something to eat was the least she could do for their time and pledge of support to her cause.

“I will not say no to that,” Alex stated, feeling the silent growling of his stomach since they had not consumed anything that morning. “I am famished.” He added, looking at her wife, daring her to make a remark.

He suggested grabbing something to eat on their way to the meeting. But his wife was so anxious to even think about eating anything.

Besides, she kept saying that they were already late, and he did not want to be blamed if they came in even a minute after her designated time. So, he had agreed to skip breakfast altogether.

“We will love to join you, Haley.” Dani finally interjected, accepting the offered meal. She had to admit that she could also feel her tummy rumbling.

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She felt guilty that she had starved her husband because she could not eat. After all, it was not his fault that she felt uneasy and slightly queasy that morning, unable to think about food.

Anyway, it was already time to eat, therefore might as well join her friend on her invitation. It was better than trying their luck finding a place that was now probably crowded with people.

“Give me a minute to arrange it.” She told them, leaving the couple to go to her office so she could come up with something.

She had to make a lunch reservation quickly. Luckily, she knew the owner of one just nearby her office. She had renovated her place, so she always made space for her.

While the couple was left sitting in the conference room, waiting for her return. For a few seconds, the two remained preoccupied with their individual thoughts.

He looked around the intricate design around him, checking the style of their firm. So far, he could see the appeal of why many hired this firm. Personally, he had never dealt with them.

Nevertheless, he knew that his company also hired them in some of their projects. The results as far as he had seen were excellent.

“What was her name again?” He asked again, returning his attention to his wife, curious if he heard her name right.

He believed that he might have heard her name from somewhere but just could not remember it at the moment. He kept thinking about it, trying to jog his memory for some sort of recognition.

He walked toward the floor-to-ceiling window, gazing at the tall skyscrapers outside. Until now, he was amazed at the progress before him, something that had attracted him to this city in the first place.

“Haley Rosley.” She repeated, gazing at the back of her husband. “She is one of the senior architects in this firm. We met through several common friends because of her foundation.” She explained to her husband her affiliation with her friend.

Although they had been around the same social circle since they were young, they did not really become friends then. They never had the opportunity to interact until now.

She was not that close to Haley, but she still considered her a friend. They learned they shared a few things that they were both passionate about, just like this project.

So, when she realized what she wanted with the property, she immediately called her friend. She knew Haley was busy. But in her excitement, she insisted on the meeting for today.

“Haley Rosley.” He mused to himself. “Her name sounded quite familiar to me, but I am sure we have not met before.” He shared his confusion with his wife.

He was good with names and faces. The Rosley family was a familiar name in this industry since they dominated the market for creating innovative designs. Still, she seemed to be a mystery to him.

"Maybe you have read her name in the news or some magazine. She was featured this past year for her new innovations and her recent works." Dani explained as she followed her husband by the window.

In addition to her many achievements in her profession, Haley was also a model. She served as an ambassador for some charitable organizations. She also helped several foundations with their cause.

"That could be it." Alex conceded, giving up on determining why her name was familiar, thinking he might have read it somewhere in passing as his wife suggested.

His mind went back to her plans, agreeing that it was a great idea. He did not mind donating the property to the foundation if it would serve a better purpose than building a house where nobody would live.

"Are you sure that you have no problems with this idea?" She asked, looking for assurance that she was not trampling on his dream of building them a home.

At the moment, she had no idea of what kind of home she wanted for their family. She was still in the process of figuring that out. But she was convinced that the house he was building for her was not the home she wanted.

"I already gave the property to you. It is already under your name. Do what you wish to do with it?" Alex gave her a light squeeze on her shoulders, giving her the signal to go ahead with her plans.

He enveloped her into his arms as they stared at the endless sky above, standing side-by-side. "We can always buy or build our new home somewhere else." He added, giving her head a gentle kiss before letting her go, so he could look into her eyes.

"I was thinking the same thing." She smiled at her husband, thankful that he was on board with her plans. "I am sure that we will find the house that would be perfect for our family."

She leaned over, returning his gesture with a mild peck of her lips on his. Thanking him with action, appreciating his understanding and support.

"I hope I am not interrupting anything." A voice came by the door. Then, they both noticed Haley waiting for them. "But we can now go to lunch if you are ready to leave."

Haley had watched the couple for a few seconds before she decided to interrupt them. She admired people just like them. She could only wish to find someone who would also love her unconditionally.

"Not at all," Dani answered her friend, turning to her. She moved towards her with Alex at her side with their hands entwined. Then, a painting caught her eye. A house surrounded by roses.

It suddenly reminded her of a house that she had adored. It was that kind of house she could live in forever. She believed it had everything she wanted and more. Things she never even imagined she liked.

The first time she saw it, she knew it was perfect. She felt at home. She knew she had fallen in love with her dream house at first sight.