

## Royal Contract 651

### Chapter 651: Moans

She woke up feeling so refreshed and alive. She smelled the cool morning breeze and opened her eyes at the beautiful sunrise grazing her room from her slightly opened window.

Then, she lazily stretched her stiff joints from her sleeping position, hoping to untie the knots in her slightly sore muscles. Suddenly, she sat up, remembering something.

“Aaahhh!” She shouted, trying to wake herself up as memories rushed into her head like a waterfall.

She thought that could not be real as she checked her bed for any signs. The other side of her bed was crumpled, but that could be her doing.

If it was a dream, she wished she did not open her eyes and had remained trapped in her fantasy. However, if it had happened, she still did not want to wake up because she could not face what she had done.

“No, no, no.” She kept telling herself. “Nothing happened last night.” She punched her pillow. Then, she pulled it over her head to drown her thoughts. However, her mind kept insisting that she knew the truth.

She quickly marched outside her room to get some caffeine in her system. She would think better if her blood was not running cold in her veins.

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After setting up the coffee, she sat down on the stool of her kitchen counter. That was where she found a piece of paper underneath her phone.

She did remember leaving her phone in the kitchen. Then, she cut her thoughts off, not wanting to relive the night as her mind delved into her memories.

“What is this?” She wondered as she pulled the white note out and opened it from its fold.

Nothing.

The paper was blank.

It was not entirely blank since it was her last bill, but no handwritten note or anything as she checked both sides of the sheet. If this was a joke for him, she did not find it funny.

She crumpled the paper and threw it in the trash. Then, she took the coffee she had prepared and moved to the balcony of her apartment.

She liked drinking her coffee as she gazed at the morning sun. She never ate breakfast much anyway since she was always rushing into work. But not today.

“Move my early schedules for later. I will be running late.” She instructed her secretary.

She knew she had a few things she needed to deal with first before going back to work today. She quickly ended the call after giving her a few more instructions.

Then, she decided to check all her e-mails and messages. Fortunately, there were no missed calls. She usually started with the oldest one, going through it one by one until she reached the latest.

“Interesting.” Her last text came from him, which was early this morning. She wondered what it said.

She tapped on the screen and opened the messaging app. She was doubtful she was moved by the short and touching piece of crap she read in bold letters.

I WAS LOOKING FOR A PEN SO I COULD LEAVE YOU A NOTE, BUT THERE WAS NONE.

I HOPE YOU WILL NOT WRITE ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED LAST NIGHT. BETTER YET, I HOPE YOU WILL FORGET ABOUT IT.

IT WAS NOT A MISTAKE BECAUSE I KNEW WE BOTH WANTED IT. BUT IT SHOULD NOT HAPPEN.

I AM SORRY.

I AM.

I TRULY AM.

BUT I THINK YOU SHOULD NOT TRY TO CONTACT ME ANYMORE. I HOPE WHAT I TOLD YOU WILL BE MORE THAN ENOUGH FOR A GOOD STORY.

“Damn!” He could write a shitty love note, she thought.

She stared again at the screen, rereading it one last time. What did she expect from a man like him? That he would be different from the rest of them.

At least this one said that it was not a mistake, and he did apologize. It was more than the other men she had been with had ever done for her.

She was not expecting to wake up with him still entangled in the sheets or find him in the kitchen making her breakfast. She did not do relationships. She reminded herself.

She decided it was better to keep her mind busy. Dwelling on something she had no control over would not do her any good. At least she did not have to deal with a guilty conscience of doing the deed with a client. It was unprofessional and morally wrong in her list of things she should never do.

“You want it forgotten. Then I will.” She closed the message, not planning on answering him back. Then, she shut her eyes tight, trying to bury those memories in her mind. Never to be resurrected again.

After a few minutes of deep breathing and meditation, she knew she felt calmer. She could safely say that she could go back to working again.

She grabbed the phone again and went to her small office, just a tiny guest room she converted into an office. She believed it was the only thing she had changed in this house since she bought it.

She grabbed her laptop and fired it up, then took her phone to check on her recordings. Although she knew most of what they had talked about last night. She might have forgotten a few details.

"I hope your story was worth all the trouble." She mumbled to herself. It was a habit she acquired since she started writing narratives. She believed talking to herself while typing made her report flow more easily.

She kept her fingers on the keyboard as it started flying away, tapping on each word as she slowly built the direction and angle of the news she would be presenting.

She would have liked a face-to-face interview with him. But now, she could not ask him to sit down with her. She might also feel awkward asking questions like what she asked last night if she would do it on a live telecast.

"So far, so good," She patted herself on the back as her fingers felt the soreness after almost an hour of continuous typing. She pulled her hands away from the keyboard and started massaging it.

After a few more minutes, she was out of things to write. She was drawing a blank as her mind had a mental block. Luckily, she had recorded their interview. She believed she might have missed something.

She played the recordings and listened carefully to their conversation. She did pick up a few things she could add to the story, but nothing quite significant.

She believed she had remembered most of what she needed anyway as the tape continued to play. It had been a long voice recording as she checked the time on her phone.

She was about to turn the recorder off when her bell rang. She quickly stood up to answer it. Surprisingly, she had an unexpected guest waiting for her at the door.

"Amelia, when did you come home?" She showed her inside before closing the door.

"I arrived the other day. I want to check on an old friend." Amelia answered her, greeting her with a hug.

"Let us go to my office. So, we can talk some more." She offered, happy to see a very dear friend.

"Wait, why don't you go ahead while I prepare a coffee for you." Her friend went ahead while she worked on the coffee.

She was uncomfortable entertaining her friend in the kitchen or the living room, still recalling what happened there. It would appear she could not easily forget the memory.

But she was shocked at what she witnessed next when she entered her office. It was more about what she heard in the recording that her friend was listening to at that very moment.

Moans.

Chapter 652: Biggest regret

"Then, work harder!" Ethan demanded, directing his gaze to his son-in-law, unable to contain his excitement about having kids running around the garden. "And do not settle for just one. More is better."

He had been busy growing his company that he thought having one child was enough. But he realized that it would have been nice if Dani had grown up with a brother or sister.

"They are not a machine, honey. That you can demand to produce your grandchild." Laura teased her husband after hearing what he had to say.

However, she shared his sentiment about wishing for several grandchildren that she could take care of and love. It had been a long time since tiny voices and waves of laughter filled this entire place.

"Anyway, the food, as always, was delicious." Alex complimented Laura for the entree she had prepared. However, they did not come here just for the food.

"Shall we have our coffee at my office?" Ethan announced to everyone. "I also have some papers I like to show you." He looked at Alex, who nodded in agreement.

He gestured for her daughter to accompany him while the other two followed them. He watched his daughter in his peripheral vision, wondering what was going through her mind at the moment.

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Once seated on his comfortable chair, he suggested that Dani and Alex sit on the available settee across from him. He could tell that they were not here for just a social visit.

"Dad, do you mind if we ask you some questions?" Dani looked into her father's eyes, gauging his mood about answering questions. She knew she could not wait for another perfect moment to talk to him about the case.

"What is this all about?" Ethan asked, suddenly curious at the tone her daughter used. There was a slight hesitation in it, which meant what she had in mind was a little serious.

But he might already have an idea of what they would be discussing. He did not finish his confession the last time they were here. He believed it was time that he told them the entire story.

"It had something about your past involvement with the underground group," Alex spoke up. "What is your relationship with Joaquin Augustus?" Going straight to the topic.

He quickly took out the file he had shown Dani before and handed it to him. He hoped he could shed some light on this matter and give them information about its authenticity.

Ethan took a deep breath as he read the file, then looked at his wife, who only nodded for him to continue. He had already discussed this with her.

She finally agreed that they could not keep any of this a secret anymore. At least not to Dani and Alex. They deserved the truth since the past had started to haunt them all.

"Joaquin was a good friend of mine since we were young. We grew up playing together." He finally told his tale that he had buried in the past. "He was like a brother."

A story that he thought he would be carrying to his grave, a secret that would never see the light of day. But, it seemed just like any other secret. It always found a way to unveil itself.

"He was said to be the underground leader before," Alex stated, wanting confirmation of this information.

It was common knowledge that the man was the leader of the biggest illegal syndicate in their city, but nobody could touch him. He had so many connections that he was practically invincible during that time.

"Yes, he was." He admitted, thinking of the time he had learned about his business. "At first, I did not know when I joined him in his business venture. I thought everything was legitimate."

Afterward, he discovered the truth. He found himself involved in some shady trading. It was too late to back out as his friend dragged his name into the organization.

"I never wanted to be part of it, but I was trapped inside." Ethan could remember how he tried to distance himself from his friend. But Joaquin kept saying that he only wanted them to be business partners.

"What did you do to get out of it?" Dani had no idea what her father had gone through in his youth.

She never realized that his father had been just like them, capable of making errors of judgment. She always thought he had chosen to join the group to further his greed for money and power. But she was gravely mistaken.

"Joaquin finally gave up and let me leave the group without consequence," Ethan answered his question. "Then, I paid off many people to clear my name from the organization."

He still remembered how he struggled to clean up his mess. He was young and made several mistakes. But he worked hard to clear his name.

He did not mind losing his money. He could earn it back through hard work. But to lose his reputation. It would be the end of his early young career.

"What about the rumor that Joaquin had a son? Do you know if there was a truth in that? Would you know who the mother is?" Alex interrupted, wanting answers to a question plaguing his mind since he remembered the report.

If there was truth in this rumor, then this person might be the one involved in all that was happening around them. It was not Dani he was targeting but Ethan. He might be using Dani to get to Ethan. At least that was his conclusion.

Ethan looked again at Laura, feeling that it would be more difficult for her when he finally revealed the truth. He had agreed to keep this because he only wanted to protect his family.

"The rumors had always been true. But Joaquin made sure to hide the truth. But it was not as simple as that." Ethan shifted in his seat.

Then he felt a hand landing on his shoulders. He saw his wife standing beside his chair, giving him all the support he needed to continue his story.

He pulled her hand into his, enveloping it in his warmth. He was glad that despite everything he had done in his past to hurt his wife, she never left him. She still stood by him.

"What do you mean?" Dani could not understand why this man would hide his family unless they were in danger. But he was the leader of the most notorious group. Who would dare to touch them? "Do you know his wife?"

Based on the report, he was never married. There were no documents that would indicate that he had been married or divorced from anyone.

He had many women in his life, but nobody ever claimed to have a son with him. Or maybe he did, but nobody openly told anyone else except him. But why?

"Marietta was our friend. Just like Joaquin, she was the other part of our trio." He remembered her face fondly in his mind, recalling the beautiful memories they shared, the three of them.

He had made many stupid decisions in his life. Marietta had always been his biggest regret.

Chapter 653: The cage of the past

She could only watch her father as he tried to recall his past that she believed he had worked hard to leave behind. But as she very well knew, no one could outrun the past. It always had a way to catch up with the present.

"Marietta and Joaquin ended up falling in love with each other." He related to the two who were listening intently to his story.

He was happy for them. But at the same time, he was also heartbroken, thinking that he was also in love with her. He had secretly hoped that Marietta would love him back, but her heart belonged to his friend.

"Did he get her pregnant?" Alex asked the question, anxious to hear the answer.

Somehow hearing a few backgrounds of the man who used to run the operation of this organization was shedding some light on their case. But he had to know more.

"It is not that simple." He looked into his wife's eyes, wanting to draw strength in her. "There was another part of the story that you are still now aware of, another secret that we decided not to tell you."

He suddenly found himself reminiscing the past. A moment that he thought he would never try to recall again. A memory that he promised everyone involved that he would never mention again.

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He found her crying in her room. He had been trying to contact her almost all day, but she had not responded. He was worried, so he hurriedly came to her apartment to check on her.

"What is going on?" He asked when she finally looked up to see him. He remembered how distraught she was, but he still did not understand what had gone wrong. "Why are you crying?"

"I found him cheating on me." She finally voiced out in between her sobs. He remembered how he almost did not understand what she was saying. Her voice was barely audible.

"Who?" He was slightly confused. "Joaquin?" He asked, but he knew it was impossible. His friend was madly in love with her. He could never cheat on her.

"Yes, your friend. He cheated on me." She said as her words slightly slurred. That was the time that he saw the bottle in her hand.

He realized that she had been drinking. He had come closer to her when he had finally smelled the stink of the alcohol on her breath.

"I think you have enough of drinking for tonight." He tried to take the bottle from her, but she slapped his hands away.

He could see that she was not in an accomodating mood. If he pushed her too much, she might see him as hostile and force him to leave.

"Why don't you join me instead? Drink with me through my misery." She said, stammering in her words.

"If I help you finish that, would you finally agree to rest?" He knew how Marietta could be stubborn, just like him and his friend, Joaquin.

However, he knew he could not leave her in such a condition. He had to find a way to calm her down and force her to rest. But his mind was still thinking of the accusation she had just told him.

"Fine. You promise." She pushed the drink in his direction. Suddenly he realized that the bottle was still more than half full, but she had already consumed a lot for her capacity.

She was not a drinker. Therefore, any alcoholic drink would have an immediate effect on her. Right now, he could see that she was drunk.

"I promise." He took the bottle from her hands. Then, he sat beside her on the floor before chugging a mouthful of the wine she was drinking like water. "Tell me." He encouraged her to confide in him.

"I saw a girl sitting on his lap while he was entertaining some clients in a bar." She calmly said as tears still flowed down her cheeks.

"Maybe you were mistaken." He still wanted to defend his friend, but he could not deny that his friend sometimes did have women flocking around him.

"No." She hissed at him, mad that he was taking Joaquin's side. "Let us just drink because you are too loyal to your friend." She said, grabbing the drink away from him.

Then, he found himself talking to her about something else. They laughed while recalling their childhood memories as he emptied the bottle by himself.

It was one of the best conversations the two of them had. But it was also the worst night as they committed the biggest mistake of their lives.

"What else are you keeping from me that could be worse than this? Whatever it is, I assure you, I can take it?" Dani said, waking him up from his reverie. She was confused at the way his father was acting.

"Marietta had a child but not with Joaquin." He admitted, shifting his eyes to his daughter, then at his wife, who nodded again, giving her blessing for him to continue.

"Joaquin claimed the child to be his to some people. He raised the child with Marietta, but he never married her." He explained further.

He remembered looking for them, asking him about her whereabouts. But his friend was too mad at him. He would not reveal where he had taken them.

He said that Marietta chose to go away as far away from him. "He hid her and the child from the world, saying he only wanted to protect them from his enemies." Meaning him.

When Marietta never tried to contact him, not even once. He knew that he had to stop looking for her. At the time, Joaquin also cut off their ties. They went on their separate lives.

One day, he received a letter from Marietta asking him to forget about her and whatever happened. That day he decided that was the last time he would think about her and their child.

"You said Joaquin claimed the child to be his. Who is the father?" Alex was afraid to ask, but he had to know the truth. If his suspicion was correct, Dani also deserved the truth.

"I always believed he was mine." He knew then that he should have looked for them. He should have taken responsibility for what happened, but he was a coward then.

He took the easy way out and moved on with his life. He never looked back and never bothered looking for them. Then, he met his wife and fell in love with her.

This time, he realized that what he had with Marietta was a friendship he had tainted with his false interpretation of love. But what he had with Laura was pure love. He learned there was a big difference.

"You have another child that you never mentioned once to us." She shouted, unable to contain her shock. "Did you know about this, Mom?" She asked her mother, surprised by her father's sudden confession.

"I know all about it, Dani. Your father had told me all his deepest secrets from the start of our relationship." She confided to her daughter, not wanting her to think that her father was as bad as it sounded.

It was not only his decision not to tell Dani about his past but also hers. They thought it would never come out again. But it seemed it was starting to slowly creep into the surface, unraveling in front of them.

However, she could see that it was a relief to finally unleash the heavy burden they had carried with them through all these years. She and her husband were now free from the cage of the past.

Chapter 654: Think outside the box

His files had looked the same since he had sat on his desk an hour ago. He was late in his meeting and distracted. Now, he could hardly concentrate on the words before him.

He grabbed his phone from the table but dropped it immediately, recalling the message he had sent her just moments ago.

"What was that?" He mumbled to himself, feeling more frustrated by his situation. "What have I done?" Rubbing his palms across his face before dropping his elbows on top of the table.

Instead of clearing one problem by getting rid of the reporter, he believed he had just created one massive problem that could bite him in the ass in the long run.

He was not drunk.



He was sane at the time.

But he was horny as hell.

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Still, that was not an excuse for what he did last night. But was he guilty, ashamed, happy, satisfied, or regretful? He was not entirely sure what he felt about it.

Slamming his hands on the table, he pushed himself away from his work. He gave up on finishing the documents as his mind kept replaying the night inside his head like a broken record.

"But your name was linked to an American woman. I think a friend of Princess Daniella. Did you two have any romantic relationship?" She casually asked him, but he could see that she was slightly uncomfortable with her questions.

Instead of focusing his mind on his answers, his eyes drifted into her eyes, nose, lips, and hands that kept moving on the counter. He could not help but be fascinated with her tiny movements.

"Jacky is a good friend of mine. Nothing more." He wanted that to be clear because he did not want her name to end up in the tabloids with a ridiculous caption.

"Will you characterize yourself more like Prince Edward or Prince Alexander?" She continued, hoping to get as many questions answered before she would send him away for good.

"I think we all have our different traits. I will never compare myself to the two, nor would I say that I am better than them." He clarified his answer, knowing that reporters could easily twist them to make big bucks. He was not saying that she was like any other reporter.

"Currently, are you in a romantic relationship, openly or privately?" She asked again, clutching at her notes, checking her list. But she only wanted to focus on her task, not how he looked at her.

It certainly felt like she was more interested to know his answer to this one. But she kept denying it, saying it was for her article. She was not asking this question for herself but for all the women interested to know his story.

"No. I am not in any romantic relationship of any sort." He felt like he was at a slumber party when he was young, where they kept asking him about his deepest secrets.

"Do you like a particular girl now?" She suddenly felt like her breast was about to burst as she held her breath, waiting for his answer.

Slowly she breathed out, not wanting to show him how nervous she felt from doing this interview. She suddenly felt like an amateur reporter doing her first interview from her action.

His eyes automatically scanned her face, suddenly unable to answer her at that instant. "No," Finally, whispering his answer after a few seconds. But it sounded more like a lie.

Suddenly, tension filled the air around him, making him slightly uncomfortable around her. But when his eyes made contact with hers, he could not look away.

"Is there something wrong with my face?" Quickly putting her hands on her cheeks, feeling uneasy at the way he was staring at her.

Suddenly, her heart skipped a beat, feeling her body shiver at the intensity of his stare. She wished to look away, but her body failed to respond to her command.

"Nothing. It is perfect." He knew he should not have said that. But he was slowly losing his control.

When her lips parted as the tip of her tongue moistened its red flesh, his eyes were easily mesmerized. His brain stopped functioning, and his body took over.

"What are you doing?" She asked as he leaned closer to her.

Her mind sounded alarming bells for her to move away, but her body stayed immobile as it waited for what he would do next. It would seem that the barrier between them was not enough to keep them apart.

"I don't know." He answered her honestly, also confused at how his body reacted to hers.

He had fought hard against the attraction he felt for her. He knew that it was nothing more than lust, a physical desire of the flesh. He doubted that emotions were involved.

However, he could not stand it anymore as he grabbed and pulled her into a punishing kiss, putting all his pent-up emotions into that kiss.

"Why did you kiss me?" She asked when he finally let go of her lips to take a few breaths.

She did not even realize she had moved in front of him. Her hands wrapped around his neck while her body pressed close to his body.

"Because you did not try to stop me." He hoarsely whispered as his lips grazed her skin just underneath her ears with tender kisses, sending a thrilling sensation throughout her body.

He wanted her to stop him, to tell him no. But she never did any of those. Instead, she encouraged him to continue with her soft moans. However, at this point, he doubted if he wanted to stop.

"I don't think I want you to." She honestly did not want him to stop. On the contrary, she wished him to continue giving her the pleasure his lips and hands were inflicting on her body.

His hands explored her back as if he was a sculpture, caressing all her curves. His lips traveled down her throat, pushing her body to the edge.

"Sir, excuse me." A voice followed by a knock woke him up from his daze, making him jerk from his seat.

He suddenly felt like a boy fantasizing about her first kiss as his cheeks slightly burned from his memory. He reasoned that it had been a while since he was in a relationship, not saying he was in one now.

Not that he was abstaining from sex. But as Rick had pointed out, he had been lacking for a long time. But he could not do it so casually like some other guys.

"Sir, you said to remind you of your meeting in five minutes." She stood in front of her boss, who seemed to be somewhere else. "Make it three minutes, Sir."

“Yes, I will be there.” He quickly responded, shaking his head to drive away his unwanted thoughts.

He stood from his chair, fixing his tie, putting on his coat before grabbing his phone again. This time, he was determined to concentrate on his task, which was running this business.

He would have to deal with his other issues later when he had more time to dwell on them. Maybe he needed to think outside the box to derive a better solution.

Chapter 655: The built-up sexual frustration

“Oh my!” Eida rushed into the room, grabbing her phone, which she had left playing on her table when she answered the door.

She had no idea that the phone kept recording whatever happened to them last night. At least, every moment while they were in the kitchen. In her defense, she lost her sanity, at some point, in the middle of that heated moment.

Her cheeks slightly burned in embarrassment upon realizing that her friend might have heard most of it. She might have recognized what was happening in that recording. But then again, she knew most of her secrets anyway.

“I feel like I missed an opportunity to witness a very steamy moment.” Amelia teased her friend, knowing that at the time she had stopped the tape, she was on the edge of her final moment of bliss.

She thought it was just a recording of an interview her friend was doing for a piece of article. She did hear a legitimate question and answer portion about love affairs.

Then, it was quiet. A long silence ensued, followed by a few background noises and what appeared to be someone whispering. Then, some more distinctive sounds.

She suddenly felt uncomfortable. Finally, hearing a considerable amount of moans and groans from her and her sexual partner. Slowly, the volume increased as the intensity heightened. Then, her friend stopped playing the recording.

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“It is not for your delicate ears.” She responded with a playful smile. “But you are welcome to listen to it more later if it is your wish.” She dared her friend.

She met Amelia in one of her interviews about a charity auction. Then, another time when she covered a foundation event. After that, they turned into friends.

However, she was far from being like her. They were opposites in many things. But they still hit it off, enjoying their conversations and the few things they had in common.

“Maybe later, Eida. I need something to preoccupy my mind. That seems to be a perfect distraction.” She responded with a slight chuckle. At least she was already feeling better, unlike when she left her house.

She picked up the coffee that her friend precariously placed on the table when she rushed to grab her phone, taking a few napkins on the side to wipe a few spills on the table.

“Later then.” She waved the phone at her friend before putting it back on the table. “I did not hear that you are back in town. When did you arrive?” She asked her, surprised to see her but glad that she came by to visit.

At the same time, she was glad that it was just a voice recording, not a full sex video. Not that she would be completely embarrassed to be in a passionate embrace with a man.

But she believed her partner would not be too please with the idea, remembering his text message earlier. She should delete that part before another soul discovered her deep secret.

Then, she wondered if her friend knew who she was with on the recording. She tried to recall if she had ever mentioned his name during those times. But she could not remember.

She put aside all thoughts of what happened last night to the back of her mind, focusing her concentration on her friend. There was no use dwelling on it anyway.

“A few days ago. I only visited to check on my Dad. But your senses seemed to be slowing down if you did not know I was here. Or...” She paused, tapping her finger on her lips. “You were just too busy taking private interviews.”

She smiled maliciously, referring to the recent recording she had just heard. If she was being honest, she envied her friend. At least she was getting some, not like her.

It had been a while since she tried having a relationship. She thought it would finally release her from her obsession with her childhood friend. But alas, she was still nowhere cured of it.

“I have been very busy with my stories lately.” She reasoned. “That one is an isolated case.” She quickly added. “Until when will you be here? We should go out.” Changing the subject.

It had been a while since she had returned to their hometown. She enjoyed her company because she had many beautiful insights into the different places she had been.

She was not just a model. She was a very intelligent ambassadress that represented their nation with grace and pride.

“I plan to leave tomorrow, but if you wish to go out, I can postpone my plans for a later date.” She suggested, liking spending a few moments with her friend.

She barely had time to call her friend. It had been a long time since she had a girl bonding moment. She had been busy with her career. She rarely attended social events unless it was official.

Eida was one of the few people she wanted to see when she came home for a short visit. Besides, she needed a friend at the moment. She was a person she could trust about her troubles.

“That would be great.” Eida expressed her excitement at the prospect of going out with a friend. She needed a distraction, and her friend just offered a perfect one. “How is your dad, by the way?”

She could sense that her friend was not thrilled to be home again. Based on previous experience, it had something to do with her father. It was her reason why she never liked to go home.

“Same as always. Domineering as usual.” She voiced out her dismay that he had not changed.  
“Truthfully, he is worse this time.” She corrected as she looked at a picture on the wall.

She envied many of her friends because they had parents who cared for them. From the picture on the wall, she could see the affection of Eida’s parents for their only child.

She suddenly wished that her mom did not die so young. She would have had a great mom based on what she remembered about her when she was still alive.

“What about you? Is this a new guy? Are you finally going serious or just another of your flings?” She was well aware of how her friends operate around men.

Eida swore never to get involved in serious relationships. Therefore, she was guessing that this was a client. An interview that accidentally went the other way.

Sometimes, she wished she could easily switch off her emotions and do what her friend did. But, she could not do it. Besides, her heart already belonged to just one man.

“You know me. I don’t do committed relationships.” She acted just the way she would if it had been another man. But somehow, it did not feel right.

The words suddenly felt bitter when they came out of her mouth. What was wrong with her? Suddenly, she felt guilty for classifying what happened last night as another of her short-time affair.

Granted that last night was phenomenal, still, she did not think it would be anything exceptional from her other one-night stand. It was just the built-up sexual frustration that made it seem extraordinary.

Chapter 656: Running out of options

“Do you think we will find him?” Her mind kept going back to her conversation with her Dad yesterday as they proceeded to Tim’s headquarters to do some more digging.

She tried to convince her father to tell her about his identity, but he insisted that he never knew. And he never tried to find out after his two friends asked him to forget about them.

After years of being married to her mother, her father thought that it would be better for everyone not to unearth a past that would only cause grief to everyone involved.

“We will find him. But it would have been easier if Ethan could have given us a hint of who he was or even at least the mother’s name.” He stated, staring into his wife’s eyes, full of questions.

He could only guess what she might be feeling, discovering that she was unaware of an existing brother. Last night, as he held her while she slept, he could still feel her restlessness about this new information.

“You know how stubborn my father could be. But I never thought that they could keep a secret like this from me. My Dad, maybe, but not Mom.” Her heart slightly felt broken, hearing that her parents could keep something this big from her.

However, she also understood, in some way, why they had to do it. They had their reasons, although she slightly disagreed with their decision. But she also had to see from their point of view. They thought it was for the best of everyone, not just her.

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As soon as they walked into the office, Tim immediately greeted them warmly, especially her, since they barely saw each other after the incident.

"I am happy that you seem to be back in great shape." She expressed her gladness to see the people who had risked their lives for them doing well.

Even Ben, who was now back at her side, protecting her as if he had not been in harm's way fighting for his life. She would be forever thankful for all their sacrifices, especially hearing about their comrades who died trying to find and save them.

"I am also happy that we had saved you both just in time," Tim said, while Ben nodded his head in agreement.

He quickly showed them into a conference room, where he had already prepared some of the documents they needed. Once he heard the new information, he worked overtime to find information that they might find relevant in this meeting.

"What did you find out?" Alex asked as he sat in the center of the table while Dani was on his other side.

On the other hand, Tim stood on the other side of the table, pointing at the screen at his back about his current investigation.

"We discovered that there are at least thirty women during those times that used the name. Marietta." He pointed to the list on the board. "It seemed it was a popular name at the time."

He continued to point to three names that they had managed to contact, but they did not fit the criteria of being the girlfriend of the mafia don and having an existing son at that age.

"What about the others?" Dani asked, not ready to give up on finding her brother.

She had no idea what she was trying to accomplish by looking for him. Maybe to say sorry for what their father had done to him.

She figured he might have an abandoned issue against their father. It was why he was venting his anger on her. He might have learned the truth about his identity.

Now, he wished for her to pay for their father's sin. It was a perfect explanation of why he had her kidnapped. Alex was just collateral damage in the situation.

"At least six were confirmed dead, but we are still looking into their story," Tim said as he showed them another list. "Most of the others had moved out of the city. We are still looking for them."

His team was working hard, but it would take time to search for them all. But he was hopeful that they would have a lead soon enough.

"Don't stop looking," Alex instructed, putting his hand on top of his wife, assuring her that his team would do everything until they had found her brother.

He only hoped that finding him would lead to a solution to their problem and not cause more. If he had transcended as the new leader of the illegal syndicate, he might be more dangerous than Dani thought.

"What about Samson? How is he?" Dani changed the subject, seeing that there was nothing she could do about his brother for now.

On the other hand, she wished to see his friend, Samson. She still felt she owed him for saving their lives. She could feel she had not done enough to compensate for his sacrifice.

Since the authorities took Samson in custody, she still did not have a chance to visit him for security reasons. But she planned to do so soon as she could arrange it.

"He is doing well in the safehouse. Do not worry about him. We are monitoring him closely and his family too." Tim assured her, knowing how important the big man was to the princess.

Since they had him in custody, the princess also asked to have his family placed protection with their security detail. She did not want anything to happen to them.

"What about our case with Nick?" Alex wanted his sentencing done at the soonest possible time.

He did not want that man to have an opportunity to get out of this case with a technicality or something else. The sooner they could have a verdict on his case, the better.

"About that." Tim paused, gauging if he should talk about Nick in front of Dani. But when Dani nodded her head, he continued. "I think he is trying to reach us."

It was a very unusual way of getting in touch with them. But it was usually done to avoid going through the system and being noticed. Inmates sent signals that they did not want their enemies to know.

"What do you mean?" Dani questioned, curious at the new information.

She could not think of why he would want to talk to them. His lawyers had not sent any transmission about such a request. She would know if there was one.

But based on Gerald, when she talked to him, he believed that Nick would soon confess and accept his crime. He had already met with Nick's lawyers, and they did not have enough evidence to win the lawsuit.

"I think he is becoming frantic with his situation. Trusting lesser people, not even his lawyers. I believe he is about to spill his guts to save his skin." Tim informed them.

He had seen many inmates who felt pressured to tell their secrets to save themselves and make a deal. He could not see Nick as any different.

From what he had heard in the grapevine, many of his men were turning against him. His lawyers were hardly doing anything to make his case. He was a desperate man, running out of options.

Chapter 657: Claiming a son

"Send him in once he arrives," Ethan told her secretary as he closed his eyes for just a bit, leaning on his favorite chair.

He hardly had a good night's sleep after what happened yesterday. He knew it was bound to happen and had prepared for it. But still, it had drained most of his strength by simply confessing all his sins.

Luckily, Laura stood by his side, supporting him through all of this. He recalled the time he told her about his son. She initially suggested looking for him. But he declined.

He had convinced himself that he was doing the right thing for his friends and his son by staying away and giving them the chance to start a family.

“No need to show me in. I am here at your service.” The man stood by the door, announcing his presence.

He continued to move forward inside and sat down on the chair he believed was reserved for him. He knew he did not need an invitation since his presence would always be welcome in this house.

He stared at his friend, who looked like he had aged drastically. He heard he had been sick, but he never had the chance to check on him. Still, he was glad that he was ok.

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“It is about time.” Ethan opened his eyes, recognizing his friend. He straightened a bit on his seat, focusing his attention on his guest. His secretary excused herself, leaving them alone to discuss their business in private.

“You can not blame me. I am halfway around the world on vacation, but I came as soon as I received your message.” He explained as he fixed his casual flowery shirt, replacing the usual black coat and white shirt he loved to wear.

“Fine. I am thankful that you are here now, Stockholm.” Ethan replied, shaking his head to clear his mind from drowsiness.

He had called for him yesterday as soon as his daughter and son-in-law had left the premises. He wanted to find his son before the two could uncover his identity.

If someone could determine his son’s whereabouts at the soonest possible time, it would be Detective Stockholm. He was still the best in this business. He had tried to use many investigators, but he still had to find someone as good as him.

“So, what is this all about?” The detective crossed his legs while leaning on his chair, making himself comfortable as he waited for his new assignment. “What is the emergency?”

He could see that this was important for his friend if he had to disturb him and rushed him back to his side. Under normal circumstances, he would not have bothered, but Mr. Hamilton was no ordinary client of his.

“I want you to find my son.” Ethan did not need any introduction to what he wanted. He required results.

He never believed in beating around the bush. If he wanted something done, he would make it happen. He would not wait for it to fall in his lap. He would look for it.

“Wait?” Suddenly, he leaned closer to him, unable to believe what he had just heard. “You have a son.” That was a piece of information he was not expecting. Or would ever expect to hear from him.



In all his years in this business, that was something he had never heard from the grapevine, not gossip nor a whisper. Therefore, hearing that it was a possibility and Ethan had kept it all this time was explosive news.

“Yes, you heard it right. I have a son I had never mentioned to anyone except my wife. But now, Dani and Alex knew about it.” Ethan began to explain to him.

After all, the detective needed all the information before starting his investigation. He needed him to find the woman he had impregnated when he was young. His friend that he had betrayed because of his wrong belief about love.

“Her mother’s name is Marietta Brown.” Remembering the name of the woman he believed he first loved.

He still thought of her quite fondly and his friend, Joaquin. If only he had met Laura during that time, he might have prevented that incident from happening.

But he was obsessed with the idea of loving her, that it should be him and not Joaquin, that he allowed it to cloud his judgment. At the moment, all he could do was regret and hopefully make amends for his sin.

“What else can you tell me about her and your son?” It would be easier if he could get as much information about the case. So it would be easier for him to find them.

However, he still could not get over that a man like him could be keeping such a big secret all these years. But he knew that this was not new. Families tend to have skeletons in their closets.

“I think he is now the one running the underground syndicate in the city.” He offered his guest a drink, taking a small amount for himself.

The doctors did say that he could drink just moderately. Today, he badly needed one. The more he thought of what his son could have ended up within his absence. The more he regretted not being part of his life.

“Hmmm!” Stockholm stared at him as he rummaged his brain for a sudden thought. “Are we talking about the rumored son of Joaquin Augustus?” He scratched his beard with his fingers, trying to piece the puzzle. “Is he your son?”

He had heard of it. A story like that had run for some time during his time, but it quickly died down, having no substantial proof to support the claim.

“Yes. If you have not heard, Joaquin and Marietta were my friends before we had a fallout. It was my fault when I got her pregnant.”

He wondered if Marietta told their son who his father was. Or if Joaquin admitted to him that he was not his father. Now, he could not help but think of what he would tell him once he was face to face with him.

What did he probably look like now? What could he be doing with his life? The real question he would like to ask was if he had followed Joaquin’s footsteps.

"Honestly, I am surprised that you knew them at all. I never heard that you were connected with Joaquin at all." The detective could not believe he had known and investigated this man before, but he did not have a whiff of his connection to the gang.

"It was easier to erase all traces of my connection to them during that time compared to today." He told him.

He just paid all the people involved and had burned the solid evidence. Then, distance himself from them. It was like he never knew them at all. It was what money could do.

He had heard about his death. He wanted to visit him, but he was afraid it would open old wounds and unleash their dark secret.

He knew his presence would not be welcome if he started unearthing the past, claiming a son he had not cared to look for in the past.

Chapter 658: Shadows of the underground world

"Do you think I can see Samson today?" She hopefully asked, checking her watch, if she still had time. It was still early.

She had been thinking of visiting him for some time, but she always had something else urgent to do. Nevertheless, she believed that it was about time that she made time for him. She owed him that much.

"We can arrange it if you want to see him today," Tim informed his assistant to make the necessary schedule and clear some time for her visit.

He had seen the big man and had a good conversation with him. He did like his outlook on life. He did not sense that Samson had enjoyed his life of crime.

Many had not picked the life they led. Circumstances forced them to do things that they did not like but had to for survival. Life never gave them much to choose from, so they ended in a life they never wanted.

"This is one of the most secure facilities that the agency owns. Samson is quite safe in this place." Ben informed her as he showed them around the building, passing through several securities.

"You have to sign in first before we can proceed inside." The guard said to her at the security checkpoint.

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"Of course," Dani responded as security inspected her for any dangerous weapons. She took the book and signed her name.

She noticed the other names of the people who had come to see Samson. She saw several familiar names. Then, a name stood out. She had heard of him before. Mike Carter.

She heard that he was part of the people handling her case against Nick. She still had to meet the man in person, but many said he was a great attorney.

He was the last one to visit Samson, based on the record. It was not unusual since he was probably checking on their witness and asking for additional information for the case.

"Please, proceed inside." The security escorted them to the room where Samson had stayed while in this trial.

She immediately went inside, where Samson was already waiting for her. Alex and Ben followed closely behind her, although they knew that she was safe in his hand.

"Princess, you finally came to visit." Samson stood from his seat and greeted the woman he had saved.

He was glad that she looked great and that no harm had befallen her after all they had gone through. Until now, he was not sorry that he had helped her.

"I am sorry if it took some time to come here, but I assume you are well taken care of and had no problems." She wanted an assurance that he was good while in their protection.

He had been good to her during her captivity and risked his life for her and her husband. The least she could do was return the favor by guaranteeing his safety and comfort.

"That is ok. I know it has been difficult for you. I am just glad that you are now ok." Samson smiled at her, showing her that she had nothing to worry about him. "Besides, I am not going anywhere soon." He jokingly said that made Dani smile.

"If you need anything else, do not hesitate to ask." Alex finally spoke up, also thankful for the assistance that this man had done for them.

If not for Samson, he was unsure if his men would have rescued them that easily. Maybe if that was the case, more lives might have been lost.

"I believe you already provide more than enough." Samson already felt blessed to meet this couple. His encounter with them had given him hope in life.

At first, he thought his life would end in the illegal world he belonged. But they managed to provide him with an opportunity to change the direction of his life.

He could finally change for the better, and his family did not have to suffer for his mistake. His recent conversation with them was fantastic as he learned that they were doing excellent in their new home.

"There is nothing I will not do for you after saving us," Dani stated, but she could see that Samson did not want to abuse their generosity.

He only asked what was fair and did not want more. A trait Dani rarely see in anyone, especially for someone who used to belong in the criminal world.

"Anyway, we came here to check on you and ask if there is anything else you can give us about our case." Alex appreciated what he already did for them, but if there were anything else he could do for them. He would like to know now.

He knew that he was so close to finding a way to put Nick permanently in jail and learned the mastermind behind all this. As much as he wanted his wife to meet his brother, he would still make him pay if he was involved in their kidnapping.

“As I said before, I never met the big boss. I only heard his voice through phone conversation.” Samson said, still hesitating whether he should give more information.

He had promised to help Dani, but could he risk his life and his family again by doing more, by telling them more. However, could he be truly free if the big boss remained at large.

“But anything else you can provide, it would help us with our case.” Dani insisted, knowing that she was closed to figuring this one out.

She could feel that he was still keeping something from her. He knew something that he was not sharing. She did not want to force him, but she was feeling desperate.

At the same time, she was afraid that she was putting too much pressure on him by asking him to risk his life again for her. She believed no amount of money could equal a life.

“I know someone that might have an idea of who he is.” Samson knew that he was risking his neck again for her.

However, if he would not do this, he would be looking at his shoulder all his life. His family would never be forever safe. He would be forever bound to live in the shadows of the underground world.

#### Chapter 659: Reign supreme

“What are you doing here, Edward?” Duke Frederick asked as he guided his brother into his office after learning that he unexpectedly arrived at his doorstep.

Usually, if the King came to visit him, he informed him or his staff beforehand. But today, there was no notice that he was coming. He wondered what was so urgent.

“I came to check on my brother.” The King uttered as he scanned the room.

It had been a while since he had last visited his brother in his home. Mostly, he summoned his brother to the palace for whatever he needed from him.

“You should be resting and not roaming the street of the Kingdom. You should have called for me. I would have come immediately.” The Duke informed the King, concerned about his welfare.

Although the doctor said he was out of danger, he still believed he should be resting back in his castle. However, he was glad to see his brother well and back in shape.

“Well, it is getting boring, being stuck inside that place with nothing else to do but follow everyone’s orders.” Edward sat on the soft cushion of the Duke’s favorite armchair.

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He always wondered if his brother ever regretted giving up the crown. Although he had loved being a King, a part of him still felt his brother had the better deal in this.

But his brother did not force this on him. Nobody had forced the crown on his head since he freely accepted the responsibility. But seeing how he had raised his son, sometimes he could not help but blame his position for taking his time away from him.

"Just wait till you get back completely on your feet, and you will be swamped with work once again." He told his brother as he sat opposite him and observed his peculiar behavior.

He still had to find out what his brother came here to do. He could tell that this was not a social call. His brother needed something from him.

"Maybe." He shrugged his shoulder as if he was not entirely sure of what he said. "Or I might be out of my chair sooner than I think." The King added.

He had heard from his loyal people that a secret meeting took place while he rested in his chambers. It had been privy to only the Council members and no one else. Nobody knew what the meeting had been all about except for some speculations.

"What are you saying, Edward?" He wondered if his brother was onto what was happening around him.

Ever since his brother had his attack, the Court had made sure to lessen his responsibility, not wanting him to take on more stress than necessary.

But he wondered if he had heard of the meeting and had an idea of what they had discussed. But his statement, the King might have a slight idea of what the Council had suggested.

"Are they already talking about replacing me? Does the Council think that I could not handle my responsibilities anymore?" He questioned his brother, hoping he would not keep secrets from him.

As the Council leader, he would be frank about the standing of the Council regarding his ruling. Although he felt as strong as a horse regardless of what happened to him, he could not blame the Council for panicking and finding alternative solutions to the problem.

Now that his son was not allowed to sit on the throne, he was still without an heir unless Alex accepted the responsibility. The question remained. Would he?

"Yes, the topic had been placed on the table during the meeting." The Duke could never lie to his brother or even to his King.

It might not be a national emergency, but he was still his brother. He wanted him to prepare himself for the inevitable. There was a point in their lives they had to accept change.

"I see." The King sighed, feeling a little disappointed, but he had expected as much. However, he was thankful that his brother told him the truth and did not keep this from him.

He leaned closer, resting his elbows on his knees, contemplating what he had just heard. Now that there was a chance that he would step down from his position, he wondered what the Council had decided on his place.

"It is still only speculation if you will not return to your previous health. It is not final and binding." The Duke told his brother, not wanting him to feel that he and the Council had betrayed him and his title.

There was a rule and a process that they had to follow. It was not as simple as dethroning a King from his position. There would be deliberations and evidence that needed to be submitted before they could proceed to change leadership.

“When there is fire, someone is feeding it with fuel.” The King resignedly uttered, staring at his brother as if he knew that there was more to the story.

He was not naive. He could tell that this idea did not come to life without someone opening up the topic. Someone wanted his position, and he doubted it was his brother.

As far as he knew, his brother would not force his son to this responsibility unless Alex would want it himself. In the past, Alex had already declined the throne more than once. Who else wanted to be King?

“Do you trust me?” The Duke asked his brother. “For now, all I want from you is rest. Let me handle this.”

He did not wait for the King’s answer. He knew that he did. However, he needed his brother to concentrate on getting himself better while he handled the situation. He would ask for his help if he needed it.

“I do, but I am not an imbecile. I can still think and act just like you.” The King said, not agreeing that his brother took the entire burden onto himself.

Whatever was happening in his Kingdom, he wanted to be part of resolving it. After all, he was still the King that ruled over all of them.

“I am sorry, but you are right. You deserve to know everything that is happening around you. I should have treated you like you are already on your deathbed.” He smiled at his younger brother, standing up from his seat and tapping him on the shoulder.

He knew if someone could help him with this problem, it would be his brother. Nobody would have a better opinion on this matter than the King himself.

“It is about time somebody recognized that I am still alive and kicking.” The King jokingly told his brother as he tapped his brother’s hand. “Tell me. What is going on?”

He was not concerned that the Council was already thinking of replacing him in his position. He would gladly accept his fate if they found him not fit to be King of their Kingdom anymore.

Maybe it would be a blessing in disguise in his case. He could finally have the peace that his brother felt when he had declined the crown.

But he still wished to know what fate lay ahead of their Kingdom. Who would be the next leader to take his place? Who would reign supreme?

Chapter 660: Only child

“What are you doing?” She looked at her husband’s face as he held her close to his body.

As soon as they stepped in the front door of their new apartment, Alex suddenly lifted her in his arms. The suddenness did surprise her, but she soon realized the act was only natural.

As a newly married couple entering their first home, tradition dictated that the groom carried his bride inside the house. In this case, their new apartment.

"Making you the happiest bride in the world." He smiled at his wife, showing her how much he wanted to do this for her.

After their last visit, Haley insisted they had to stay away until she had finished all the rest of the renovations and decorations.

He finally opened the door and revealed the first part of the house. It was the hallway leading to the living room. But from their viewpoint, they could already see their beautiful apartment.

"Wow, Haley did a great job." Dani could not stare at their new home.

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Alex already sent most of their private things and had his assistant buy grocery stuff. Therefore, they could move in at this moment.

She looked at the masterpiece in the center of the elegant fireplace. It was a large painting of their wedding picture. Whoever painted it did a marvelous job since it looked very similar to the original piece.

"That is Haley's wedding gift to us," Alex informed her, seeing that she had been staring at it for a long time. "Let me show you the rest of our home."

Haley had asked him to provide her with a picture of the wedding. He questioned her purpose. Haley explained her plan to surprise her friend with a portrait.

"She always has a great talent." She always admired the paintings she had made in the past. Although she seldom painted anymore, concentrating on her architectural career.

"What about this one?" Alex showed her to another area of the house.

He pulled her to the balcony. It was still full of fresh flowers, but it would soon wither away from the cold, but for now, it had brightened the small space and added to the view of the city.

"This is beautiful." She smiled at the magnificent sight before her.

She would never get tired of looking at the tall skyscrapers that tried to reach the sky. It was a great contrast to the glorious view of the blue horizon behind it.

"Come on. I want to show you something else." He pulled her again inside the house and went on to the set of stairs.

Soon, they were going through the rest of the rooms in the apartment. There was still one room that had nothing on it. It was just a blank white painted room, bare of any furniture.

"What is this room?" She asked, curious about what his husband had planned for this.

She had contributed most of the ideas for the living room and another part of the house. While the rest, she had left to Alex's discretion.

"I did not want to mess up with this one. I thought you might want to design it once we have our baby." Alex tilted his face down to her, staring into her reaction to his plan.

He could not wait for her to carry his child. He wanted to have a baby as soon as possible. He did not mind one or two or even three as long as the child would be healthy.

"Oh!" She was not shocked, but she did not want to rush things. She had heard that the more one waited for a baby, the less likely it would come. She just wanted to enjoy their marriage life first and allow fate to surprise them with their firstborn.

"Aren't you excited to have a baby?" Alex asked, slightly confused with her response. He was expecting a bit of enthusiasm in her face, but he could tell that she also wanted kids. They had talked about it before.

"I want to have kids. You know I do." She quickly answered, seeing the concern on his face. "But I do not mind waiting for it until we are both ready to have them."

She did not wish him to think she had changed her mind about this. She did not want her to focus on it since they were still in the middle of many things.

"I understand that we are going through several changes, then the case, and now finding your brother." He could see that she was feeling guilty for the way she reacted. But he did not want her to be. "But if a baby comes, I think it will be a blessing."

He did not want this to become an issue or a misunderstanding between them. He was willing to wait until his wife was ready to have a child.

"I know our child will be a blessing. A great gift we will both cherish." Dani stared into his eyes, understanding what his husband wished to tell her. "But I don't want you to expect it to come soon. I do not like to see you disappointed."

Although they had stopped using contraceptives since they got married, she was still not pregnant until now. She believed that the stress that she had gone through prevented her from conceiving a child.

"No. I will not be disappointed if we don't have a biological child. That is not the point. I only want to raise a child with you. Because I know you will be a great mother." He corrected her assumption.

At the same time, he did not realize that he was putting too much pressure on her by constantly asking her to produce him an heir. It was not his intention, but now he believed that was the case.

"You are willing to adopt if I can not have a child." She was surprised by this revelation. Most men would like their flesh and blood, not a baby coming from an institution.

It was not like she was barren or had a likelihood to be, but she could not help but worry about not being able to provide him a son.

Based on her experience, most of them preferred a male child over a girl. Luckily for her, even if her father wanted a son, he still loved her like she was his entire world as if she was his only child.