

## Royal Contract 791

Chapter 791: Daily struggle was real

Her eyes stared at the street outside, but her mind did not register any of the views before her. The place and the people looked unfamiliar, but it was what she wanted, a place where she could start again with her child.

Eida, for the first time, walked on the street, finding her footing in her new home. The place where she would settle down and take roots.

"Is this your first time here?" Amelia asked as she accompanied her to scout the place.

She wanted to see the neighborhood that Evan had chosen for her. She did ask for a lowkey but safe environment. It seemed Evan perfectly understood what she wanted.

"In this place, yes. But in this state, I had been here a few times before due to work. But never did I imagine living here." She admitted as her eyes took in every little detail of her new environment.

She was lucky. Amelia agreed to stay with her for a few weeks to help her settle. But she knew she also had a life somewhere else. She could not ask her to stay indefinitely.

So, she had to establish her new home and new life in this place as fast as possible. And apply for a local job and hopefully get one under her new name and credentials soon.

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"I am sure that you will find that this neighborhood is not so different from our town. Evan assured me this place is safe for you and your baby." Amelia tapped her by her hand as they walked, with their arms entwined, on the slightly busy street towards the market.

Compared to the other places she had read on the internet, this seemed to be one of the best. It did not say that it did not have criminals living in the neighborhood, but compared to others, it had the lowest crime rates.

Although it was a bit expensive, she did not mind. She had enough money to support herself and her baby even if she did not get a job immediately.

Still, she preferred to work rather than stay home and mope around. It would put her mind distracted and not thinking of going back and begging Lance to forgive her.

That would not work in the end.

She had to stick to this plan. It was better this way for everyone involved.

"I like it already." She answered her friend, smiling to convince her friend everything would be fine.

She was unsure about that, but she would try her best for her child. Their future would solely depend on how she would look at life. She just had to stay positive.

"Just remember that Evan and I are just here if you need us." Amelia squeezed her hand. "Anything at all. We will always be here for you." She nodded, glad that she had a friend like Amelia.

“What about you?” She stopped her friend from walking further, facing her in the middle of the street. “Don’t you like Evan? Are you just going to let him slip away from you?” Eida was through pretending that she should not meddle with her friends’ lives.

She could see that Amelia liked Evan. But of course, her other friend’s lifestyle was standing in the way. But she could also see that Evan was just as affected by Amelia.

She and Evan came from the same cloth. Scarred by an unknown past, they were afraid to commit to anything. Afraid that love would destroy them in the end.

But it was too late for her. There was nothing in her cards for love. But not for her friends. She could see that they still had a chance for happiness. She would not stand idly by and let them miss that opportunity.

“What are you talking about?” Amelia denied her words as if she was not speaking the truth. “We kissed, and it did not work out. Now, we are friends.” She reasoned, but her eyes had spoken to her differently as she avoided looking at her.

“You can lie to yourself all you want, but you can never lie to your heart. I don’t want you and Evan to suffer the same fate that I have. You still have a chance.” Eida continued, but this time, she turned around and strolled to the grocery with her friend walking beside her.

“Do you think Evan likes me enough to change?” She asked her, uncertainty laced in her voice. “Because I could not handle another broken heart.”

Now, she understood her hesitation to accept Evan. Suddenly, a pang of guilt pierced her heart. Not that she intentionally blamed her for her first heartbreak, but she still had something to do with it.

“All I know is if you don’t try, you might miss the opportunity and regret it for the rest of your life,” Eida stated, realizing that she had good advice that she could not apply to her personal experience.

As much as she wished to follow her heart, there was more at stake than her selfish desires. She had to do this for Lance and their child.

Eventually, if the truth had to come out, they would understand. But Eida hoped that nobody had to know her secret. She wished that her child would not want to meet her father and that she would die carrying her secret with her.

Lance would move on without knowing about what happened to her. And he would live a happy life with his new family. A new person that he would love and devote his life to for the rest of his life.

“I don’t know. I am afraid.” Amelia said. Still, she looked unconvinced that giving Evan a chance was the right thing to do.

Well, she could not blame her friend. The reality of life was never close to fairy tales. A happy ever after would always conclude one way or another with a sad ending.

She was not a pessimistic person, just realistic. She did not want to live in a world where people could walk on clouds, find a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow or play with unicorns.

She was the kind of person who believed that daily struggle was real.

## Chapter 792: To vow to be faithful

He had enjoyed most of his journeys through life. But most of all, his trips through the sky, especially when he traveled accompanied by a beautiful woman.

However, today as he gazed at the most special woman in his life sitting by his side, he could not help the smile from forming on his lips. He could not contain the joy that was bursting inside him.

"You have a very nice plane." She said excitedly in that sweet melodic voice as her eyes sparkled with the thrill of joining him on this trip. "Maybe I should borrow it more often when I want to go visit my friends."

It was indeed her first time flying in his plane since she usually declined most of his offers to join him on vacation. But this time, it would not be just temporary. She would finally be living with him.

"You can use it anytime you want, Grandmama." He smiled at her, not at all bothered by his teasing.

He would give anything to her to make her happy until her last breath. She had devoted her life to him. Now he was returning the favor, the kindness, the care, and the unconditional love.

"You are so sweet, Evan," Angela took his hand and held it in both hands as she stared at the beautiful, blue, vast ocean underneath them. "You don't need to give me more. You are more than enough."

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She turned to stare into his eyes with all seriousness covering her face. He could not read his grandmother's thoughts, but he could tell she had more to say.

"But I want to." He insisted, feeling he would be forever grateful for her sacrifices and that giving her material gifts would never be enough. "I want to give you more."

"If you insist, there is only one thing I like, want, need." Angela let go of his hand and touched his cheeks like the way she would caress him when he was a child.

Somehow, he felt that he had fallen into another of her traps as he looked into her eyes. The mischief in them was evident as if she was preparing him to accept his misfortune.

"What is it?" Evan asked defeatedly, knowing he could not feel mad or disappointed with this woman, no matter how much she insisted on meddling with his love life and plans.

Because she only meant well.

This woman had no selfish bone in her body. Her heart never harbored hatred. Well, at least none of that he had known about since he had learned to talk.

Therefore, how could he feel differently but love this woman with all his heart? The only woman he had given his heart with complete trust and love.

"I have everything I could want in this world, do what most could only dream of, love the best man I ever met and a grandson that made me smile every day of my beautiful life." Her eyes suddenly turned melancholy, but her smile never wavered.

"But you still had one more wish." Evan never wanted to say it because he already knew what she was about to say.

Her eyes suddenly twinkled as if a new hope rose from somewhere inside her. Her smile lit up her face, brightening the room.

"Of course, we should never stop dreaming until our last breath," Angela uttered with a renewed spirit as she touched the window as if she was reaching for the sky. "I know I might not last long, but I always dream of not leaving you alone in this world."

Still, her dream showed her captivating character, thinking of him rather than herself. But could he ever fulfill her dream, knowing it went against everything he believed at the moment?

He was not saying he would never get married and have kids eventually, but not anytime soon. He believed he was not ready for such a commitment, not when he was still enjoying his bachelor's life.

"But I am not alone, Grandmama." He insisted. "I have David, Alex, Marcus, and Lance as my family. Even Dani and Jacky. You would love them once you meet them all." He excitedly said, but he knew it would take a while to convince her.

Besides, it was not as if he had any prospect at the moment that he could instantly put on the altar and say I do. It did not work that way anymore. Arranged marriage was stupid as far as he was concerned.

If he would tie himself to one woman, she had to be the best of all the women he had been with and probably more. She should possess qualities they would have in common, so their relationship would not end up boring.

And many more traits he did not want to enumerate at present. But it would take time for him to know the woman before he could tell whether they would be compatible enough for him to marry her.

"I have nothing against friends. I am sure that I will love them all. But family is different. Someone who would take care of you. Love you." Angela muttered frustratedly, just like when he was a teenager when she talked, and he hardly listened.

"But anyway, I am tired. I do not wish to exhaust myself more when you refuse to listen." Angela pulled him closer and dropped a kiss on his cheeks. "Show me where I can rest."

With that, he assisted her at the back of the plane. A small room with a comfortable bed awaited his grandmother. Then, he returned to his seat and asked for a glass of whiskey to accompany him this time.

He twirled the content, letting the ice slowly melt into the amber liquid, then drank half of its content. His throat felt the heat as the alcohol passed through, making him gasp with satisfaction.

But he never felt the gratification as his eyes searched the clouds outside for the image forming in his mind. Why did this woman keep popping in his head?

Because she was the only woman who had refused to sleep with you, his logical brain reasoned. He doubted that, but at the same time, he wanted to believe it because it was the simplest explanation for his odd behavior.

The other one his mind could think of was too complicated and messy. But somehow, he found it intriguing and exciting. Still, was he ready to vow to be faithful?

#### Chapter 793: Little princess

How could she say that she was ok, knowing deep in her heart that she was not? In truth, she had no idea how and when she would be ok with all of this.

How long would she keep feeling this pain that would not stop creeping into her heart and mind without warning? Suddenly, she could not breathe, like a fish, unexpectedly thrown into the land without a water source, gasping for air.

Just when she thought she was getting better. Her heart would abruptly stop, then an incredible pain would grip her tightly, rendering her immobile, unable to move, think or feel.

She just felt like dying.

Dani watched her mother in this state, only feeling probably half of what she felt. She could not imagine what her Mom was experiencing, knowing the pain she was personally going through.

“Mom, shall we go home?” Dani concernedly asked after the burial ceremony had ended.

Laura had cried non-stop just sitting on her chair as she watched her husband drop down gradually six feet under the ground.

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She doubted if her mother had heard or understood most of what had happened earlier. She did not, so how could she. All she saw was the last glimpse of her father’s face. And her last chance to be with him.

Then, he was gone forever, covered with the muddy dark dirt that would remind them that he would never return. Not ever. But with a tomb bearing his great name, reminding them of the marvelous husband and the best father lying underneath their feet.

“Can you give me just a few more minutes?” Laura finally looked at her with a smile, wiping her wet face with the handkerchief. As if she had finally recovered from the devastation of losing her husband just like that.

But her eyes would never lie to her. It was a facade, a self-preservation mechanism of the mind and the body to pretend that she was ok. But soon, when she was alone, she would again break down and cry.

Well, that was the truth. That was how people usually cope with tragic events in their lives. Some managed it well, but others succumbed to their sorrows and never recovered.

“Ok, Mom. Just a few more minutes.” Dani stepped away from her, moving to stand next to her husband, who was waiting for them. Jacky, Marcus, Gerald, David, and even Evan were there. And, also waiting.

Many had arrived to pay their last respect to her father but had already left the vicinity, leaving just them and their closest friends. She was glad because it gave her mother the time she needed to say goodbye to her father.

How many goodbyes could one say to the person who had been with them for more than half their life? She guessed not one or two but as many times as she could say it.

It was like saying I love you. There was never more than enough. Say it as much as could be said because the time will come. It would be too late to say it.

“Do you think Laura would ever be ok?” Alex asked, knowing how difficult it was to lose someone. She could understand his apprehension. Her mother had never been without her father.

It was like her experience. She had never been away from Alex for a long time. Would she be able to cope if something similar to this would happen to them?

She did not want to imagine because just thinking about it was already painful. What more if she was going through it just like her mother?

“I have no idea. But I could only hope so.” Dani turned to her husband, gazing into his face as he stared at her father’s tomb.

She could only wonder what was going through his mind. What was going through all these people’s minds? As her eyes finally roamed around, taking on the place. Then, she saw the faces of their friends and her brother for the first time.

Everything that happened next had been all a blur for her. The wake that followed after the funeral was like a celebration. It was a tribute to the man that had touched countless lives.

“Thank you for joining us.” She told several people who she could hardly remember their names. She knew them. It was just that her mind was preoccupied with something else.

She had no idea how she managed to smile and laugh, thinking that it was what her father would want, but all she wanted to do was shout her frustration and yell at the world.

Watching her mother entertain their guests was more painful than seeing her cry. She guaranteed that her mother was more likely to feel just like her.

“Do you want something?” Alex asked, always at her side, ready to give everything she would need.

Truthfully, all she would like to do was to run away and escape to an empty room and cry herself to sleep until she could dream that her father would be alive and would like to join her for dinner.

It would have been the perfect way to end this nightmare.

“No, I am good.” She responded as they moved on to the next guest.

But her Mom was adamant that she would do this the way her father would want to see them. She would celebrate his life, how much he had a great life, with their family and friends who had known and loved him.

She wondered if that was false bravery or if her mother just had some form of super-strength because, at the moment, she was struggling. But just like her, she had to push through.

Luckily, she still had Alex as her support. She could only hope that she would also acquire the same strength her mother had when the time came that she would need it.

“Mom, would you mind if we stay here for the night? I am just tired. I don’t want to drive back to the city.” Dani asked her mother.

She was indeed exhausted. She could hardly stand on her two feet, but more than that, she just wished to be close to the only remaining parent she had.

She did not want to leave her side. She only wanted to be her little princess again. Even for just one night.

Chapter 794: Mom?

Her vision was a little impaired as the light from her window blinded her. It took her a few seconds before the haze in her brain cleared, reminding her where she was.

Waking up back in her room felt strange since it had been years since she had been back in this room. But at least she had her husband sleeping soundly beside her.

“I love you, Alex.” A habit Dani had acquired during the time that they had been together. It was something she would never get tired of doing.

However, she felt it was weird to see her husband in a girly room like this. But still, he looked so manly with his exposed chest in her view and his kissable lips just inches away from hers.

But not wanting to wake him up, she stood up and walked towards her desk, noticing the room had not changed much since she left.

It seemed her parents maintained it just the way she had left it. “Really?” She questioned, shocked to see that all her things were just how it was. Some looked older, but everything was clean and orderly.

She scanned the room that had held many of her childhood, teenage and adulthood years. Many memories reminded her of years spent with her father while growing up.

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Her room was like her father’s memorabilia, with pictures of him when they were young scattered around the room. Items he carefully picked as gifts for her birthdays or other occasions were still amongst her things, in full display.

“I miss you already, Dad.” She picked up one of their photos where she was dancing with him.

She could not remember the occasion, but she was particularly fond of this because her father let her step on his toes while they were dancing.

She was afraid that she would fumble since many were watching, so he said to ride his toes, and he would teach her how to dance.

“You were indeed a good dancer.” She mumbled, hugging the frame, swaying like she was dancing with her father again as gentle music rang inside her ears.

Then, the music ended.

She opened her eyes, landing on the man, still lying on the bed, watching her. His smile told her he might have been watching her for a while.

"He must be a great teacher," Alex commented, standing up from the bed and walking towards her. "Are you ok?" The same question that he never forgot to ask her time and time again.

But this time, she had to answer him differently.

"Not yet. But I will be someday." Honestly? Dani had no clue when that someday would come, but it would eventually.

Then, he started humming. Well, it was not as terrible compared to his singing. He had a soothing tone. But he did not know how to hold a melody. His rhythm was out of sync. He just had no business singing.

"Then, maybe you will join me for a dance." He took the frame from her hand and placed it where it belonged, in her memories. Then, he extended his hand to her.

"Maybe it is time that we make more memories in his honor." Alex continued when he saw her hesitation.

Soon, she was gliding and moving, following his stride. With her cheek buried in his chest, she could hear his heartbeat, which seemed to dictate the beat of their song.

"Better," Alex stated, which both sounded like a statement and a question.

But somehow, her heart knew what he meant.

She looked up at him, loving the smile that showed on his lips. How could she not feel better after this? Suddenly, she was grinning as if he had said something funny.

"Well, that is better." He suddenly twirled her around, getting lost in the moment. Then, she found herself enveloped in his arms, covered with his lips.

It was a minute or more.

She had no way of knowing exactly. But it was enough to uplift her spirit before they stopped and stared into each other's eyes. "Because you always make me feel better." She finally responded as his fingers caressed her face, shoving the strands of her hair that fell on her cheeks behind her ears.

"Because it is my job. It is what I promise to do. And I will do my best never to fail because I love you, my Daniella Blackstone." He pulled her again near him. Then, he kissed her forehead before finally letting her go. "Now, feed me, woman, because your husband is starving. I believe that is your job." He teased her, making her giggle when he started tickling her on her side.

"Oh! Really?" She managed to respond as she escaped his clutches.

"On second thought. Can you show me the kitchen?" He jokingly said, bowing to her. "My lady, you have to forgive your humble servant."

"Fine. But first, I want you to go take a shower while I check on my mother." She instructed, slightly chuckling at her husband's silly antics. But she knew he was only doing his best to make her smile.



She did not mind the terrible singing and the horrible puns because his intentions were always for her wellbeing. Nothing could be sweeter than her husband attempting to make her smile.

Last night, she would have cried herself to sleep. But because of his warmth and love. She had slept like a baby, with no dreams nor nightmares. It was just a good and peaceful sleep.

“Call me if you need me,” Alex responded, knowing that it might not be easy to see her mother in her wretched state.

She doubted that her mother had a peaceful sleep just like her. Not when her father was not at her side. She must have tossed and turned, missing him terribly. She might have cried herself to sleep as she initially thought she would.

Finally, she strode towards her bedroom on the other wing of the mansion. The room that she had shared with her father since they were married.

Once she entered the room, she knew she would be expecting the worse. So, when her eyes landed on the room, she was shocked.

“Mom?”

Chapter 795: Full of surprises

“Mom?” Dani called again, finding her parent’s room empty. She quickly moved to the bathroom, wondering if she could be taking a bath or something. But she doubted it since she hardly heard any noise coming from that direction.

Where was she? She asked internally, taking on the state of the room. It was clean. The bed sheet had no creased on it as if nobody had slept on it last night. But she was sure that she assisted her mother into her room, even tucked her in her bed.

“Mom.” She tried again, but no one responded. Concerned, she checked every available space in the room, even under the bed.

A little absurd.

However, she had to be thorough. But the room was empty.

Where could she have gone? Checking again for any sign, but everything in the room was in order. Maybe she was in the garden, and the maids cleaned the room as soon as she had left.

It was worth a try as Dani exited the room and followed the path to one of her favorite places where her mother liked to spend her time.

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“Good morning, Ms. Dani.” One of the maids greeted her with a smile and a nod. “It is nice to see you back, even if it was for a little while.” She added before she went

She was carrying a vase full of colorful flowers in her hands when she passed her by and continued on her way.

Could those flowers come from her mother? That was not likely since she was still very distraught when she left her last night. Still, those flowers looked beautiful.

She walked further into the hallway, going in the direction of the garden, but before moving further, she heard something that caught her attention. It was coming from her left.

It was the voice of her mother. Laura seemed to be giving instructions to someone. It was slightly unclear, so she changed direction and moved towards the kitchen instead.

"Mom!" She finally called again when she was within hearing distance, not needing to shout.

Then, when she entered the room, she saw her mother in the kitchen, preparing breakfast as if this was just an ordinary day.

"Good morning, my Princess." Laura finally looked up to her with a sweet smile on her lips.

She suddenly wanted to slap herself on the cheeks to check if she was not dreaming. Her mother enthusiastically cooked in the kitchen as if nothing had happened yesterday.

But when she slightly pinched herself on her arm, she knew this was all too real. Her mother, who was supposed to be in her bed, still crying or fast asleep, was now in their kitchen, smiling and happily cooking for them.

Was she in some form of denial? Was this a stage of her grief?

She had read something about the five stages of grief on the internet. Something that she was hoping would help her in the process of accepting the untimely death of her father.

She knew it would not be easy, but she wanted all the help she could get through reading, therapy, or being with her loved ones. But could her mother be going through those stages?

"Hi, Mom. What are you doing?" Dani asked as she walked closer to the counter where her mother was busy working.

She could remember how her mother would wake up early each morning to start preparing for the day. Her first obligation was to feed them. So, she would always find her in the kitchen when she woke up.

She would always ask her what she would cook for them. Then her mother would smile and say either her favorite or her Dad. Now, she was afraid to ask, frightened of what her mother would answer.

"I am preparing something special for you and Alex." Laura looked up to her before returning to her preparation. "Don't worry, my darling. I am ok." Her mom added.

She must have noticed the concern on her face. But she felt relieved to hear her say that. She was expecting that she would mention her father in the mix.

But she was glad she seemed fine, but it was still too early to tell. Maybe the symptoms would show much later. But she hoped that she did not have to go through those stages.

But if she did not, would that be bad too? She had no idea since she was also going through something herself. But one thing she was sure of, she missed her Dad terribly.

"I am glad to hear that." Dani sat on a stool, tightening the knot of her robe as she watched her mother move into the kitchen.

Would she ever be domesticated and house trained just like her mother? Until now, Alex dominated the kitchen more than her. What about when they started having kids? Would Alex and her kids expect her to cook just like her mother?

Suddenly, she smiled, realizing where her thoughts had taken her, imagining small children running around the place. Her mother would love little kids playing with her cooking stuff, except for the knives.

"I am not sure what you like for breakfast since we rarely see you this early." Her mother had a glimpse of sadness in her eyes, probably remembering her father in that statement, but she quickly blinked it away.

"Anyway, I prepared several choices," Laura told her. "But I still cooked some of your favorites."

She could see several of her mother's assistants working in the background, preparing several dishes under her directions. It seemed like she was cooking a feast just for the three of them.

"Alex likes everything. He would eat anything you put in front of him." Dani guaranteed her mother that she did not need to worry about her husband.

The last thing she wanted was for her mother to be anxious about nothing. She had been through enough to feel terrible about her cooking.

"That is good to hear, but don't worry. I have invited some guests to join us, so you don't have to eat everything." Laura smiled before turning around to put her pie in the oven.

She did not expect that again. This morning seemed to be full of surprises as her eyes widened at her mother's plans.

Chapter 796: The new man of the house

Laura could hardly sleep last night, staring at the vacant bed beside her. It felt strange to close her eyes, knowing she was alone in this big, spacious room. It felt so empty without him.

It was not that she had never slept on this bed on her own. Ethan did have to work overtime countless times during their married life, so she sometimes lay alone on this bed. The only difference from that time to this.

Before, when she woke up the following morning, her eyes would land on his sleeping form next to her. Now, she would open her eyes to silence and his absence.

"I am happy to see that you are looking much better." Ben, her brother, held her hand in his as he sat next to her at the table.

She smiled at him, glad he and his family could join them on such short notice. She had missed him dearly since he resided now at a different location, farther than she wanted.

"Ethan would not like to see me mourning his passing." Laura forced a smile on her lips as she looked at her brother. "I only want all of us to celebrate his life. His family and friends who truly cared about him."

She was not in denial that Ethan was now gone from their lives for good. The pain inside her heart still squeezed the life out of her every chance it could get.

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Her mind still kept reminding her that she would not see him again. It was a continuous struggle that she had to push through to overcome every minute of every day.

Still, she would do good with her promise. To stand stronger for this family. She would be the beacon of light that would bring this family closer and closer together again. It was what Ethan would want her to do.

"I still could not believe he is gone, but remember that we are always here for you," Ben said, squeezing her hand tighter.

Yes, she knew she could always count on her brother. His family, not so much, but still, they were family, and Ethan loved them just the same.

She turned her head to the other people who joined them this morning, taking some time off from their busy lives to indulge her spur-of-the-moment whim.

She appreciated it since it started as a small idea of cooking breakfast for her kids that had turned into a mini-celebration for her husband.

It was the only way all of them could get over the loss of their beloved Ethan. By showing support and love for each other. By knowing that they were not alone in missing him.

Because if she had to do this alone, she might not make it. The same would happen to Dani, Alex, and the rest of the family. They needed each other to go through this.

"Thanks, Ben," Laura responded as she stood up from her seat and raised her glass of water, tapping it with a silver teaspoon.

Well, it was too early for any alcoholic drink. "Attention, everyone." Making all present stopped their chatters and directed their eyes at her. "I would like to thank everyone for coming. And I have a few words to say."

"We are glad to be here, Mom," Dani answered for everyone.

Her daughter's smile was all she needed to continue. Seeing her daughter's strength encouraged her to stand up firmly for this family. Something she had never done when Ethan was alive.

It was her time to carry this family and take some of the responsibility. She could not continue to stand on the side, idly by, without helping shape its future.

"I know we all love my husband. Sometimes, I am jealous that he had spent more time with you guys than he was with me." She jokingly said with a thin smile.

She did call them his mistresses at times. But she always understood his reasons. Besides, her husband never failed to go home to her at the end of the day.

Some of them laughed, while others had a few tears in their eyes, but all she wanted was for them to feel that Ethan might be gone, but she was still here, ready to help in any way she could.

"I am a bit guilty about that," Alex answered, making everybody smile, agreeing with him. But most agreed that Ethan had been everyone's favorite.

"Well, now we will miss him together. But it is not goodbye. I know he would still be watching us." She continued. "But, know this, our home will always be open to all of you like when Ethan was alive. We are family through thick and thin."

Blood was never an issue to Ethan. Everybody who managed to catch his heart automatically became a family to him. But never, ever break his trust. It would be the only way he would turn his back on a family.

Her eyes landed on her stepson, sitting a chair away far from her. He was looking at her while also talking to Ben on occasion. He might be smiling, but somehow she could sense his pain.

She concluded that Gerald was a different case from everyone else. He still had to admit that his feelings for his father had already changed. Still, she would not give up on him.

It was something Ethan had regretted not being able to do while he was still alive. Show his son that he still had a family who loved him. Now, it was her turn.

"Before I conclude my speech, I have one question." She turned her head to the other side of the table. "Make it two."

She could see the expectant eyes of everyone. She knew they were all waiting for her to break down and cry. And for her charade and false courage to end. But she was not done yet.

That would have to come later when she was back in the safety of her room. She would cry her eyes out. And accepting the pain of losing the other part of her heart. But now, it was about them.

Everyone remained silent, just waiting in anticipation. "Ok." But Alex dared to interrupt. "What is it?"

"When is the wedding?" Laura stared at her two guests, who sat next to Alex. "Please tell us it will be soon because we all need some joy around us."

She knew the two were postponing their plans because of Ethan, which was unfair to them. She would not allow it. They should not waste any more time.

"Soon." Marcus and Jacky answered simultaneously, making her happy with their answer.

"Great then. For my last question." She stared at her daughter. "When is my grandchild coming?" Which made the other people around the table cheer with her. "We need some new members in this family."

"That also applies to the two of you." She pointed to the engaged couple, who had loved clouding their eyes, just like Dani and Alex.

"Therefore, I need you all to hurry up and give me some kids that would brighten up this place." Laura once again riled up the crowd, making them shout, cheer and clap their hands for the two couples.

"Soon, I promise." Alex finally answered her, winking at his wife.

She finally felt satisfied. That was all she needed to hear from the new man of the house.

#### Chapter 797: A fool

Lance had finally been discharged from the hospital to recover under the care of his father. His rehabilitation would take time, but the doctors did not see any hindrance to his full recovery.

But the speed of his healing would solely depend on his determination and willpower. The more committed he was, the more he would heal faster. He just needed good motivation.

“You could not keep lying on that bed, feeling sorry for yourself.” His father’s voice boomed inside his room, but he did not want to talk to him, so he pretended to be sleeping.

However, sleeping was the last thing he wanted to do because every dream he had started with her face and ended up in a nightmare.

He tried to stop her, but he was too paralyzed to move. Then, she was gone. Yet, he lay there, waiting for her to return. But the dream ended, waking up without her.

“I know you are awake. The nurses told me. Stop acting like a victim because you are about to become King.” Count Thomas walked inside his room until he stood before his bed, looking down on him.

He did not want to hear anything about the Kingdom. He could care less about being King. He only wanted one thing. He wanted to ask him to look for Eida.

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He was desperate to see her again. But he already knew what his father’s answer would be. It would be the same as yesterday and the day before.

Count Thomas already said that Eida was not worth his time. Even gave him enough proof to support his claim. Eida was nothing more than a gold-digging bitch who wanted money, fame, and everything he could provide.

But where is the proof that she did not love him? All he saw were papers. Nothing that would give him conclusive evidence that she did not feel the same way as him.

“She would squeeze the life out of you. Luckily, we learned of her intentions.” His father shouted at him, making him accept that she was not the right woman for him.

But why did his heart still long for her? He wanted to see her, talk to her, hear her side of the story. He wanted an explanation, a reason why she did it.

Because that was the only way he could forgive her, and they could start again.

Foolish heart.

But he could not stop it from beating only for her. Honestly, he felt like dying without her.

But instead, he asked. “Where is Amelia?” She was her friend. She would know where Eida was hiding. She was his only hope of finding her.

His father seemed to be thinking about his question. He did not immediately answer as he walked towards the window to gaze outside.

After a minute, his father answered. "Amelia's father told me that she had returned to her life abroad. She could not stay here anymore after what happened between the two of you."

His father looked genuinely sad about that. But he knew his father. He never truly liked Amelia as a person. But he believed he was disappointed that the wedding did not push through.

Knowing this, he had no way to contact Amelia, especially when his father still had control of his life. It would seem that as long as he could not move on his own and still recovering. He would be under his father's custody and mercy.

"What about my assistant?" He thought of every possible way to have some semblance of normalcy. "Could you have her report to me today?" He looked at his father as he tried to move in his bed but only managed to inch to a sitting position.

Pain still pricked his body from his various injuries. It was all over his body, so it was hard to pinpoint or isolate the source of the pain.

From his different operations that were still healing internally to the superficial wounds that had not completely closed yet. To a few more bruises still visible on his skin. He was still physically suffering.

"No. The board had put you on hiatus status while you are recovering. You are not working until you are better." His father informed him. That would mean that he had no secretary or assistants to help him.

The only people allowed inside his room were people hired by his father, who had clear instructions not to entertain his whims, as his father called them.

"Fine," Lance answered his father with full of sarcasm. "You want me to get better. Find, Eida." He shouted, feeling his frustration filling his limits.

"You are not doing yourself any good by thinking about her." His father once again argued that he was better off without her. But he would not hear it. "Ok. You want Eida." His father said in an exasperated voice.

When his eyes focused on his father with suspicion, he continued not minding what he was thinking. "Get better, and I will personally help you look for her."

He had heard that before. He doubted his father would lift a finger to find the woman he did not want his son to marry. He knew he still could not trust his father.

"Or better yet, you look for her yourself. I will give you all the resources you will need." The Count told him in his authoritative voice as if he was declaring a law inside the Council Chambers.

"But you have to get better first." Count Thomas expressed his satisfaction as if he knew he would always win the argument between them.

He guessed his father was right. As long as he was tied in this bed, unable to move on his own, he was hopeless and helpless.

But if he could recover and get back on his feet. His father could not stop him from pursuing his plans. He supposed that was his only option.

"I guess you are right. I need to get better soon so I can prove you wrong once and for all. I will find Eida, and we will sort this out." He promised to his father, who looked dumbfounded by his statement.

The doctors, therapists, nurses, and even his family and father said he needed motivation. Now, he believed he just had one.

Eida.

He would get better, then find her. He had to see her so they could clarify some matters. He needed answers, and he had to hear them from her.

It would seem that no one would want to help him. So, it was up to him to do it. But of course, he had to fully recover first because apparently, his father would never help him in this quest.

And Evan and Amelia had abandoned him, making him conclude he was all alone in this fight.

Then, he came to a realization.

Fear.

He was afraid that his father could be telling the truth. But he still hoped that his instinct was right about her. She had profound reasons for doing this to him. She would not intentionally hurt him because she loved him.

Then, anger.

On the other hand, if his father was correct, could he forgive Eida if she admitted she did not love him and that she had played him for a fool?

Chapter 798: A King and a Queen

How do you say goodbye to a great man? How do you completely step into his shoes and promise to do great things just like him? When what he achieved was almost impossible.

Ethan left an incredible mark in the business industry that taking in-charge of what he left behind would take tremendous courage and skills to measure up to his level.

No one knew this more than Alex. He had worked closely with the man, studied under him, and learned from the experienced he shared. And most of all, he had been his father and a mentor.

"Are you ready?" Alex looked at his wife, who had goosebumps on her skin, tiny beads of sweat on her forehead, and probably a wildly beating heart.

If he could listen close enough to her chest to confirm it, he would know he was right. But her eyes showed him only determination, her hands firmly placed on her side, while a genuine smile covered her lips.

No trace of the nerves that people would notice, but only he could tell.



“Yes, I am,” Dani answered, taking a large intake of air before expelling it back out of her body. “Shall we go?”

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No one said it would be easy to become the person she was born to have and meant to lead. It would take enormous bravery to step into the power she inherited and had to earn so she could say she deserved it.

But he believed in her completely, with his heart and mind. He knew she would handle this new responsibility with flying colors. She would be one of the best CEOs of an entire legacy left by her father.

He would be there to support her and guide her, just like what Ethan had done for him. He would be her mentor until she became the best they had ever seen.

“Ok, your throne awaits you, my Queen.” He teased her one last time, knowing she never liked the title. But it was an internal joke between them that he enjoyed sharing with her.

Yes, once again. Alex was not taking the throne since it was not rightfully his. He only safeguarded the position until the rightful heir took her place.

Ethan did offer the keys to the Kingdom to him. But he knew it would not feel right to take it since it was not his to rule. He only temporarily held the fort until his wife realized it was hers.

She was the heir.

He opened the boardroom doors, where the other board members were already waiting for them. To welcome the new head that would lead the company to new heights.

“Welcome to your other home, Daniella.” One of the board members, a close friend of her father and her second in command since Alex had stepped down and would only be staying on as a consultant.

She immediately stood in front of her designated place, at the center of the long table, looking at the people she had respected as her father’s business associates and friends.

Why did Dani suddenly change her mind about taking her inheritance? Because she finally realized that she could effectively create more change by being the leader of her father’s company rather than a silent partner.

His wife, Daniella Hamilton Blackstone, was taking on the challenge of being the face of the company. Someone who would not only bring the company to a more productive future but an empire that would look after the people.

“Thank you, everyone, for giving me this opportunity to stand here in front of you, for allowing me to prove to you that I can be an effective leader just like my father.” Dani began as everyone clapped their hands, accepting her as the new head of the company.

He would not dare say that all twelve board members were on board for Ethan’s daughter to take his place. Some were skeptical about her ability to lead because of her lack of experience in this field.

But Alex reminded them they also doubted him when he first took over, but they realized he did well when he stepped on the plate. He promised them the same result. His wife would even do better.

He had complete trust in his wife's ability and her courage to do this job to her best ability, just like the way she had done it all her life.

"So, shall we begin with our first agenda?" Dani began presiding with the board session, discussing the urgent issue that the company was facing.

He had to step back and sit on the sideline, allowing her to take the spotlight. He could not give her this throne if he would still keep reigning on it. But he would always be there if needed.

After an hour of suggestions, debates, and conclusions, the meeting was ready to adjourn. Meeting like this could be exhausting, but Dani seemed to do just quite well.

"Thank you, everyone, for coming." His wife had ended the gathering and finally faced him with a beautiful and pleasing smile. "Thank you for everything." She moved closer to him and hugged him.

Soon, they were back in her new office, where she would spend most of her working time. Compared to her old office, this was much bigger and magnificent. But she would need to redecorate it a bit to change the manly designs.

"What now?" She asked when she sat on her big chair.

"We wait and see." He finally answered his lovely wife, who now held the biggest company in this city, probably in the world.

Now it was his turn. First, he had to formally inform his father and the Council that he was not taking the throne. At this point, it was his time to build the Kingdom of his dreams.

A new Empire that he would build from his sweats and hard work, not something handed to him. He already had laid the framework, done the preliminaries, and established the groundwork.

Now, all that was left to do was continue what he started before he married Dani and put his mark on the world just like Ethan did.

But this time, he would work, hand in hand, with his loving and supportive wife by helping each other out in any way they could until they both have a legacy to leave behind for their kids.

Who said that a King and a Queen could only rule one Kingdom, and why not two?

Chapter 799: Bury the hatchet

His eyes scanned the name written on the polished marble stone with flowers and candles still scattered around his tomb. But no one else was present, visiting his grave, except him.

He had high respect for the man, buried in this ground, for being a worthy adversary, but he could not say he felt a tremendous loss since he never knew him as a father.

Still, he knew him as a man of vision who had taken the business industry by storm. No one was able to stop him from taking what he wanted. A man he would remember for his accomplishments.

ETHAN HAMILTON

A GREAT MAN, A WONDERFUL AND LOVING HUSBAND

THE BEST DAD

Written on the epitaph on top of his tomb.

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“Dad...” Gerald initially uttered but stopped. Hearing it from his lips still felt odd. He still could not get used to it.

He never imagined that this man, who his father, the one who raised him, thought him to despise with all his guts, could be his biological father.

It just seemed insane. Like this happened only in story books. But life had always been full of twisted lies and half-truths. At least in his world, that had been the case.

The only person who he believed had truly loved him was his mother, but she passed away too soon, leaving him to fend for himself.

He was a young boy who had to survive in a world of cruelty and injustice. Where real guns were his toys and the wrong was his right. Killing, robbery, assault, and assorted crimes were the norm that he had grown up and lived with until now.

So, how could he come out of that kind of darkness? “Tell me, Dad. How could I easily turn my life around and say I could be just like Dani?” Pure and innocent.

His world was tainted with all the madness he had to endure his entire life. Horrible experiences molded his mind and his very being.

Kill or be killed was the number one rule he had to engrave in his young mind. Love, pardon, and mercy were words that did not exist in their vocabulary.

He had to fight for everything he got because someone else would be waiting to take his place. He had to take what he wanted with force or be left behind with nothing.

The last rule? Do not break any of the rules.

The punishment? He would end up in a body bag, buried where no one would find his body. No one would look for him. No one would miss him.

“If only I did not live in that world...” He looked at his father’s tomb, thinking he had been living in hell almost his entire life. “Maybe my life could have been different.”

But the fact was, he had thrived in that world, and now he was ready to step into the position left to him by his other father. Ethan might not have given him his Kingdom, but his other father did.

He was also soon to become King.

The one that would rule the underworld organization, dominating the criminal syndicates that operate under the shadows of the City and even the world.

"Maybe if you have stepped up a little sooner, but you were years too late." He spoke up again as a slight wind carried his words.

Dry leaves flew on the grassy lawn as the breeze slightly increased its strength. The branches of the trees gracefully swayed as if dancing with the wind.

But this did not bother him as his gaze continued to stay on his father's grave. His focus did not waver as Gerald suddenly remembered something Ethan had said to him.

One day in your life, when you least expect it, you will realize that you can be ten times better than me if you only try hard enough. You are the King of your life, your world, so rule it.

Yes, he would be King but not the King that Ethan had in his mind. He was past pretending that he could still change. It was his world, and no one else would rule it except him.

Then, a vibration in his pocket alerted him of a call. Quickly, he grabbed it and answered, seeing the name on the screen. The last time she called him, it was about their father. He had not spoken to her since.

"Yes, Dani." He answered immediately, wanting to know what was on her mind.

He had just learned that she had officially accepted her position in the Empire that Ethan had left behind. He had no problem with that, glad she was now taking over.

"Are you free today? Do you think you can meet with me?" Her sister asked him over the line. Her voice was still the same, determined but graceful.

However, he could tell she was still a little nervous, although she tried hard not to show it. It was like the first day she had worked with him in the case, but she had proven to him that she could work on her nerves.

She fought that case with a tremendous passion, determined to prove to everyone that she belonged at that table. Gerald firmly believed that she would still do the same. She would be a worthy adversary, just like her father and husband.

"Ok. Would you care to meet me at my place?" He suggested, knowing that she had no choice. She needed him. So, he would dictate his demand.

Besides, a business setting was not appropriate for a family affair. Now that they were family, she should be able to come and go to his place as she wished.

"Ok. Could you text me the address and the time you are available?" Dani asked without hesitation this time.

"Sure, I am sending it right now." He texted his place while talking to her on the speaker phone. "What about in thirty minutes? I am about to go home."

"That is fine with me. I'll see you then." She probably saw his address by now. Then, she was gone.

She welcomed him into her family. It was time he also did the same. Well, it was worth a try to make a bond with his remaining family. That was if Dani would agree with him.

What was the saying? Let us bury the hatchet.

Chapter 800: Grow up fast

The fuss and the buzz behind the death of a legend like Ethan created chaos in the business industry. The stock market had plummeted because of unsubstantial rumors spread by shrewd minds who wanted to take advantage of the situation.

Evan barely had time for himself since he had returned. He was out the door of his apartment at the break of dawn and then came home by midnight only to sleep on his bed.

"Aren't you joining me for breakfast?" Her Grandmama called to him before he was out the door. He did not notice that she was already up and waiting for him.

Suddenly, he felt guilty that he had brought her along with him to live with him. Then, he just had to leave her to attend to herself because he was always busy with something else.

"I am sorry, Grandmama, but I have to leave early. I promise I will make it up to you this weekend." Evan felt horrible that he had been neglecting her, but it was just temporary until everything returned to normal.

He had to assist their biggest client, Dani, who was taking over the Empire her father left her. Then, Alex also required assistance with his company, returning to the business he had built from the ground up.

"Ok," Angela responded with a smile, as usual, full of understanding. "Just drive safely." She added before leaving him to go to the kitchen alone.

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It broke his heart to see her in this way, but he had no choice at the moment. He also felt guilty that he had left David for a long time to deal with the current situation. He was trying to make up to him, too.

He rushed to his office, knowing that several files of cases would be waiting for him on his desk. It did not help that Dani resigned from her position in the company. Therefore, many of her pending cases landed on his lap.

"Are you even sleeping?" David asked when he walked into his room, carrying two cups of coffee. He placed one on his desk while he took the empty chair before him.

Compared to him, David looked much better. Actually, way better than him. His partner did not have eyes that drooped on the corner or a single hair out of place.

But in his defense, he was the managing partner. He had fewer responsibilities than him. Besides, he took most of the load from him as he said he was guilty of leaving him for quite a while.

"Of course, but there are just too many backlogs that I needed to catch up with, and of course, the new business I need to check." Evan pointed to the files piling up on top of his desk.

He started rotating his neck, untying the muscles that had gone stiff from his position earlier. Then, he leaned on his chair, slightly loosening his tie and unbuttoning the top of his shirt, feeling the suffocating air around him.

"You did not have to do all of this." David pointed at the stacks of files. "I can also do my share of the load. Besides, I don't take it against you if you need to care for your grandmother."

His friend looked at him with concern as if he was studying him for a crisis that did not exist. He had no problem. He was just busy trying to finish all the issues of the company.

"Don't worry. It is not that. I can handle all of this." He assured him that nothing was wrong. He had everything under his control.

In all honesty, it did not feel that way. He was drowning in his work because he needed it to distract his mind from another issue that kept flooding his consciousness.

He did not want to deal with the other issue, so he created a barrier that would prevent him from thinking about it. But it was barely working.

"Come on, man. I know you." David put down his coffee and walked toward the window. "You are hardly yourself since you returned. I don't know what happened to you, but something did."

David seemed determined to find out the truth as he paced the floor in front of him. But he was not about anything because this was not a problem he could not fix. He just needed a few more days to expel her from his mind.

"I am tired from the trip. You don't know how exhausting my grandmother could be." Remembering all the antics she had done to bring him there. "But I will bounce back in a few days." He assured him.

"I hope so. Last night, you barely looked at the woman who kept blinking her eyelashes at you." David stopped in front of his desk to make his point. "Did you even notice her?" He continued.

Last night, David and a few friends invited him to a new club not far from his place. He never passed up the chance of a good night out. But once inside, all he wanted to do was leave.

Weird, that was what he felt when he walked out the door earlier than usual. To answer David's question, he did not notice the girl.

"As I said, I am tired from working my ass off. But once I am through with this, I am bouncing back. I promise." He did not know if he sounded convincing, but like the look on David's face, Evan was also not confident about what he said.

He felt something had changed in him. He could not figure it out yet. Was it for the better, or was it something that he would regret later on?

"Ok. But if you need any help. You know I am just in the other room." David offered even though he knew that he would not seek his help.

Unlike David, he was not the kind of man who liked sharing his feelings. He always looked at it as a weakness. Though, he was not judging his friend for being a bit emotional.

He only believed in dealing with his problems, thinking no one else could help him but himself. Although his grandmother had been there for him, he still had learned to fend for himself.

Learning at a very early age, he could not burden his grandmother, who was also aging quickly, with all his needs. Suddenly, he had to grow up fast.