

Royal Contract 921

Chapter 921: Happy tears

He had accompanied her out that afternoon since she had to buy some clothes. She could not continue wearing his clothes. Then, she suggested they eat out for a change, like a date.

He took her to this semi-fancy restaurant. It was an expensive restaurant but not the kind of establishment that would need a reservation before they could enter. They had a private corner. It was good enough for her. Besides, the food was good.

"I am going back home tomorrow." Amelia casually told him as she drank her wine after the delicious dinner they shared.

Since he woke up that afternoon after falling asleep in his office chair, she had acted like nothing from the ordinary had occurred. She pretended that she did not remember the proposal and the ring.

She took that beautiful shining diamond ring off her fingers and hid it in her pocket. But she could tell that he was wondering about it. Yet, he had not voiced his concern either. As if both of them were waiting for someone to broach the topic.

"Why?" Evan suddenly asked as if he was surprised by her plan. "You don't have to leave yet." He abruptly extended his hand on the table and wrapped her hand with his warm one. "You know you can stay as long as you wish."

What was he doing? He needed to ask her if she remembered anything about his proposal last night. But he was afraid that she had rejected him. Why else would she take the ring off her finger and not talk about it?

.....

She did say yes last night, but it sounded like she was not herself. After all, she was drunk and must be confused. He could not rely on that answer, but could he propose again for the third time, counting his first attempt, even if she did not see the ring?

"Because Eida and Angela must be worried about me. And I miss Luisa." It was the truth. She only gave them a story about an abrupt problem with the foundation, so she had to be away for a few days.

"But you can always tell the truth that you are with me and planning to stay for a while." He continued, hoping that he could read what was on her mind.

He was so sure now that she was the only woman he would ever want in his life. Yes, it took him a while to realize that, but he knew he could never survive without her. He needed her like he needed air to breathe.

"I can always come back to visit, or you can always see us." She could tell that he was starting to get agitated. But she could not help but tease him some more. But she had a plan. She just had to stick with it.

"Amelia, I..." He was about to say something, but she stopped him. She feared that he might ruin everything.

"I am sorry, Evan, but do you mind if I go to the ladies' room?" She gracefully stood from her seat with Evan following to assist her, just like a true gentleman.

"Ok." He seemed stunned by her sudden interruption, but he knew he had no choice but to wait for her return.

She strode away from him in the direction of the bathroom. She tried not to take long, not wanting Evan to suspect anything. After dealing with her business, she returned to her seat, ready for his surprise.

"Sorry if I took so long." She immediately said, throwing Evan out of his element. She needed to distract him until she could proceed with her plan. "Can you please order me some creamy custard cake?"

Of course, he quickly called a waiter and ordered her dessert. But before he could say another thing, her phone rang, silencing him until she finished her conversation to herself.

She could see his growing frustration. She could feel that he wanted so much to talk about last night. But not yet. She still had one or two more things she wished to do.

Then, the waiter returned to their table, carrying a cake with a candle on top, accompanied by a violinist. As soon as both stopped before their table, the musician started playing a romantic piece.

"I think you are making a mistake. It is not my birthday." Evan quickly corrected the waiter as he placed the cake before him.

He did not understand why the waiter would make a mistake. But he did not like that they were making a spectacle in the restaurant as other diners started to look in their direction. He wanted their privacy because he wanted to discuss something with her.

But before he could say more, he felt her hands stopping him again. "Evan." She called his name, making him shift his face in her direction. "I want us to celebrate this day before I leave tomorrow."

She did not wish to leave, but she had to share this great news with the people she cared about most in her life. Besides, she knew she had taken most of Evan's time away from his work. He had to concentrate on it for now while they figured this out.

"What do you mean?" Evan's eyes stared at her, confusion written on his face.

"Please, indulge me." Amelia requested as she leaned forward to the table, reaching for the cake.

Then, she opened a chocolate cone on the top and revealed something shining, a familiar object. It finally dawned on Evan what she was talking about, realizing where this was possibly going.

She pulled out the ring from her pocket and showed it to him. "Would you kneel and propose to me properly, so I can finally give you my answer."

She spoke to him so softly, together with the soft music of the violin, serenading them. It felt like he was talking to an angel. He was beyond enchanted, transfixed in his place.

It took him a few seconds to remember that she had asked him to go on his knees. "Of course." He immediately moved and changed position, kneeling before her as he took the ring from her hand.

He was still thinking of something profound to say to her as he raised the ring in his fingers before her when she smiled at him. He did not even get a chance to say a word when she finally said, "YES!" As tears rolled down her eyes, happy tears.

Chapter 922: Threesome

He decided to drink his frustration away as he drove his way to his favorite bar. This morning had been terrible, but he could not do anything about it.

After his failed attempt to convince his father to reconsider his internship, he decided to apologize to Mr. Blackstone, hoping he could stop working in the mailroom.

Walking to the office drenched in coffee was not the impression he had in mind when he decided to set an appointment with his boss. But he could not cancel the meeting because that would only worsen the situation.

"Well, I would assume that you would at least come to the office in time and wear a more presentable attire," Zach remembered his boss, Alex, telling him as he entered his office, like a cat who just came out of a dumpster.

Of course, the meeting did not go as he had planned. His boss still assigned him to the mailroom to work there until his boss decided that he had learned enough lessons.

He did not go to college to sort out packages and mail. It was just insane, but he had no choice. It was either that or out on the street. He might have a college degree, but without a job, he would starve.

"Give me two shots." He shouted at the bar as he occupied the empty stool. Immediately upon recognizing him, two shot glasses appeared before him. He stared at it for a few seconds, contemplating his life.

.....

He could look for an actual job. His friends would probably hire him in their companies, but that would mean begging for it. His pride would not allow him to do that to himself.

As long as no one knew that he was working in the mailroom, that was better than asking his friends for help. He just had to be careful. He believed his boss would not tell anybody about it.

So far, the mailroom did not seem to know who he was. He just had to keep it that way. But tonight, he just wanted to forget and be himself again.

"Give me your special tonight." The bartender already knew what he was asking for as he took a bottle from the upper glass case.

After downing his tequila shots, he held one glass of the finest scotch in his hand. The feel of it as it scratched his throat and passed down into his stomach was worth every penny he spent on it. It was delicious.

Was he ready to give up this life? The answer would be a definite NO.

"Hey, Zach. Where have you been?" Someone clapped him on his back and sat right beside him. He did not have to look to know who it was.

"Around..." He answered but not elaborating. He had been silent in their group, avoiding their calls and going to their usual hangouts. How could he when he was busy dealing with those stupid mail?

He was so tired by the time he left. When he tried to leave early, his boss required him to work overtime because he was late. But he was not used to waking up early.

Damn! How do these people live? He thought as he tried to do what they did. He could barely catch up with the female employees he worked with, and some of them were half his size.

"A little bird told me that you are now working." His friend ordered the same thing that he was having before continuing. "An intern at the Blackstone Industries. Is that true?"

It seemed that news about him traveled fast. At least, that was the part he heard, not the rest of the story. "Yeah, where did you hear that?" It was better to answer it with another question.

"I heard that you are working with your father's campaign." And by using his friend's ego to talk about himself rather than answering questions. "How is that going, Ryan?"

Ryan's father was also running for another office term as a Senator of the nearby state. As politicians' sons, they had become friends and college buddies. But they were not what one would call best friends.

They were buddies who benefited from each other when needed. After all, someday, they would also become politicians like their fathers. But they did not have a deep sense of commitment in their friendship.

"It is going well, I think," Ryan answered as he turned around and scouted the room. "You know I don't have the patience for it. But they said that Dad had a solid chance of winning again." Saying it confidently as if he believed it.

But knowing his friend, he would not know shit about what was going on in his father's campaign. In his opinion, Ryan was worse than him. But unlike his friend, he wished his father would have hired him in his campaign instead of sending him into the corporate world.

But he knew his father never trusted what he could do. All he saw in him was the disappointment he would give his family. Yes, he had brought several shameful acts into their family, but most of them were not his doing.

However, his father always saw the worse in him, believing the tabloids more than his words. Her mother did not care too much to even deal with him. So, yeah, in the end, he acted on it.

Could they blame him for doing what they already thought he did?

"Well, my friend, we should celebrate tonight," Zach ordered another set of drinks for them while his friend waved his hands to the brunette and the blond on the other side of the bar.

"Yes, we should." His friend answered as he smiled like a Cheshire cat about to eat his prey. "Why don't you ladies order what you like? It is on us." His friend started introducing himself. "And this is my friend, Zachary Andrews."

“Just Zach.” He corrected as he shook the hands of the girls. But knowing his friend, he would use him as his wingman to score one of these girls. Which one, he would find out soon enough.

Then, of course, Zach would be stuck with the other one unless his dear friend was being greedy and decided to take both. But tonight, he just wanted to drink and be alone, so he hoped his friend would take the two with him and have his threesome.

Chapter 923: To go down without a fight

“Are you sure that you would like to do this?” Her manager, Nora, asked as they heard her plans.

She had been hiding from them for more than a week, trying to figure out what she would do with her life. That was precisely why she went away. She wanted to get away from her chaotic relationship.

She did not expect that her boyfriend, well, her ex-boyfriend, would follow her. She thought when she left after catching him cheating. He understood it was over between them.

She could not believe that he would still follow her and hurt her. The worse part was his threats. She could not keep going, with fear weighing her down.

“Yes, I already thought this through,” Serena explained how she ended her relationship with the famous movie actor, but this time, she was not going to stay silent about his abuse.

She did not want him to get away with what he had done to her. And she did not want others to experience what she had gone through. She was tired of being afraid and hiding.

Her manager went to the sidebar of the hotel, where she took two glasses and fixed her a drink. Then, Nora gave her a stiff drink to make her relax as if that would change her mind.

.....

“But this might ruin your career. You know how influential Elliot is in the movie industry. His family connection to the entertainment business might ban you from getting any job.” Her manager pointed out how precarious her situation was if she continued to sue her ex-boyfriend.

But she had made up her mind. It was like what her psychiatrist said. She kept attracting cheating and abusive men because she allowed them to abuse her. These men could sense her fear and use it to their advantage, knowing they could get away with it.

Still, she knew that Nora was only looking after her best interest. She was not here to go against her wishes but only to confirm that she knew the extent of the possibility and consequences of her plans.

“I don’t care anymore. If I have to start at the bottom, then I will.” Nora was correct about that, but this was not about her career anymore. It was her life too.

Her career had a likelihood of nose-diving into the abyss. Elliot and his family would likely bury her career six feet under the ground. She probably could kiss her showbiz career goodbye.

Another scandal and the final nail in her coffin if she lost in this fight against a giant. But what was the alternative?

Was she willing to return to her abusive relationship with him? From what she had seen, he was not ready to let her go just yet.

“Let us not get ahead of ourselves.” Nora walked to her side, looking down at her as she slumped on the couch like a broken raggedy doll. “Let me see what else I can do.”

Her manager grabbed her phone and started to make some calls. Serena was just too tired since she could hardly sleep last night, so she closed her eyes and let her manager deal with the situation for now.

She could hear Nora rambling on the phone, barking orders to whoever was on the other side of the line. One thing she liked about her manager, she did not like receiving crap from anyone.

“I want your recommendation on this situation this afternoon.” It was the last sentence she heard from her manager before exhaustion took over her body and her mind drifted to a deep slumber.

She felt her body move, then a soft blanket draped around her, but after that, she was unconscious. She still appreciated her manager with her tiny gestures. Nora was tough, but deep inside, she had a soft heart.

On another side of the city, another person was busy dealing with her situation. Adam did promise he would help, but she still had to agree to file a formal complaint.

“I want everything you can find about Mr. Elliot Jamieson,” Adam instructed the man assigned to investigate his new case.

Thankfully, Alex sent one of his good investigators to help him with the case he was filing for Serena. Adam could only cover so much with his other obligations. So he might need all the help he could get.

He was sure if he came to David, he might be willing to lend him some of his resources. After all, this was for his sister. But he wanted to consult with his client before making any additional actions.

“How deep do you want me to dig into this, Mr. Jamieson?” The investigator asked him as he took note of the details Adam shared with him.

He looked at his file case, closing it before looking at the man he would be working with for the first time. Alex said he was the best, then he believed him.

“As thorough as you can.” He wanted everything that they could use against the man. He would bet that he would have the best attorneys’ money could buy.

From his initial investigation, he gathered that Serena’s ex-boyfriend was not just anybody. He learned that he was about to go against Goliath. Did that make him David? If that meant he would win the case, so be it.

Then, he was alone again, dealing with his other cases. Serena’s case was not the only one he had to focus on since other people also depended on his help.

“Can you get me the file of Mr. Logan?” He shouted, directing his orders at the woman just outside the door. “It is the one regarding the manslaughter case we received yesterday.” He explained to his new secretary.

Setting up his new office was not easy since he did not have a sizable capital to work on, but he was glad that several of his colleagues had decided to join him in forming their small firm.

They had agreed to take on paying clients so they could also accept pro bono cases. It was hard to help those victims who had no money if they did not have enough funding to support their suits.

Many big corporate firms were hard to beat, especially in controversial cases like his case with Serena. His opponent would have massive resources at their disposal. So, it helped if they had allies open to supporting their pro bono cases.

"Sir, Adam. You have a client waiting for you outside." His secretary informed him as she brought the file he had asked for, putting it on his table.

"Tell him to give me a few minutes." He did not usually turn away a client, but he had to deal with something first before meeting another.

"I think you should see her, Sir." His secretary insisted, making him look at her questioningly. "I think that is Ms. Serena Anderson outside. The actress." She excitedly stated.

"Send her in," Adam instructed, a little bit surprised but glad that she saved him the trouble of going to her hotel to discuss her case.

He only hoped she was here to tell him to proceed with the case and not to drop it. The last thing he wanted was for her to go down without a fight.

Chapter 924: Sniff a story

She stepped out of the death trap, elated that she would live another day. The elevator seemed it had seen its better days and should retire soon enough. Luckily, it was just a few floors, or she might die of a heart attack every time it seemed to hit a bump.

It took her and her manager a while to find his office, even if they had his address. Well, her manager did not think they were in the right place upon seeing the condition of the dilapidated warehouse and the location. She thought they had made a mistake.

"Let me handle this." Serena heard her companion say, but unlike her, Nora had no patience in waiting in line, seeing the long queue ahead of them.

Judging from the clothes most were wearing, the clients were not what most giant firms would represent. This firm seemed to center more on the middle and low-income groups and some marginalized sectors.

"No. We will wait for our turn." She stopped her, not wanting to cut in just because they could.

All these people went here for assistance, just like her. And not because she was somebody famous that would make her concerns more important than theirs. They would sit here the whole day if necessary until it was their turn to meet up with a lawyer.

"We can't waste our time sitting here." Nora pointed out the many people who probably had been sitting there for an hour or more.

.....

"You are welcome to leave if you need to be somewhere else." She told her manager as she moved toward the end of what seemed to be a line.

Then, she sat down with the other clients while she waited for her turn. It was her fault. She did not make an appointment ahead of time. Though she did not mind, at least this time, she did not experience preferential treatment.

She sometimes liked to experience what an ordinary person would go through in their everyday life. Honestly, it gave her a better perspective of how someone else lived.

True, she sometimes used this experience in her job. It was hard to portray a scene if she did not know what it was like to be in that position. Experience would always be the best teacher and a great way to learn.

"Ser..." Nora stopped before someone else heard her name. "You know I can't leave you here alone."

She had to use another of her disguise so that other people would not recognize her. They did not want people to fuss over her because she was a celebrity. Besides, once the word that she was in a law firm, the media would not be far behind.

She was still at the top of her game. Her recent movie just hit the top of the box office chart. But she wondered if it would still be the same after this case.

"Then, sit quietly with me." She ordered as she watched the distressed faces of the other clients waiting for their chance to talk to one of the lawyers here.

She noticed several lawyers around, but she still had to see hers. Then, a receptionist handed them a form, asking them if they were here with a particular lawyer in mind.

"I am here to see, Mr. Adam Mason." She kept her eyes hidden in her sunglasses and most of her hair covered in the scarf she wore. She just hoped no one would recognize her as she sat in a crowded room.

"We will call you once he is available." The woman said, but the other woman kept looking at her face. She could only wonder if she recognized her. She hoped not.

After a few minutes, she had her answer. Another woman escorted them inside the other room and into the end of the hallway. The receptionist recognized her and decided that they should not keep a client like her waiting. Soon, they were sitting across from him.

"If you are that good, why are you working in this crappy place?" Nora questioned as her eyes roamed around the room and looked at the dilapidated warehouse that her new lawyer occupied.

She still could not believe that Serena would choose to come into this place. Who was this lawyer that insisted on working on her case? She initially thought they would meet with Serena's brother or a partner, knowing he owned a large firm.

But she doubted this was the firm David owned, seeing that it was not at par with the other firms representing most of her talents. She would not bring her cases to this place if she had any other choice.

"I am sorry for coming here without an appointment. But we can wait until you finish with your other clients." Serena kicked her in the foot, speaking up, interrupting her manager from making more of her snide comments.

She understood this place was not where their usual lawyers had conducted business with them. But Serena did not see any problem with it. It might not be world-class, but in a way, it still looked presentable.

Her only complaint would be the old elevator that needed some major work. Besides, she believed she liked what Adam had done to this place.

"It is nice to see you, Ms. Anderson." Adam greeted her, ignoring the other woman's clear insult of his workplace. He did not plan to justify her words by answering her question.

He quickly offered them a seat and introduced himself. "I am Adam Mason, and you are?" Addressing the other woman accompanying Serena. He did not like how she belittled him, but he still needed to show respect.

"I am Nora, the manager." She firmly shook his hand but made it short. She was a woman who never liked beating around the bush. "So, what are we looking at here?" She always struck at the middle, not a fan of wasting time. "What would you suggest?"

However, Nora did not like what she had seen so far. It was not just a trashy place. But she had not heard of this man. She could not tell if he was good at this or not.

She could recommend several top lawyers, who could defend Serena, but why did she pick this man? She could not picture the reason why. Was this man that good?

But honestly, she could see the appeal, looking at the face and the physique of the man before her. He could be a model or a star, minus the cheap suit and the old shoes. Still, his accomplishment and the firm remained questionable.

"Of course, it will all depend on you, Serena." Adam pointed to the famous star as they settled on his desk to discuss the case. "We have two options for now. We can try to settle this out of court if that is what you want or battle it head-on inside a courtroom."

He looked at his client and her manager, gauging what they wanted. But basically, he only needed Serena's decision, but sometimes, he could not discount the manager's influence on her talent.

"If we go to the negotiation table, we can avoid a messy trial and prevent the press from making a spectacle out of this story," Adam explained to her their situation.

However, that would limit the impact of the case since they were letting him free by settling for a fee. What was money in this case, but nothing but a commodity in abundance against the accused?

She would not get the justice she wanted because the abuser would be set free with just a penalized payment. His name would remain intact, and the entire incident would disappear and get buried as if it did not happen.

On the other hand, Serena would not have to go through the trouble of being tried by the masses. She could avoid the public trial, which could go either way.

He was sure many would not side with her in this one since their opponent also had his supporters. It would not be a simple trial of what happened recently but the unearthing of all their past. And he could already foresee that it would not be pretty.

"If it is my choice, I suggest we settle this out of court and protect your career if possible." Nora looked at Serena, wanting to convince her that was the better choice.

Once this went to court, there was no question that the media would have a field day in this case. It would be a battle of not just two people but the entire world.

Nora had adored Serena since she took care of her career. She was not hard to manage and great at her job. But her personal life was a mess. It was the only drawback in managing her career.

"But if Elliot denies all charges against him, we will have no choice but to take this to court." Adam needed to prep them with all their options. At the end of this trial, she was the only one who would face the final result.

"So, this would become a media circus," Serena stated in her conclusion, suddenly wondering if she was making a mistake of even coming here.

She wanted Elliot to pay for what he did to her, but digging up her past was not part of the bargain. Could she face them again, all the things she had buried and hoped never to be reminded of again?

It seemed that was the price of going through with this.

"We can ask the judge to put a gag order about the proceeding, but most often than not, the case still finds its way to the press," Adam informed them of the possibility.

Therefore, he could not promise that this case would remain private. In his experience, the press had always found a way to sniff a story, even if they hid it carefully from plain sight.

Chapter 925: Until the end of time

She arrived early at the apartment. At least the place she had been staying for several months and considered her home. She softly worked her keys on the doorknob, hoping not to make too much noise.

She did not want to wake up the other occupants, who were still probably sleeping soundly in their rooms. Especially their little angel that could become the devil if she disturbed her beauty sleep.

However, the lights suddenly turned on, almost blinding her when she entered further inside into an initially dark room. She had to shield her eyes with her hand to get them adjusted to the sudden brightness.

"What are you doing sneaking in the middle of the night?" A familiar voice reprimanded her. "Amelia, you almost gave me a heart attack, sneaking up like that."

But due to the blinding light, she did not see the new vase blocking her path. She accidentally knocked it down until it created a smashing sound on the tiled floor. She did not mean it, but she did not see it.

"Correction! It is almost morning. Anyway, where did that come from?" Amelia did not remember that vase being there before. Angela might have added it to the decorations while she was away.

"I bought it yesterday." Her friend answered her to answer her question.

.....

Finally, she saw Angela, by the switch of the lights. Her friend was staring at her with one of her hands, holding on to her chest. It was evident that Angela was not expecting company as her hand was still mildly shaking.

"I am sorry, Angela. I did not mean to frighten you." She quickly excused herself. She knew she should have called them last night that she was coming home. Now, she almost gave her friend a cardiac arrest.

She hurriedly moved toward her and assisted her to the sofa as she requested her friend to sit while she got a glass of water. When she returned after a quick run from the kitchen, she saw her friend was calmer and more relaxed.

"I thought you would not be home for a couple more days." Angela more or less stated than asked. She had implied that notion in their last conversation when she could not give them a definite date when she was returning.

"Well, the thing I had been handling while away was resolved earlier than I thought." She explained to her friend without going into details.

"What is going on here?" Another voice joined them, followed by a whining baby. Eida walked to the living room with Luisa in her arms, joining them in the morning chaos.

It seemed that her plan not to wake them up had backfired. Now, all of them were wide awake. Even Bea and Goliath were not far behind as the commotion woke them up.

Now, she had three adults confused and very sleepy, a barking dog, and a whining baby to deal with, on top of her exhaustion. She was hoping to get some rest before she had to face them. But lucky as she was, here they were, all staring at her.

"I am making coffee. Does anybody else like one?" Bea asked as she moved toward the kitchen with Goliath following her. "Don't bother. I will prepare for all." Then, it was just her friends and their adorable princess, still complaining about ruining her sleep.

"What is going on with you, Amelia?" Eida suddenly asked as she danced Luisa in her arms, attempting to send her back to sleep. "You know you can talk to us if you have any problems."

Somehow, the baby seemed to be responding to her questioning as she grew silent every second. Maybe she was also waiting for her reply, which she had no idea how to answer.

Nonetheless, her friends were looking at her situation wrong. They thought that she might need an intervention. But she did not. She had never felt great in her life. But, of course, they did not know that.

"Hey, guys. I don't have any problems. I never felt happier than today." Amelia genuinely smiled at her friends, not only ecstatic about what she would like to share with them. But also glad she had friends who cared so much about her. They would intervene on her behalf.

"Are you sure? You are not just saying that." Angela gaped at her as if she had doubts.

But she could not blame them since she had been acting strange lately. Or maybe since she had met Evan. Admittedly, she had not been the same.

"Yes, actually, I have something to tell you guys. I was going to tell you about this later, but since we are all here, I might as well share it with you now." She began, hoping she could spill it out and get it over with since they would find out about it soon enough.

"Well, what is it? Don't make the suspense worse for my heart." Angela grumbled this time as if she was about to have another episode if she did not hurry up.

She took a deep breath, garnering enough courage. She thought that telling them would be easy, but it was not as she stared into their expectant faces. She wondered what was going through their mind. Were they thinking the same thing she had in her mind?

"Come on, Luisa is almost asleep." This time, it was Eida who was pressuring her.

One more deep breath, she told herself. Suddenly, she wished Evan was there by her side so they could say it together. But unfortunately, he was not. Anyway, here goes nothing.

"I am getting married." She hastily blurted out of her lips before she lost her nerve. She thought she would stutter, but it sounded right in her ears.

Amelia could see the shock combined with the smiling faces of the people before her. It was like they were confused and happy at the same time. "Are you serious? To whom?" Eida added, still looking at her disbelievingly.

"Amelia is getting married to me." She heard his voice behind her and suddenly felt relieved. Evan walked to the room and stood beside her, taking her hand in his firm grip.

She had to go to the apartment ahead of him since he had to deal with their luggage. Besides, she would also like to check if the coast was clear. As she said, she would like to sleep before dealing with her friends.

"Really?" Angela expressed with a satisfied smile. Well, the confusion and disbelief suddenly turned into delight.

"Yes, me, Grandmama. I already proposed, and she accepted," Evan answered with an affectionate grin as he looked at his grandmother before turning his attention to the woman he was going to make his wife.

He disagreed that she should leave, at least not alone. Instead, he came along, dropping everything for her again. He wanted to be with her when they broke the news to his grandmother and her friend.

It was valuable news, and Amelia should not do it all alone. From now on, Evan was not letting her do anything by herself. They would become partners in everything they did until the end of time.

Chapter 926: Revenge was a dish best served cold

She had finally gotten the hang of her new job. It was not as hard as she initially thought. But she would not consider herself slow since she had worked herself through school using her intellect and pure hard work.

It was not easy to work on the side and study at the same time under a student scholarship grant. But she had made it work until she met the father of her son. Then, everything went downhill from there.

"Ria, good job with your first two weeks." Her supervisor praised her while she stood in front of her small desk. "Even the boss told Sir Alex about your impressive work." She continued.

"Really?" She could not believe it since she was new at this job. But she tried hard not to impress but to do a good job. "Thanks. I will work harder so you will not get disappointed with me."

Everything she was doing was not only for her but also for her son. She knew it was not about earning money for his son but giving him a reason to be proud of her mother.

She had worked hard all her life to follow her dreams. That was what she wanted her son to see in her. She was not a loser or a gold digger who only used the father of her son for money. It was a long story.

"I don't think I will ever get disappointed with you, Ria. You are a good kid." Her supervisor was walking away when she turned around as if she remembered something. "Why don't you come with me later? I will treat you with a drink."

.....

It was seldom she liked interns, but this new one was different. Ria seemed genuinely interested to learn. This young woman was willing to start at the bottom and learn her way up to the top. A rare characteristic she could hardly find in the young people today.

If she managed to have a daughter, she would be proud to have someone like her. But she was married to her job, so having children was out of the question.

"Tonight, Ms. Brenda. You want me to go out with you tonight." Ria repeated since she could not believe that her boss would invite her out.

Other interns and the employees had warned her about the strict rules that her supervisor implemented. She had experienced it first hand, the reason she had worked twice as hard.

Therefore, she could not believe her boss would praise her and even consider taking her out for a drink. Now, she was in between accepting her offer and rejecting it.

"Yeah. I hope you will not say no." Brenda looked at her as if she had no choice.

The problem was not just going out with her boss. She had never included going late in her plans to get drunk. Although she had warned her babysitter that she might be late a few times, it was due to work and not because she was out on bars.

"I am..." Ria was still coming up with an excuse when her boss suddenly shouted at someone else.

"Ms. Josey, I am taking Ria out tonight. Why don't you join us." Brenda called their COO, who just came in from her meeting upstairs.

Their big boss stopped just by her desk and looked at them. "When is this?" Ms. Josey inquired, appearing like she was interested.

"Tonight," Brenda answered, and the two started planning it as if she was not even there.

"Then, it is settled. Pack up your things early." Ms. Josey told her, giving her no time to say anything else.

Then, her supervisor and COO were gone as fast as they had arrived at her table. She was left problematic with what she had to do. First, she had to inform her sitter that she might be late picking up his son.

Afterward, she had to figure out an excuse to get out of there before she found herself drunk. Her alcohol limit was not something to brag about since she could hardly hold her liquor.

Not for lack of trying in college, but she had no tolerance for it. It was the reason she ended up pregnant. She was too intoxicated to say no to her boyfriend that night.

She was not crying rape since she loved him. But she would have been more responsible if she was not drunk. Moreover, she thought her ex-boyfriend understood her concern about not having sex until they were ready. But she realized too late that it was just all a game to him.

"Isn't this fun?" Ms. Josey told her and the rest of their company. The next thing Ria knew, she was already sitting in a bar with her two bosses, drinking their margaritas.

But fortunately, they also invited two other female employees to join them. So, it was not just her who felt awkward to be drinking with her bosses.

"Yes, it is," Ria answered, slowly sipping her drinks, afraid that one glass would be enough to inebriate her. Then, the other two were already finishing their first drink.

Then, her eyes roamed around the room since she was not familiar with places like this. The first and last time she was in a bar was the night she got pregnant with Edison.

She never had time to drink, go out, and party since she was never young. As she said, she devoted her life to studying. But when she had to stop because of her pregnancy, she had no choice but to keep working in a diner to earn a living for herself and her baby.

"Ria, I think someone is interested in you. He had been eyeing you since we entered." Ms. Brenda said, pointing out the man using her lips toward the left side of the bar.

"I think I have seen him working in the mail room." One of the other employees also followed their boss' gaze.

Ria finally looked at the man in question. Then, she was surprised to realize that the man was familiar. She had not seen him after their last incident in the elevator.

"Pity. I thought such a good-looking man would be one of the executives in one of the departments." Ms. Brenda said jokingly, but Ria could tell she was teasing her. "He certainly looked like a Greek God, less the tan colors."

Ria could see that he had a lean body, but she could tell he was hiding a masculine body underneath his suit. But it did not mean that she was her type. And she doubted he was looking at her because he was interested in her.

She believed it had something to do with what happened the other day. He probably recognized her and had something in his mind to get even with her.

After all, revenge was a dish best served cold.

Chapter 927: Back to square one

“Do we have to go?” Jacky could not believe how time flew by in an instant.

She watched her husband move around the room, wide awake and ready to pack their things. He told her that it was time to go home. Was she prepared to return to reality and face the truth?

Honestly, given another choice, she would like to linger for a few more days. Who was she kidding? She wanted to stay forever. But all good things must come to an end.

The vacation was over. It was time to face the music.

Marcus sat beside her on the bed, trying to comfort her, placing his hand on the side of her cheek, gently caressing her like she was porcelain that could easily break. He did not have to say anything, but she understood.

“I wish we do not have to.” She stated what Marcus might say, knowing that he did not want to break her heart, but he also had no choice.

Besides, they have responsibilities not just to themselves but to their friends, the company they work for, and the people depending on their jobs. It would be selfish for them to stay.

.....

It was time to return to her life, not the fantasy she had been living with for weeks. Still, she appreciated what her husband and their friends did for her. She probably needed the break from her reality more than she ever thought.

“We will try to do this more often,” Marcus promised her, but both knew it was a promise that would be hard to keep with the demands of their jobs.

But he believed if he would save their marriage, he had to make time. He had never seen Jacky take a fall like this. It was like she would never recover.

Luckily, she pulled through, well, at least, he hoped she did.

“I like that,” Jacky answered and smiled at her husband. Then, she pulled herself up, planting a short but sweet kiss on his lips before moving out of the bed and into the bathroom.

She had to prepare for their departure. The sooner, the better. Besides, there was nothing much to pack, but it was like she had a lead in her feet as she moved slower than usual.

But on the upside, she would see her friends again. They had been chatting with her almost every day when they were not busy. Next time, she would be face to face with them. Something that she was looking forward to and not.

In truth, she missed them. But at the same time, she also dreaded seeing Dani with her full belly, ready to pop. At least on the phone, she did not have to see her, but in person, she had no idea how she would react to her being pregnant while she was not.

“Don’t worry. Everything will be fine. I will always be here.” Marcus assured her, wrapping her up in his warm embrace as they stepped outside the villa that they had considered their home for the last weeks.

Her therapists said she should let go of her memories, anchoring her from going forward to the future. But she also said it would not be as easy. It would not disappear in a snap of a finger.

She still recommended that she continue counseling until she was back on her feet. Marcus also agreed to go with her if she wanted, supporting her throughout her ordeal.

But the final decision would always be with her because she was the only one who could assess her need. Truthfully, she had no idea what she needed at the moment.

“Shall we go?” Then, she entwined her arms around his. Soon, they were flying back home.

The home that they built when they got married. How did she feel about that? She guessed it was another question she had no answer to yet. But she would know soon enough as she watched the plane soar higher in the clouds.

Was it wrong to imagine her baby floating in the sky, softly cuddled by the white cottony layers around her? She guessed it was so much better compared to the horrors of seeing blood everywhere.

“Are you ok?” Marcus must have noticed her silently watching outside her window. He had dozed off when the plane was steadily flying in a slightly cloudy sky.

But he must have woken up when they eventually bumped into slightly cloudy weather. The plane shook as it experienced turbulence from the strong winds outside.

What was sunny and bright earlier had quickly changed into this gloomy, dark weather that threatened to worsen every second? Then, the captain spoke on the speaker, assuring them that it was nothing to be alarmed about, but they would soon be out of it.

“No,” Jacky answered him honestly, not noticing that her hands were shaking, but she could feel her heart beating faster.

She was getting used to flying, but this was the first time she had been in this situation. It usually helped if she could think of happy thoughts when she was in the air, like earlier when she thought of her baby sleeping in the clouds.

But when the weather gradually changed and horrible thoughts entered her mind again, the beautiful image vanished, replaced by a nightmare. It was like she was reliving it again in her mind, over and over again.

“What is wrong?” Her husband looked at her as concern covered his expression. “Don’t worry. Captain Lewis is a great pilot.” He could see the stress all over her face.

He knew that Jacky was not a particular fan of flying, but he could assure her that they were in safe hands. Besides, it was just a mild weather condition, nothing that their plane and an experienced pilot could not handle.

He took her hand, cold from whatever was going through her mind, and rubbed it, trying his best to comfort her. Then, he pulled her closer, letting his warmth envelop her.

"It is nothing. It must be this weather." She was glad he thought it was just her nerves because of their present circumstance.

She did not want him to think she had regressed again if he discovered what was going on with her. Besides, she believed it was just a temporary relapse on her part.

Soon, she would be ok once they were back on the ground. She did not want to worry her husband unnecessarily, knowing that he would not leave her side if he knew that she was not yet that well.

But she was trying hard.

"Ok. But you will tell me if you need anything." Marcus looked at her as if not convinced. She nodded her head, but she knew she might be lying.

Soon, as her husband had promised, they had landed safely on the ground, back in the city where she had lived her entire life. But could she still call her this home after all the heartache this place reminded her of and the painful experiences she had to endure?

"I promise that things will be better. Slowly, but if we help each other, we will get through this." Marcus swore to her.

She did not doubt that he would do his part. He would be the best husband a woman could ever want. She would be the luckiest woman alive. And regrettably, he would have been the best father if they did not lose their child.

She had seen him with her brother, Andy. How he interacted with him? He acted as a good role model to him. She had seen how he had changed from the man she had met in that bar.

"I know you will," Jacky answered, happy to have him in her life. But she would also try her best.

She already asked her last therapist for a referral. She still planned to continue with her therapy. Marcus deserved a better wife, not a broken one. So, she would try her best to fix herself.

Eventually, they arrived at their apartment.

The very first place she could truly call her home. Marcus carried her on the threshold as if they were newlywed, letting the staff take care of their things. He quickly deposited her in the bedroom as if it was their first day back from their honeymoon.

It was sweet, and she appreciated it. But.

"I am thirsty." She pulled away from him. "And hungry." She untied the scarf around her neck and let it drop on the floor, walking towards the door. "I am going to the kitchen to get some water. Why don't you order us something to eat?" She suggested as she left him.

She could hear him grumbling, protesting that she had left, but she only smiled. But she saw him grab his phone and then heard him order something. It sounded like pizza.

Whatever it was, she believed she could eat a cow because she was starving. She continued her way to the kitchen, passing again by the living room.

Then, she stopped as her eyes grew wild. Then, uncontrollable tears flooded her eyes. She knelt as her hands wiped the floors. She must be growing crazy.

Blood. All she saw was blood.

Now, she was back to square one.

Chapter 928: Pulling the plug

"Sir, Lance. Your fiance is here to see you." A professionally dressed woman entered his office, interrupting his meeting with Lord Fordshire.

He looked away from the Kingdom official in charge of their treasury and the north portion of their land. Then, he focused his eyes on the distraction by the door.

"Tell her that I am in a meeting." He told his secretary irritably as he continued his discussion about their Kingdom's finances, dismissing her.

As the upcoming King, he was slowly getting acquainted with the current issues he had to deal with once he sat on the throne. Fortunately, King Edward managed the Kingdom well during his reign.

He did not see a significant problem he had to inherit with the crown. He was lucky that King Edward and his brother, Duke Frederick, had ruled with the people in mind and not their interests.

"But..." His secretary continued without moving from her spot, but she stopped when she saw his annoyed expression.

The last thing he needed at the moment was to meet with his fiance and talk about the wedding. He had left all the decisions for the ceremony to the coordinators. He did not want to bother himself with the details, believing it would be wasting his time.

.....

"Tell her to make an appointment with you when I have an available time." With the King pressuring him to get married soon and take over the throne, he had little time to go over all the details of his responsibilities.

Unlike Prince Edward and Prince Alex, he had not undergone the extensive training of taking over the crown as his cousins did. After all, he was the unlikely candidate to sit on the throne.

But before his secretary could say anything else, the woman in question appeared at his door and marched inside. His secretary tried to stop her, but his unwanted guest continued until she stood before him and his guest.

"You have to stop avoiding me," Camille spoke in a barely controlled voice, demanding his time, but she was ready to explode. "We could not keep delaying the wedding."

She had become the laughing stock among her friends and their society when her supposed wedding date kept moving around. She could still hear one of the questions asked by a reporter.

"Is the wedding still on?" The media man with his camera ambushed her that morning. Of course, she smiled and answered that it was. She had no choice but to make a silly excuse about a delay in some of the preparations.

But it was a degrading experience since she did not come up with the decision to tie the knot with him. She might have agreed with the arranged marriage, but not to the humiliation.

If he could not honor their agreement, maybe it was better to get out of this arrangement while she still could. She knew marrying him should be a great honor to their family, but to what extent? But could she back out of it?

"Hi, Camille. Can we do this another time? As you can see, I am in the middle of something." Lance barely glanced up at her before he continued to read the chart on his table.

He knew he was trying hard to be harsh to her. She did not deserve it, but he did not like to make a wrong impression. He did not want her to fall for him and expect that he would also love her.

"No, Lance." She finally lost it. "We are talking about this now." She did not care if there were other people in the room. She would allow him to ignore her this time.

She moved closer to the table where Lance was sitting and stood straight with her hands on her waist. She was not leaving until they had dealt with the problem he kept avoiding.

"I think I better reschedule our meeting later, Prince Lance." Lord Fordshire felt that his presence was unnecessary in this discussion. "It is nice seeing you, Ms. McKinley."

The Lord stood up from his seat and quickly gathered his things. He could see that it was a conversation that needed a little privacy. He did not want to get stuck in the middle of a pending fight.

"I am sorry about this, Lord Fordshire. I will have my secretary call you for a better time." Lance stood from his seat and assisted the older nobleman outside his office doors.

Then, he turned around to face his fuming fiancé. But he was also annoyed due to her lack of respect for his time. Not because he was marrying her, she should use it to barge into his office without his permission.

He had to point to her that she could not act like a spoilt brat, especially when she was about to become his Queen. She had better learned her limitations, especially when he became King.

"Can we now talk?" Camille sat on one of the chairs as she tried to calm herself down.

She knew it was wrong to march into his office like that. But she had enough of him brushing her off as if her concerns were insignificant. Admittedly, she was doing this because of what it would bring to her family.

But she was not a terrible person for forcing Lance to marry her. She was following her obligation to her parents. As much as she wanted to lead her life the way she wanted it. She could not. It was not an option for her.

So, as much as she wanted to get out of this marriage, that was not possible. Her father pressured her to demand the soonest possible date for the ceremony.

"Do I have a choice?" Lance answered her sarcastically as he moved to the side of the bar to pour himself a glass of strong scotch.

He did not usually drink in the morning since he always wanted his mind clear when working and driving. But lately, a bottle of scotch seemed to be his only friend.

It was the only way he could go through the day without losing his mind. He was not yet an alcoholic, but at the moment, he needed it more and more, especially as the wedding and the coronation came closer.

"Well, you can end this marriage if you found me so abhorring," Camille shouted, not liking his words and tone of voice.

She knew she should not dare him to back out of the wedding. Her father would disapprove of her actions. But she had enough of him being so mean all the time.

"You know what. Let me save you the trouble. I will tell my father to end this charade and to tell your father to find another woman who would put up with you." She stood up from her seat and turned around.

She was ready to walk out of there and be done with it. She believed it would be better to deal with her father's wrath than spend eternal suffering married to this man under his roof.

Then, she moved toward the door.

"Stop!" Lance did not shout, but his voice had an authoritative quality that made her halt in her tracks. "Camille. I am sorry. You are right. We should talk." Then, his voice shifted to a lighter tone.

She wondered what had changed his mind, but she was glad. Despite her resolve, she was still afraid of what her father would do to her if the wedding did not push through.

She knew her father would not take it well, and he would put all the blame on her. She doubted if she could take another of her father's punishments. She wished her mother was still alive, but all she had now was her ambitious stepmother, who could care less about her.

To her father and stepmother, she was a commodity they could sell to the highest bidder. But, of course, they hid it in the guise of an obligation to the family. After all, she still had younger siblings to think of since this was not just about her.

"So, what is the problem?" He had to ask since he had no idea what was happening with the wedding.

He knew he should be happy that she was backing out, but it would be short-lived. Soon, his father would have someone else lined up to take her place. Would it be better or worse? He had no idea.

But Camille seemed to be a good person. Maybe he was better dealing with her than another girl he did not know. So, he had better fixed his act and worked on making this work, even civilly, if he had to because the other option seemed worse.

"We still need a date. You have to sit down with me and discuss when our wedding will be." Camille pointed out the issue.

They could keep planning and organizing, but without a definite number in the calendar. It would remain an imaginary wedding.

She sat down with him and waited. She noticed that he was contemplating the issue but did not respond immediately. However, she was not leaving without his answer, or else she was pulling the plug.

Chapter 929: The future Queen

The meeting with her future husband finally went well. He finally agreed on a wedding date, calling the coordinators to settle it in a month. At least she finally knew it was pushing through.

But honestly, she was anything but happy. She was planning her future. Camille McKinley was going to be a fucking Queen soon enough, but nothing about that news gave her joy.

"Who was she kidding?" She was just a dummy in a game of chess inside that castle. Her title might be one of the most valuable pieces in the Kingdom, but she might as well align herself with the pawns.

In a game of chess, she was supposed to be the next most powerful leader, who would have the King's back. It was part of her obligation to protect the King against all those who would want to hurt him.

At the same time, she also had to provide for all his needs. That included bearing his children, especially a son. It sounded medieval, but the Council explicitly expressed that she should understand these rules.

"Stupid rules." She kept mumbling, glad she was alone in the bar as she drank her second glass of alcohol.

She would have called one of her friends to drink with her, but she did not want to talk about the wedding. Everyone seemed to be enjoying the topic of her misery, except for her.

.....

However, the thought of carrying his child was a concept that still had not sunk in her mind. Of course, that would involve having sex. She was not pure, so she was not afraid of sexual intercourse. Thankfully, remaining chaste was not a criterion in this marriage.

However, she still found it awkward to do the deed with him, knowing he was not interested in her. She always thought that if she married, she would at least be attracted to the man and the same with him. Unfortunately, that was not the case. She was stuck in this marriage whether she liked it or not. And she was to bear his sons and daughters. So, how many? That was the question.

Suddenly, she imagined the animals she had seen in a documentary. She envisioned herself as the one giving birth to a child one after another. "Eeehhh!" That was disgusting, shaking her head off the horrific image. But unfortunately, she would become a baby-making machine if she did bear a son soon enough, picturing herself with a dozen daughters with no son.

"Hey, Camille. Is there something wrong?" A voice behind her asked as a familiar voice sat beside her on one of the vacant stools. "You look like you needed some company."

She slowly turned to a familiar face, but not someone she would call a friend. They had been going in similar circles but never had the chance to hit it off, probably because she avoided him like he had the plague.

First of all, she knew he was bad news. Second, he was not her type, nor was she his. Third, she was in a deep, committed relationship until his father told her she had to marry Prince Lance.

Crazy, right? Obligation trumped love.

It was another long story she did not wish to think about now. She wished she could dig up a hole and bury all her baggage underneath the ground and forget all about it. But they said time could only heal old wounds.

“Actually...” She turned to her visitor and stared at him. “I am leaving, Prince Edward.” She picked up her glass and gulped the remaining liquid in it, not caring if it was unladylike. Honestly, it was tiring to be perfect all the time.

“But I just arrived. Surely you would share even just one drink with your future cousin-in-law.” Edward slightly blocked her path as he ordered two drinks for them. “Just one drink. Let me congratulate you and welcome you to the family.”

He would not take no for an answer as he used his most adorable smile to charm his way to the future Queen of the land. He was unsure if it would work, but it convinced her as she settled back to her seat.

“Ok. Just one drink.” Since she was going to be part of the Royal family, she could not start by making enemies. No matter what she thought of the disgraced Prince, he was still the son of the current King.

“Thanks. That is all I ask. Besides, we will see each other at many family functions. It would be nice if we could at least be friendly when we bump into each other.” Edward explained to her as he handed her a drink.

He had lived out of the radar of his father and the Council. He had avoided creating a scene or making any mistakes. The last thing he wished for his father, the King, was to disown him.

But was he done fighting for his right to the throne? Of course not. Only a fool would relinquish his birthright. And he was no fool. His father and the Council were wrong when they chose his cousins over him.

“Yeah, it would be nice to have someone familiar to talk to inside the palace.” Although her father was wealthy, they were not Royalty.

Yes, she had some association with the Princes and Princesses of the Royal family, but they were never her friends. So, it would probably be nice to have acquaintances besides her husband.

“Are you excited about your new role in the palace?” Edward asked as he took a sip of his drink while staring at her.

He could not help but wonder if he could explore the possibility of using this woman to regain his throne back. How? That was something he would reserve for later. At the moment, he just needed to gain her trust, hoping they could somehow become friends.

"I don't know if excitement is the word for it. Maybe a little of that and dread more like it." She admitted as she tasted the new drink that Edward offered her. It was different from what she usually drank, but it did taste good.

She looked at him, staring directly into his eyes. But all she saw was a genuine smile. Either this man had changed from what she had heard in the past. Or he was that good at fooling everyone.

Still, she was not letting her guard down around him. She did not want to become one of his victims in his schemes. Anyway, she just had to be careful around him.

"I think you will be perfect in our family," Edward assured her as he raised his glass to her. "To our future Queen." He toasted, clanking his glass with her. "Bottoms up."

"Thanks, I guess." She hesitantly agreed with him, finishing her glass.

Then, she took as her opportunity to leave. "But I really must go. It was nice seeing you, Edward."

She stood up again, slightly wobbly on her feet but quickly recovered before she slipped into the floor. She was not a lightweight, but her last drink was a bit stronger than her regular ones.

"Do you need help? I can offer you a ride." Edward kindly offered, seeing that she was in no condition to drive.

"No, I am ok. I am not yet drunk." She hastily declined, not wanting his help. "Besides, I have my driver with me, waiting outside." She recomposed herself and shook off the slight buzz in her head as she pulled away from his arms.

"Thanks, anyway." She added before she walked gracefully out of the classy bar toward the car already waiting for her.

Since her arrangement with the Prince, her father guaranteed that she always had an escort following her. A driver always drove her around, and two bodyguards were not far behind.

Soon, she was back home under her father's roof. She was staying with them until the wedding for her protection. Since the announcement of their engagement, she had to relinquish her apartment and move back to the house where she grew up.

It was like her past did not exist to make way for this new one. But what could she do? She had agreed to this arrangement. Now, she had to live it until the day she died.

She slowly made her way into the hallway, hoping not to make too much noise. She could see that only a few lights were on, meaning most had already retired to their rooms.

But.

"What happened with your meeting with your fiance?" She heard a calm voice echo around her as soon as she entered the living room.

It was already late, so she thought that her father might already be sleeping. She was not expecting to see him, still reading in his favorite chair as if he was waiting for her.

She hoped she would have to face her father by morning, but that was not the case. She tried her best to stay still as she stood before him, but that drink had seriously impacted her sobriety.

"It went well." She slightly giggled, remembering the irritated face of her future husband. At least she got what she wanted. "I am getting married soon." She announced happily.

"Are you drunk?" Her father asked, probably noticing her odd behavior. Her father finally stood up from his seat and watched her. "What are you thinking?" Confirming his suspicion.

"You are the future Queen. You should be acting responsibly." Her father shouted at her as if that would make her undrunk.

She was not completely drunk, maybe tipsy, but not enough to be accused of being irresponsible. She had been a good daughter all her life, and she took her responsibility to this family seriously.

She might be the future Queen, but she was still a human being.

Chapter 930: Cherish for eternity

Marcus stared at his wife, who was finally in deep slumber. Thankfully, he managed to calm her down after finding her crying earlier. Now, he wondered what else he could do to help her with her current condition.

It was still fresh in his mind how he walked into the living room to find his wife on the floor, balled up like a child, sobbing as if in pain. At first, he thought she might have slipped and had an accident, but when she saw her eyes, he recognized her dilemma immediately.

She was not in physical pain but trapped on an emotional roller coaster due to the psychological trauma of losing their child. The therapist reminded him that her depression could still come and go.

"Jacky, I hope you will let me help you." He whispered in her sleeping form, wishing she would listen to him through her subconsciousness.

He knew that she was trying her best, but there were times that she did not want to share the burden with him. It was like she did not want to bother him with her problems.

No matter how he tried to convince her, it was ok. He could take any punch thrown his way, but she still would not let him be a part of what she was going through. But he was not giving up. He would find a way to help her.

"I love you, Jacky." He said repeatedly. He would not get tired of telling her how much he loved her if that would prove to her that he was not going away. "I will always be here for you."

.....

He was not saying that losing a child was easy. On the contrary, he could not even imagine what Jacky might have gone through when it happened. He did not carry their child in his body, yet he felt the devastation of losing something he did not even know existed until it was gone.

Between the two of them, it was Jacky who wanted a child immediately. He did not mind waiting for a year or more, but he could feel her excitement to have someone to care for beside him.

So, he understood why she was more devastated by the loss of their child than he. Besides, they said the mother had a greater connection with the child than a father.

He moved out of bed, unable to sleep as his mind swirled around finding a solution to a problem. He was not an emotional person, usually dealing with a problem logically. He just had to look for the correct answer if there was a problem.

He grabbed his phone from the table and walked outside the balcony. Outside the glass partition, he could talk without waking up Jacky. At the same time, her wife would still be in his line of sight.

"Hey, man. I am sorry if I woke you up." He immediately said as soon as his call connected on the other line after several rings. He could hear somebody breathing on the line, but it appeared he was catching his breath.

He assumed his friend might be sleeping by then. But he badly needed help. So, he still tried to call him. Now, he wondered if he had interrupted him doing something else, judging from the unusual sound coming from the receiver.

"I..." He was about to make some excuse and hung up the line when someone finally said something.

"Hi, Marcus. I was in the bathroom and had to rush inside to answer the phone." Then, she breathed again before continuing. "Is there something wrong?" She asked immediately. "Is Jacky alright?" Adding the last part with a worried tone.

Now, he knew he had made the mistake of calling his friend Alex. He did not mean to disturb Dani, who was in the delicate stage of her pregnancy. He could not abruptly end the call without assuring Dani that her friend was ok. He could not let Dani worry about her too.

"Yes, of course. I was looking for Alex about a business matter." He quickly concocted an excuse, hoping Dani would not find him lying.

The last thing he wanted was to cause any harm to Dani's condition. He heard that she had to go on leave from work due to her health. The doctors did not want to stress her out. Therefore, he could not add to the burden she was already going through.

"At this hour, is there an emergency in the company?" Suddenly, her voice sounded alarmed, which would be no different if he had told her about Jacky.

Suddenly, he was also panicking as if he was doing more damage than containing the situation. "No," Marcus hurriedly said. "Nothing like that. I only want to get updated with what is currently happening in the company."

He felt like he was burying himself from one lie to another. But it was a necessary evil in this case.

"Oh! You got me slightly worried there. First, I thought it was about Jacky when I saw your name on the screen. Then, the company." She breathed a sigh of relief, hearing that it was nothing serious.

"Sorry about that. But I better call again tomorrow when Alex is awake." He hurriedly said, not wanting to keep Dani up so late.

“Actually...” Dani paused and took a deep breath. “Do you mind telling me the truth? How is Jacky?” She could tell that something was wrong with her friend. She had been aloof in most of their conversations.

She could tell that Marcus was not fine from his tone. Call it an instinct. But she was not fooled by his excuses. She knew he called to confide in Alex, but she also wanted to help. She was pregnant, not an invalid.

“She is good most of the time, but she is still trying to get better.” Marcus knew he could not lie anymore. He just hoped he was doing the right thing by telling Dani about her friend.

He told her what happened during their vacation and how he thought that Jacky had recovered from what happened. But then again, she had a breakdown again earlier that night.

It was a difficult situation. Something that Marcus wished he could manage with numbers and some arguments. But this was more complicated than any of the cases he had handled during his career.

“Tell me if there is something I can do to help.” Dani offered, wishing that there was something she could do more for her friends who were going through tremendous difficulty in their life.

“I will.” Marcus was about to say goodnight to his dear friend when an idea went through his head.

“Come to think of it. I might need your help on something.” He continued, explaining to Dani what she could do to aid his situation.

It was an idea that he thought might help them. But there was no reassurance until he had tried it. He just hoped that it would work. But as the saying goes, no pain, no gain. So, he had to try.

“Sure, I will work on it first thing in the morning. I will call you once I have some details.” Dani excitedly informed him, glad she had something to do even if it was not much.

“Thanks, Dani. I appreciate that. I will wait for your call in the morning. Kindly tell Alex that I might not come in yet to work.” He knew he could not leave Jacky in her current situation.

Although both of them agreed that they had to return to work, he doubted it was time. Maybe a day or two more to be sure that Jacky was fit to return to her stressful career.

“Now, go back to sleep,” Dani commanded on the line, telling him what he should do. He could only smile at his friend.

After hanging up, he felt more relaxed, knowing he had something planned to help them both. Suddenly, he could not wait for the morning to come, excited to tell his wife about his new surprise.

She might have sensed him when he returned to bed. She suddenly stirred in her position, stretching her arms upward before slowly opening her eyes. Then, when her eyes landed on him, she smiled, seemingly happy to see him.

“What time is it?” She sleepily asked as she wrapped her arms around his shoulder, pulling him closer to him. She believed it might still be midnight, catching the shadow of the moon’s ray by the window.

“It is time to go back to sleep,” Marcus mumbled as he kissed his wife gently on her soft lips before wrapping his arms around her body.

Then, he was spooning her under the sheet, feeling her warm back against his chest. Somehow, the steady rhythm of her breathing was enough to lull him to sleep.

Soon, he was in dreamland, thinking of the future he wanted to build with the love of his life. It might not be a Kingdom, but it was a home that they would cherish for eternity.