

Royal Contract 941

Chapter 941: Therapy or exorcism?

Evan mentioning his childhood friend's name, Amelia, reminded him of only one person, Eida. Amelia and Eida were best friends. If anyone could point out where Eida was, it was Amelia.

When Evan confessed that he was marrying Amelia, numerous questions crossed his mind. But did he want to ask them? Did he even need them answered? No.

Lance remembered asking about Amelia, "How is she?" but avoided mentioning anything about the woman who broke his heart. There was no point. At least, that was what he kept telling himself.

"She is fantastic. I don't know what she saw in me, but I am glad she accepted to marry me." Evan said, seemingly very happy about his situation.

If he was in his condition and marrying the woman he loved, he might feel the same way. He would be on cloud nine and shouting at the top of his lungs. He was happy for his friend, Evan, and his childhood friend, Amelia.

"I hope that you will never hurt her. She is like a sister to me." Lance reminded his friend. He might have married her if he did not feel that way about her long-time friend.

"I love her, man. I don't think I could ever hurt her." Not again after what he did before. "I swear." He added.

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"Then, if you are here to ask for my blessing, you have it. If you need help with Amelia's father. I am sure I can put on a good word for you." Lance knew that Amelia's father might not be as approachable to an outsider. But he believed that he would like Evan once he got to know him.

"Thanks. I will surely need all the help I can get. I want to make Amelia happy." Evan said as they toasted for his upcoming wedding as well.

"Tell Amelia, I am also happy for her," Lance said, missing his friend who he had not seen for a long time.

"She wanted to see you but was afraid you might still be furious at her," Evan told him, making him feel like an ass from how he had acted the last time he talked to her. "I think you were a little hard on her."

His friend was right. He had cast his childhood friend aside because he felt betrayed that she seemed to side with Eida. He had forgotten the years of friendship they shared and the things she did for him.

But he had the right to be mad back then. But he believed it was time to bury the hatchet and return their friendship to what it was before. He missed his friend and would like to see her.

"Are you dead set on getting married?" Evan had asked him as he looked around the place as if he did not want anybody eavesdropping on their conversation.

Everybody seemed to be minding themselves. A few were already drunk in the bar, while a few were still flirting on the side. The ladies who offered them drinks earlier seemed to have moved on to another pair.

David was still out of sight, probably still on his phone somewhere quiet. That one was devoted to his girlfriend. Then, Alex was still conversing at the other table, most likely discussing business ventures.

"It is my obligation. I have to if I will be King." Lance answered as if that was the only logical explanation for his decision.

He could not help but stare at his friend, wondering if he had something else to say, like talking about Eida, but was he willing to talk about her after what she had done?

"What if Eida..." But he did not let him finish. He knew the answer to that question.

"No. We will never talk about that woman again." He had already made his peace with his ancestors. He had vowed to do his best to serve their people. That included forgetting about her and marrying Camille.

"But, don't you want to..." Evan continued, still internally debating if he should divulge the secret about Eida and their child.

"Evan, I know you are just trying to be a good friend. But I only want to forget her. That part of my life is over. Now, I need to move on." Lance stopped his friend from saying more.

Then, any talk about her ceased to exist. Their other friends came back and continued to have a good time. He could tell that he was drunk, but he did not care.

He just found himself back in his room, lying on his bed. How he got home, he had no idea. But if he had to guess, it might be his bodyguards who were always around wherever he went.

"Hey, anybody there?" He asked, but there was only silence. His friends might have left and returned home to their lives. Now, what about him?

He closed his eyes, wishing the alcohol in his body would claim his consciousness, but he remained wide awake. His thoughts ran wild as his friend reminded him of the woman he had every desire to forget.

This night was about his marriage to someone else and his coronation. But instead, here he was reminiscing the past. He did not want to talk about her or think about her.

"Why now?" He placed a pillow over his face, shielding his eyes from seeing her face. But his eyes were not the problem. It was his memories as they flashed across his mind.

All his investigators led him nowhere when they searched for Eida and followed Amelia. When he questioned Amelia, she denied knowing where her friend was. Now, he wondered if Evan knew where Eida was.

But would that make a difference? Did he still want to see her?

"No. I don't." He angrily hissed as he threw the pillow on the other side of the wall. Then, he swiped the blanket away from his body and slid out of his bed.

He was surprised to realize that it was already morning. And yet he hardly slept a wink. What was wrong with him? He gazed at the bright light outside the clear glass window of his room.

He could not even recall the exact time he reached his place, but he could clearly remember her face. It was insane when all he wanted to do was forget everything about her.

"Sir, do you want your breakfast now?" His assistant was already waiting for him outside his room. He could tell it was time to return to work, observing the light coming outside.

But was he up to performing his task today? Or would he prefer to do something else that would expel himself of anything that would remind him of her?

"No. Cancel all my meetings today." Lance stopped on his track and closed his eyes for a few seconds before sighing. "I am taking the day off." He told his assistant as he returned to his room.

He noticed that his assistant was surprised by his announcement. He had never left a day off from work since he had recovered and returned to his obligation.

But he knew today would not matter. He was too distracted to concentrate on anything. He had to find a way to clear his mind of all thoughts of her, one way or another.

Quickly, he took a long hot shower, giving up on getting any sleep. He could still smell the liquor in his breath, but a few cups of coffee should cure him.

Then, he put on his casual clothes, not bothering with a coat and tie. He had no plans of going to the office. He had other matters he wanted to do today.

"Sir, I am sorry to disturb you, but your father was on the list of your appointments. Should I also reschedule him for tomorrow?" His assistant asked him when he exited his room and asked for his keys.

"Cancel all." He repeated, not particularly interested to see his father. He would deal with his wrath tomorrow at their meeting. Today, he wanted nothing to do with him and the crown.

He grabbed his keys and proceeded outside, where his car was already waiting for him, just like every morning. But unlike before, his bodyguards were ready to follow him around wherever he planned to go.

As the future King, his safety would always be an issue. So, he could not get rid of them even if he wished. Therefore, he just had to learn to live with them always in his tail.

"Don't call me unless it is an extreme emergency." He ordered his assistant, not wanting his father, forcing him to divulge his whereabouts.

"Yes, Sir." His assistant answered, knowing that he had to follow his future King. Besides, he had his bodyguards to keep him safe.

"Good." Then, he closed his door and revved up his engine. Then, he pressed a number on his phone before speeding away on the long driveway towards the massive gates.

"Where are you?" He asked on the speaker phone as soon as a woman answered his call.

"Home. Why?" She answered, her voice appearing surprised to hear his voice.

"I am coming over." He commanded on the line before cutting it short. He did not even wait for her to answer as he drove toward her house.

He could still feel the alcohol in his system, but he knew sleeping would not give him peace. Drinking would also be futile. So, what else could he do? He wondered if this woman could help him. He was running out of options.

He needed something that would stop the ghost of her from haunting him. Like what? Therapy or exorcism?

Chapter 942: Getting to know each other

He eyed the front of the windshield, focusing on the sharp turn he had to make. He could barely see the road ahead, but years of cruising this course allowed his muscle memory to drive for him.

His body shook from the tremendous force of the turn, making him lean more on the other side. But his training had taught him how to handle such pressure.

The speed was the only thing that made him feel free while the rest of the world had become his prison. But it was a sentence he had willingly taken in exchange for the chance to serve his Kingdom. He believed his duty was his only purpose for being alive.

"Come on, just one more lap." He muttered forcefully to himself, pushing his body and mind to his limit.

He knew under his condition, he should not be driving, but it was his only way of expelling his thoughts of her. It was the only way he could get rid of her from his mind.

"Aaaggghhh!" He furiously screamed as he pushed his feet harder on the pedal. It was the final leg. Then, it was over.

But frustratingly, even his only comfort could not help him as he let go of the fuel and slowly drifted the car to its pit stop. Then, gradually the vehicle slowed down until it made its full stop.

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"Are you crazy?" Rick shouted at him when the door opened. He could not believe how recklessly Lance had been behind the steering wheel. He drove like a madman on the race track.

"No. I am not." Lance answered, but he did not move from his seat. "Come on, Camille, I don't have all day." He shouted over the loud noise.

Then, the woman he was about to marry who stood beside Rick moved closer to the open passenger seat. She looked hesitant to enter the vehicle.

"Are you sure that it is safe?" She asked, still having doubts about what Lance wanted her to do.

"Are you mad?" Rick was now at his wit's end. He could not believe that Lance had every intention of putting the life of the future Queen of their land in jeopardy. "Please, Lance, stop this nonsense."

He would not have allowed the Prince to drive in his state if he had known that he was in the tracks. But his buddy did not inform him intentionally that he was taking the car for a spin. Because Lance knew he would have stopped him.

Now, this was purely irrational. Rick could not allow this to happen. It was already madness to put the future King in this life-threatening situation, but to endanger the Queen top. That was madness.

"If you want the wedding to happen, you will enter this vehicle at this very instant," Lance shouted louder, already in his last straw.

He knew he was acting irrational and insane, but this was his last act before he gave his life to the throne. He would like an assurance that he was doing it for the right reason.

He knew that he was a good driver despite his slight impairment. But he was not reckless. He would not put the Queen in danger but only wanted her to see his life before she decided to tie her fate with his.

Besides, if fate wanted him dead, he would have died in that car accident. "Last chance." He looked at the woman who seemed nervous and was about to faint.

His mind thought she was nothing like Eida. Then, he quickly chastised himself for going there. He should stop comparing everyone to her. She was nothing.

When he believed she would walk away, he was surprised that she suddenly climbed inside the car and leaned on the chair. "So, what now?" She asked as she held the buckles in her hand, not knowing what to do.

"Put them on," Lance answered without looking at her as his eyes focused on the road ahead.

"Both of you, get out of the car." Rick stood by the door with his disapproving look. He could not believe that the future of their land was behaving like they had lost their minds.

"Either you help me with my seatbelt or move away." Camille looked at his team captain, still shaken but seemingly determined.

"Trust me, Rick, I know what I am doing." Lance finally said to his friend. Then, he saw him shake his head in surrender as he leaned forward to help Camille in securing her body in the seat.

"Just don't do what you just did." Rick reminded him as he moved away, closing the doors again.

He would pray to all the Gods if that could help this young man from killing himself. He knew what his friend was going through, but there was no way he could help him but be there for him.

Then, the car sped away. Thankfully, it was moving slower than earlier. He knew that Lance was one of the best drivers in the circuit. But what he was going through might have impaired his rationality. However, he was not losing hope in his future King.

While inside the car, Camille held tightly to anything her hands could hold on to as the car started picking up speed. She knew how to drive but only at a specific speed limit. Putting her life into a dangerous stunt was never her style.

"Hold on tightly and keep taking deep breaths," Lance instructed as he steadily increased his speed.

He watched her closely, monitoring her movements. Of course, he was also concerned about her welfare. He did not want her to have a heart attack out of tremendous fright, although he knew she was as healthy as an ox.

"What is the purpose of this?" She asked as she held on to what remained of her bravery.

She knew she did not have to do this. But she also wanted to show Lance that he was not alone in this sacrifice. If he believed he was doing this for the Kingdom at the expense of his freedom.

Well, she was also doing the same thing.

On the other hand, if this was his ploy to make her back out of this marriage by threatening her life, he better think of something more creative than this. She did not easily break by frightening situations.

Lance finally answered her. "Getting to know each other."

Chapter 943: Sealing a negotiation

He believed he had been unfair to her. After today's event, he decided he would at least give them a chance to be friends. After all, they would be living under the same roof and sharing the same bed soon enough.

Besides, she gained his respect when she courageously overcame her fear, showing him that he could not push her around. Maybe she was not such a terrible choice to be his Queen.

If fate would bless them, they would probably have one or two children, hopefully, a son who would succeed him on the throne. Maybe it was something he could not continue to avoid.

"Would you like to order or prefer I do the honor?" He asked, scanning the menu for what he would like to eat. He was starving since he barely ate anything since he left the house and picked her up at her home.

He took her to one of his favorite restaurants, not far from the racetrack. The least he could do was to treat her to an early lunch after subjecting her to something she did not grow accustomed to doing.

But in his defense, he had been careful while maneuvering the tracks, knowing another life was in his hands. He would not be careless enough to put them both in danger.

"You seemed to be familiar with the place. Why don't you choose for me?" Camille suggested as she sat tightly on her seat, still feeling the buzz of being in that monstrous car.

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She had never been adventurous, not for lack of trying or by choice, but his father had always been overprotective of his assets. He did not want anything to happen to her.

Sadly, she believed his father raised her as a commodity he could trade off to the highest bidder. So, she needed to remain perfect in every aspect because his father demanded it.

Why is she doing this for her father? Why was she not rebelling against his wishes? That was another long story for another time. At that moment, this was her fate.

"Ok!" He called the attention of the man in his black vest, assigned to serve their table. After ordering the best dish according to his taste, he dismissed the man, leaving him alone with his date.

He had just realized that this might be their first date that the Palace did not coordinate for them. It might be impulsive, but he believed it was long overdue. It was time that he also played the role of her fiancé.

“What is the point of putting yourself in harm’s way?” She finally asked as they waited for their meal, filling the silence enveloping their table.

She still did not understand the weird fascination of men to go through the trouble of putting their lives in danger. She was not saying that it was stupid. She believed they had their reasons. Still, she could not grasp the necessity.

Although, if she was being honest, she felt a slight thrill when the car sped up, making her heart stop for a millisecond. Maybe it was for that precise reason.

“You mean, why do I race?” Lance finally looked up and confronted her. He had never stared at her face before. He knew what she looked like, but nothing in detail.

He only realized that she had expressive eyes and a matching dainty nose. Then, her lips were also small, just the right size, perfect for her small face.

She was indeed beautiful compared to the other ladies listed as his choice. But, at that time, he had let the Council decide for him, not particularly interested in picking his wife from a piece of paper.

“Yes.” Her lips barely moved as she said that single word. But he noticed the intensity of her stare as she waited for his answer. She seemed genuinely interested to hear what he had to say.

But they had to wait as the server brought their first course and refilled their glasses with the finest wine available in their cellar. Then, they had to wait until they were alone again.

“I like the feeling of my heart beating with the engine. It provides me clarity when my entire world is going chaotic.” He gazed at her eyes again, wondering if she understood the feeling.

He remembered Eida also felt the same way. It was something they had shared that made her special to him. They liked many things but were not afraid to contradict each other when they disagreed about something.

What about children? Did Eida want kids? It was something he believed did not come up in their conversation. But what used was it when he should forget about her, not comparing her to the woman he would be spending the rest of his eternity?

“I never thought of it in that way.” Camille was surprised by his answer. “I always it had something to do with acting cool.” She admitted how lowly she had thought of people who do this kind of stunt.

“I think everyone starts in that way. Until they discover their passion for the sport and its purpose in their lives.” Lance disclosed to her. He was not speaking for all his colleagues, but he knew most had valid reasons for doing this dangerous profession.

“I guess you are right. It is hard to judge people without knowing them on a deeper level.” Camille was happy that they were making progress. Compared to their other dates, it was the first time that the Prince had opened up to her about something personal to him.

“I hope we can get to know more about each other.” Lance was sincere about his intention. He was over fighting his fate, knowing that he would not win against it.

"Lance, if you want this relationship to work, at least give me a chance to prove that I can be a good wife and the Queen of this Kingdom." Camille stretched her hand to him, placing it on top of his on the table.

She was not naive or stupid enough not to understand what her situation was in this farce marriage. She had expected to be a pawn in her father's ambition for more power, nothing more.

"I am not asking you to love me, and don't expect that from me as well, but all I ask is mutual respect." Camille continued when Lance remained silent in his seat. "Maybe a friendship." She suggested, hoping he would agree.

She only wished for a peaceful marriage with him, if not a real one. If she would play the role of a wife and Queen with this man, she would at least need his cooperation and respect.

"I agree. I will be frank. Love will never be part of this marriage." He knew that such words were not something a couple about to get married was supposed to say.

But they were not an ordinary couple in love. They were two strangers placed in a situation where they had to fulfill their obligations to their families.

"But I will honor and respect you as my wife and Queen. That I can promise as much." Lance extended his hand to her as if he was sealing a negotiation.

Chapter 944: The top of the list

"Edison, you have to stop messing around." She quickly grabbed the papers in his hands before he tore them to pieces.

She accidentally placed the documents that she took home the other night on the living room table when she grabbed Edison from his room. She was in a hurry since she woke up late. It was hard to open her eyes when she still lacked a good rest.

As she prepared Edison's breakfast on the kitchen counter, she did not notice that he had slipped from her sight. He had managed to move to the next room and grabbed the papers she had worked on for several days to accomplish.

"You have to eat, baby. I have to be at work in an hour." Ria glanced at the clock, fearing that time was quickly ticking. She lifted her child from the floor where he sat, playing with anything he could get his hands on, thinking they were toys.

Then, she placed him in a high chair where his food was already waiting for him. Usually, it was easy to feed him, but since he had been sick, he did not feel like eating. He kept tossing his food around, having no appetite.

"Mama, eat me." Her son formed words according to his understanding. It was adorable. She almost forgot that she was in a hurry. Yet, staring at the papers on the table reminded her of her job.

But his son chose this morning not to cooperate with her. However, she could not force him since he was still recovering from illness. These past couple of days, she had to stay home to care for him.

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Honestly, she was anxious that her absence might affect her performance, causing her internship, although her boss said otherwise. Still, she could not help but worry that they would consider another intern better suited to their position. At least someone who did not have a responsibility like hers.

After a few minutes of struggling to feed her son, she finally grabbed their things and picked him up as she headed for the door. It was time for him to stay with his sitter while she went to work.

“Thank you, Sasha.” She patted her shoulder as the young teenage girl took her son, guiding him into her house. “Call me right away if he has any relapse.” Reminding her of her number in her mobile and her office.

Although the doctor assured her that it was nothing but the common flu going around, she could not help but feel scared. Edison was everything to her. She almost lost him once. She could not go through that again.

Then, she rushed toward her work, hoping she would make it in time. She still had a few minutes to spare when she arrived at the lobby of the building. If she did not have a kid, she would not be in this situation, but she would not trade her life for anything else.

She eventually concluded she could lose this job but not his son.

“Wait!” She shouted at the fast-closing doors, forcing herself to run faster as she inserted her body into the tiny slit before completely closing.

She pushed herself on the elevator, squeezing herself in the fully packed metallic box. She could not afford to wait for another one and risk being late. She believed she was already running out of luck.

Every floor was like waiting for the ticking bomb to explode. But that was the problem with being assigned to the top floor. The lift had to pass through almost every floor on the way.

Unlike the bosses, they had access to the express elevators, which went directly to the upper floors where the top management had their offices. But mere mortals were not allowed to use such a facility.

“Good morning, Brenda.” She hastily greeted her supervisor when she passed her in the corridor, walking toward her desk.

She looked like she was in a hurry, not noticing her until she had spoken to her. She could only imagine the chaos when she was not around. She was that important, but she was supposed to do most menial jobs, assisting the other employees with their responsibilities.

“It is great to see you back, Ria. Is your son finally well?” Her supervisor asked as she stopped to talk to her.

“Yeah, I think it is just the flu, but he seems fine now,” Ria responded, glad her boss seemed genuinely concerned.

She had imagined in one of her conjured scenarios that she would lash out at her. But that was only to prepare her for the worse. However, she doubted that Brenda was an unreasonable boss. Maybe strict, but not unfair.

She hoped it was a sign that she was not in trouble for not being able to return to work immediately. “I have the papers you asked me to review. I am sorry I was only able to finish it last night.” She handed the file to her boss, struggling to get it out of her bag.

Luckily, she was able to fix it, making it appear presentable. If she did not notice Edison holding it for a few more seconds, those files would have ended up in the garbage.

“That is ok. It is just in time. I will need this for tomorrow’s meeting.” Brenda assured her that it was not a problem. “I have to run because I also have another meeting.”

“Ok. I will be at my desk.” She mumbled as the older woman disappeared on the corner.

It would seem her luck had not run on her just yet. She thought as she happily walked toward her desk. As expected, she already had several papers piled up on her desk.

She quickly placed her bag in the lower drawer and opened her upper one to get a pen. Then, a white envelope caught her eyes. It was still there.

“Of course.” Silly her, face-palming her forehead. She remembered putting it there after receiving it without bothering to open it. But she forgot all about it because she had been busy. Then, the Edison incident happened.

Now, it was still there.

She wondered what had happened to the man who had given her the envelope. Did it come from him? She touched the smooth surface, debating whether she should open it.

She believed she was overreacting when that man gave it to her. Of course, it was nothing but a piece of paper, probably containing some silly note. She grabbed it with her fingers and ripped the lid off.

She peeked inside, finding something that looked like a bill. It must be her payment for the ruined shirt. Why did he return it to her? As she suspected, she could see a note inside.

Who was that man, remembering he knew her name, but she had no idea of his? But before she could look at the note, her boss entered her area, carrying several files.

“Sorry to dump this on you. But we were short of hand while you were not around.” Brenda dropped several folders on her desk, giving her instructions on what to do with them.

She hid the note on her desk, placing it as her last priority. For now, keeping her job was at the top of the list. At least next to her son.

Chapter 945: Her bark was worse than her bite

She had been cooped up in her room for days, unable to go outside. At least not without company. Her manager told her to use the time to think about her plans, but she felt like she was a prisoner of her situation.

She was bored out of her wits as she looked at the four corners of her hotel room. Her brother offered to take her to his apartment, but she refused. She was uncomfortable spending more than a few minutes with him or anyone from her family.

But if she planned to stay in this place longer, she had better arranged for better living conditions. She could not stay in a hotel room where she had limited movements.

"I need to get out of here." She felt like she needed a few hours of freedom before everything became a jungle of mess.

She had no current projects since she took a leave of absence from work. She felt she needed a few days out of the spotlight. Funnily, she wondered if she could ever get back to it once this was all over.

She knew once the news hit the fans, her life would never find silence again. The media would be all over her, and his ex-boyfriend's fans would have a field day, trying to destroy her.

"Then, what?" She looked outside the balcony of the high-rise building, wondering what she would do once she was outside.

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It was a vast city out there. Although she had lived in this place all her young life, many seemed to have changed since then. She also had no friends here. But did she have friends, to begin with, knowing most of them were only riding her success?

Truthfully, all the people surrounding her were friends of Elliot. So, she doubted that they would even look at her the same way again. More likely, they would condemn her, accusing her of defaming their friend and lying about it for her interest.

She knew the entertainment industry could be exciting and glamorous. On the other hand, it could also be cruel and vicious. Many had thrived in it, making a successful career in it until they had retired. Unfortunately for her, she might not see that in her future.

"Claire, is that you?" Suddenly, she heard someone open her door and enter.

Only two other people had a key to her room, her manager and assistant. It was most likely the latter. She was new. Someone her manager recently hired locally to assist her in her needs temporarily.

She stretched her neck on the balcony as she tried to see if she could spot her visitor. Once she had confirmed who it was by the door, she felt relieved.

Sometimes, she wondered when his ex-boyfriend would suddenly show up in her room just like the last time. Then, beat the hell out of her for disappointing him. Call it a traumatic experience.

"Yes, Ms. Serena." Her assistant hollered from the doorway, carrying several clothes and groceries in her arms. "I brought you what you have asked for." She continued in her very delightful accent.

Then, Claire walked her way to her bed to place her clothes. Then, her assistant moved to the mini kitchen to drop off her food supply. She could still feel her moving around her room, but she stayed out of her way.

She remained on the balcony, just watching the buzz of the other people who continued to survive in the harsh world they all lived in, but she knew that more than half of those people were barely making it in this modernized jungle.

“Would you trade off your clothes with mine?” A thought suddenly occurred in her head as wheels began turning. Her eyes studied her assistant’s body shape, finding it was close to hers. They might be the same size.

She moved closer to her assistant, who was putting away the dried goods in the cabinet. She stopped by the small kitchen counter and stared at her, waiting for an answer.

Claire immediately turned around, appearing surprised by her question, probably wondering if that was a trick question, as she remained silent. Of course, her assistant must think she was going crazy.

“Pardon, Ms. Serena.” She still looked dazed as she stopped what she was doing to turn to her. “Why would you want my clothes?” She clarified, still looking perplexed.

She could not blame Claire for looking shocked. Most of them thought that she had a perfect life. But they only saw the actress, the star that shone in front of the cameras.

But, nobody bothered to look deeper, to see the emptiness she always felt inside her. Since she was a child, she strived hard to please everyone, but to no avail.

Now, it seemed she was still a failure. She was lost. She had no idea how to find herself.

“I know this sound crazy, but I need your help.” Serena could hear the desperation in her voice, but she did not care.

She moved closer to her assistant and told her about her plan. If her assistant was shocked earlier, now, she was ready to faint. “Please, help me out.”

In truth, she did not want to be in Claire’s shoes. If her manager learned about her plans, her assistant would be taking all the blame. Her manager could frighten the devil himself when she was in her crappy mood.

But Claire had no chance against her when she used her full charm. She usually got what she wanted in the end. She just took a mental note to compensate for her sacrifice in another way because she seriously needed this.

“Thanks, Claire.” She tapped the other woman on the shoulder after swapping her clothes with hers. “If Nora looks for me, tell her you found the apartment empty when you arrived.”

It was not her first time doing this. She liked to pretend that she was just like everybody else. But today, she needed it more than ever to feel like she was still alive, that her life was still worth living.

She placed her trusted hat, pulling the brim a little lower on her face and eyeglasses to complete her disguise. Then, she was off, assuring her assistant that she knew what she was doing.

She just hoped her assistant was good at lying because her manager could sniff a lie a mile away. She did not doubt that Nora would explode, but she was not worried. Her bark was worse than her bite.

Chapter 946: A nice, innocent girl

He had been early these past two days, wondering when he would see her again. But she had been a no-show at work since he took the position as the CEO's new intern. They were supposed to be working on the same floor, just opposite offices, but her desk remained empty.

He just came from the office supply room and returned to his desk when a woman he knew was working on the other side of the floor passed him along the hallway.

"Ah! Did..." He stopped the secretary of the COO, thinking of asking her about their intern but thought better of it. "Never mind. Sorry!" He apologized and dismissed the idea. He suddenly felt like he was making a fool of himself.

Was he going out of his mind? Even he was puzzled by his unusual behavior. It was not like him to act this way.

He was about to return to his station when he heard the elevator ding, making him stop and turn around before disappearing from the other corner. Fortunately, the wall hid him from plain view as he saw the woman he had been waiting for exit the lift.

Should he say hi? But what else would he say to her? "No, that is a bad idea." He mumbled silently to himself as she watched her stop in the corridor, having a conversation with one of the top executives on the floor.

He finally thought better of it as he continued to conceal his presence from her sight. He still felt guilty about how he acted the first time he met her. Or even in their last encounter.

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He finally saw her walking towards her table. He had been wondering why she had not been to work for days. He, somehow, felt remorseful that his letter might have something to do with her absence. He even thought she might have quit because of him.

He wanted to ask her boss or co-workers, but he did not want them to be suspicious of his interest in her. So, he just kept his silence, waiting for any news. But he was glad she was now back at her desk, looking a little haggard.

"Is she sick?" He could not help but wonder, staring at her tired appearance. As if she had not been sleeping well. Or did she have a problem?

It was not like him to be nosy about someone else's life. Truthfully, he could not care about other people. He admitted that growing up in a political family taught him to exploit others as they used them.

But for some reason, he could not stop worrying about her. It did not make any sense since he did not even know her. But he wanted to find out why he seemed to remember her from somewhere.

"Zach!" He heard someone suddenly call his name behind him. He finally turned around to see who it was.

"Zach, Alex wanted you to finish all of this." Alona walked towards him, handing him the papers in her hands. "By the way, what are you doing here? Is there a problem?"

He did not realize that he was still standing by the corridor, watching the empty hallway. "Nothing. I just remembered something and was momentarily distracted." He must have appeared strange, lost in his thoughts, staring at space.

She was long gone in her little hideaway, and yet he was still left staring at the path she walked on. He had no idea why he was suddenly obsessed with her. Something about her seemed to keep his curiosity since she bumped into him.

In truth, she was not his usual type. But what kind of woman interested him? He was not particularly picky, but she was different. He seemed unable to take her off his mind, and seeing her at that bar, confirmed it.

"I will get it done right away." He continued, not wanting his boss's secretary snooping around in his affairs. At the same time, he wished to impress his boss, wanting to fulfill his promise to do his best.

As far as most were concerned, he was just an ordinary intern trying to work his way into this job. Only a few truly knew his true identity. Alona was one of them, so he better be careful around her.

He intended to keep his anonymity as long as possible, enjoying this new challenge. He would admit that everything in his life came easy. But now, he wanted to prove something, not only to his father but also to himself, that he could also do better, be a better man.

He was inspired to hear his other co-workers praise Alex for achieving something without the help of his family's wealth and influence. The Prince had started a new life in a strange country with nothing much but hard work and perseverance.

Alex turned down a crown, working his way to the top of the business ladder with sweat and determination. Zach also wanted that kind of admiration, not the respect he usually got for being the son of a politician.

"You better. I need it before the end of the day." She said, staring at him one last time. "Those papers are urgent." She reiterated its importance.

He could swear Alona gazed at him funnily as if she knew something that he did not. "I promise." He held the papers in his hands up in the air, thinking it was about his task. "It would be at your desk before the day is over." Smiling at the woman to dispel her doubts.

Alona suddenly stopped walking away and looked back at him as if she still had something to say but was slightly hesitant. Then, she turned, facing him again.

"What?" Zach questioned her, wondering if she had forgotten to say something, additional instructions perhaps.

He had learned in the short time he had been with this company that Alona worked hard to be where she was, fiercely loyal to her boss, and did not take crap from anyone.

It meant everyone, not even her boss, Alex, if she believed he was in the wrong. Therefore, the last thing he would wish was to be on the wrong side of her good graces. He had to impress her first before his boss.

"You can stop ogling her now." She uttered with a warning in her tone. "Besides, you are just wasting your time on her." Pointing in the direction of his sight.

"I don't know what you are talking about." He pretended not to understand what she was saying. But, of course, he realized what she implied with her words. Was she onto him?

He turned away, walking toward his station with her following. His desk was not far from hers since he received most of his instructions from her when his boss wanted him to do something.

He thought she would move back to her desk, but surprisingly, she was not yet through with him. "Stop feigning ignorance." Alona stood in front of his desk as he sat down to scan the documents she gave him.

"What did I do?" Zach asked, playing clueless, confused about what she seemed to be accusing him of doing.

"I saw you staring at her when she arrived. Besides, I have a good instinct about these things." She explained as she stepped back, feeling proud of herself.

"Ok. I was looking, but that was it." He finally admitted, knowing there was no point in lying to her. "I am just curious about her." That was the truth as far as he was concerned.

It was not like he was going to court her. At that moment, he had no idea what he planned to do with her. All he knew was that he was fascinated by her.

"Then, stop," Alona said with finality, her face appearing very serious.

"Why?" He did not understand why she was so concerned about him. Was office romance forbidden in this company? Not that he had that in mind.

"You don't have to worry about me. I am a grown-up man." He emphasized this by sitting straight, showing off his masculine build.

It might have been too much, but he did not like how she was meddling with his affair. Perhaps he was not used to someone telling him what he could and should do.

Then, she started laughing as if he had said something hilarious. One of her hands automatically went to her lips while the other went to her midriff as she tried to control her laughter.

"What is so funny?" Zach finally asked, seeing that she was calming down. He was more perplexed about her reaction than before. What was so funny about what he said?

"You!" She blurted out with a few more chuckles escaping her lips. When he raised her brows at her in question, she continued. "You think I was thinking about you."

But when he appeared clueless, she added, back to her serious face. "Look!" She seemed to want his full attention. "She is a nice, innocent girl. I don't want to see her get hurt by you."

Chapter 947: One hell of a balancing act

She woke up with a big smile on her sleepy face when she checked her phone for an early text message.

YOU GOT THE PROMOTION.

Her boss sent her a very early present, informing her that she got the promotion she had been aiming for, Senior Investigative Reporter. In truth, her boss offered something better before, News Anchor. But she declined that job, settling for a position behind the scene.

Eida rushed to the other room with her phone held in her hand and dropped it near Luisa, grabbing the sleeping child instead to tell her the good news. "Mommy got the promotion." She cheerfully kissed her baby, sharing her happiness with her.

But, of course, Luisa was not pleased about the commotion as she began to cry after she had disturbed her peaceful sleep. But Eida could not be bothered by her wailing as she danced with her little angel in her arms, knowing she was her lucky charm.

"I am sorry, baby. Mommy is just so happy." She could not contain her delight, needing to share it with the most important person in her life.

"What is all this raucous?" Amelia rushed to Luisa's room, worrying that the baby was not ok. However, she was surprised to see Luisa making all those noises because of what Eida was doing.

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"I got the promotion." She ecstatically repeated as she continued to kiss, hug and dance her child merrily. It was usually rare she got some personal good news, so she was savoring it because it might take time for the next one.

"Congratulations!" Amelia quickly hugged her behind, expressing her happiness for her.

She knew that after she told her about her engagement with Evan, her friend had been slightly affected by it. She kept denying it, showing her a brave front, but she could tell she was depressed by it.

Of course, her friend also wanted a happy ending to her love affair, but it did not happen. On the contrary, she had to leave the man she loved to start over with their child on her own.

So, Amelia would celebrate this little milestone with her friend, hoping that it would at least ease her sadness. "Let me cook something nice for dinner so we can celebrate." She offered.

"No." Eida quickly vetoed her suggestion. "We will get dressed and go out tonight. Dinner is on me." She decided that she would book them in a nice restaurant. She believed they all deserved an extravagant celebration.

"I like that. I will notify Angela not to make plans for tonight." Amelia told her. "But first, give me Luisa. Go and take a bath and enjoy this day." She believed her friend deserved a few moments for herself to relish this moment.

"Thanks, Amelia. What would I do without you?" Well, she had thought about it. She would need a regular sitter to stay with Luisa while she worked at the office.

Soon, she knew Amelia would leave them and move in with Evan. Although it was just a short flight or a slightly longer drive to see her, it was still a considerable distance that would separate them.

She would miss her friend dearly, but she had to accept that was how life worked. At least she had enjoyed her company before their lives had to part. She still had Angela, Bea, and Goliath as a company. She would not be alone with Luisa. At least not for the near future.

“Go, live with Evan and me.” It was a joke, but they knew that was not likely to happen. They would have to go on their separate ways eventually.

She even believed that Angelo would soon move on with her life. Angela might live with her grandson, especially if her first real grandchild was born.

Then, her phone suddenly rang again. When she looked at the screen, her boss’s name appeared in bold letters. “It is my boss.” She mouthed silently at Amelia, who attempted to lull Luisa back to sleep.

She immediately moved out of the nursery room, going straight to her room as she answered the call. She wondered if her boss had called to say she had sent her the wrong message.

She remembered some argued that she did not deserve the promotion since she was just new to the job and had no experience. Of course, she could not use her previous employment record since her name was different. At the same time, she could not expose the past that she had left behind.

But, “I deserved it.” She told herself, knowing her performance was more than enough to prove to her boss that she could do the job.

Then, some also said she had a child, so she might not be up for the challenge. That was what she heard behind her back, but she had proven that despite that, she had done well.

Being a single mother should not stop anyone from doing well in their job. On the other hand, she saluted women in a similar situation just like her for trying their best to be good mothers and providers.

“Yes, Ms. Athens.” She greeted the woman on the other line, both excited and anxious to hear what she had to say.

“First, let me congratulate you on getting the job.” Her boss said, bringing relief to her rattled nerves. “I would like you to take the rest of the day off and enjoy it with your family.”

She was not expecting that, but it was a much-deserved break from working very hard. “Thank you, Ms. Athens. I assure you that you will not regret giving me that position.”

She knew a higher position would demand more from her, meaning more work and time. But she was doing that before. The only difference now would be adding Luisa to the equation.

She needed to equally balance her time between her obligation at her new position and being a responsible mother to her only daughter. It would be one hell of a balancing act, but something that she would do her best to do well.

Chapter 948: Lazy pig

Since returning to work after having Luisa, she rarely had time to hang around the house and do nothing. She was either fixing things, learning how to cook, or taking care of Luisa. But nothing to do with relaxing except to catch up with her needed rest.

After receiving word from her boss, giving her the day off, she quickly returned to Luisa to care for her. But Amelia shooed her away, telling her to take the advice of her boss and relax. She even suggested that she should go to the spa.

"I don't need to go to a spa." She countered as Amelia banned her from touching her daughter. "I will just have a long relaxing warm bath." She told her friend before leaving them to go back to her room.

Amelia would not even give her phone back, saying she would not need it. Her friend would pass on the message if she had an urgent call. "Relax. I got this."

How could she say no to a stress-free, relaxing day? She could not even remember the last time she did not rush out of the bathroom. Her life was one juggle to another.

She walked to her bathroom, not to clean it but to enjoy her time under the water with bubbles covering her naked body. She soaked every inch of her skin, basking in the warmth seeping through her muscles and bones.

"Oh! It is perfect." It would have been better if she had a glass of wine in her hand. But that was not yet advisable since she was breastfeeding her baby. So, she had no choice but to imagine holding one as she lay on the tub.

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She gradually closed her eyes as slow music played on her phone and a lavender scent filled the air. It almost lulled her into sleep. But, of course, she could not truly relax, thinking about her daughter in the next room.

Was this motherhood?

She was always worrying and constantly thinking of the worst thing that could happen to her child when she was not around, even if she knew she was in safe hands. She hoped that was normal and she was not just paranoid.

"Stop it." She chastised herself mentally. She believed that Amelia and Angela would not let any harm come to her daughter.

She had to learn to trust people because soon, her work would take more of her time away from her daughter. Someday, she had to learn to have faith in other people, something she had abandoned a long time ago.

The water was almost cold anyway, so she pulled herself out of the tub and grabbed her robe, wrapping it around her body. Then, she looked at her mirror but could barely see her face.

With the side of her palm, she polished the glass to remove the moisture that covered the surface, allowing her to see her reflection. When was the last time she had closely stared at her face? This morning, but not like this.

She appeared like a typical mother. Yes, she still put on makeup when she went to work, but not in the same way as before. She also wore presentable clothes, but not something that would make people give her a second look.

“Is this the price of becoming a mother?” No wonder Amelia looked at her like she had lost it. If she was the image of sophistication before, now, she presented the model of postpartum depression of motherhood.

She tapped her face with the palm of her hands to bring color back to her cheeks. Then, she turned her sight down to her belly, still sagging from her pregnancy.

Her fingers held the fats converging on her waist, wondering why she had never noticed it before. Well, she had to get back to exercising, just like before, if she would gain her figure back.

Finally, she had enough of finding faults with her current situation, knowing the only way to fix it was to work harder. She had to stop neglecting herself and feeling guilty about not doing enough for Luisa.

Angela was right when her wise friend said she could only do so much for her child. She still had to think of herself half the time. Because if she could not love and care for herself, she was doomed to fail to love and care for her child.

“Amelia?” She looked for her in the living room after getting dressed. She was starving and planning to fix something to eat. “Luisa?” But she had not seen them. Even Angela seemed to be out, as the apartment appeared empty.

She went to the kitchen in the hope that they were there. But she doubted since it was too quiet. As she had expected, no one was there to greet her. But two notes hung by the refrigerator.

GONE TO THE MALL WITH LUISA, BE BACK MUCH LATER – AMELIA

OUT WITH BEA AND GOING HOME LATE – ANGELA

She guessed they were serious about giving her some space. But she was surprised to see Goliath lying on the floor by the kitchen counter. She suspected that wherever Angela had gone, dogs were not allowed. She usually took him wherever she went.

“I guess it is just the two of us for a few hours.” She uttered to the dog, kneeling on the floor to pat him on the head. However, as usual, the dog could not be bothered as if it was his day off too.

“What about a doggie treat?” She tempted the dog as she pulled a few dog biscuits out of the pack. But the dog only barked a few times, grabbed the snack, and returned to his position.

She guessed even the dog did not want to bother her as she proceeded to the living room to find something else to do. Eventually, she decided to order a pizza instead of cooking.

She meant to watch several movies before but never had the chance. Maybe it was time to catch up and bum around. When was the last time that she acted like a lazy pig?

Chapter 949: Carrying a secret

So far, so good.

Nobody yet had recognized her. Who would think she was a famous star in this plain clothing with no make-up and messy hair? Definitely, not her fans.

And hopefully, not the paparazzi. The last thing she needed was them following her around with their nosy cameras.

Serena walked on the pavement of the busy downtown among the buzzing crowd. She wondered if this city ever became dull as she looked from left and right where people came and gone.

Luckily, she remembered to bring in some cash as she felt her stomach grumble, demanding replenishment. From the corner of her eye, she saw a line in a hotdog stand.

They said one had not lived in this town unless one had tried their famous street food stands.

"One, please." She ordered, remembering loving them when she was young. "Put everything on." She added, handing her payment to the vendor.

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Then, she took a big bite of the delicious, juicy hotdog on the planet, letting it fill her mouth with its savory taste. Truthfully, no one could claim

to have lived in this city without eating a handful of this sumptuous treat.

She munched every bite with gusto, even brushed her lips and fingers with her tongue to scrape the greasy juice off her skin when done. As they said, it was finger-licking good.

It was great to feel a bit of freedom.

She decided to explore some more, wondering what else had changed in this place since she had been gone. Then, she turned to a familiar diner she remembered visiting a few times when she was young.

Then, something hit her hard, bumping into her arm and shoulder. "Watch it!" She yelled at the man, but he did not even turn around to apologize as he went on his way, walking even faster.

Suddenly, she remembered why she hated walking on this street. It was because of people like him. Nonetheless, she believed it would be useless to waste her time on assholes like him. It was better to continue on her trip to memory lane.

"Stop!" She heard someone shout behind her, making her turn around. She observed a commotion behind her. Of course, she had no plan to stick around and joined the chaos as she sauntered faster out of there.

"Miss." She was already walking away when someone approached her from behind and called her attention. She found a boy trying to catch up with her. At least, she believed he was referring to her.

She wondered if she should stop, thinking he might have recognized her and wanted an autograph or something. Of course, it would not be wise for her identity, revealed in the middle of this bustling crowd.

"I think this is yours." The boy tugged her back when she did not stop.

When she turned around, having no choice, she found a young boy, probably thirteen, showing her a small pouch. Of course, she recognized it. "Yeah, that is mine." She was surprised that he had it.

"Here." The boy offered it to her, shoving the object into her hands.

"Thanks!" It was her initial response. "Where did you get it?" She asked, wondering how the boy took possession of her thing. She looked around them, slightly paranoid that other people might be watching them.

Thankfully, everyone seemed to mind their business, not bothering to look in her direction. As much as possible, she did not want any attention, especially the one this boy was making.

"You're welcome." The boy continued as they both stood at the center of the pavement. "I saw the man pick it out from your pocket." The young man informed her, making her realize it was the man who bumped into her.

"Oh!" Truthfully, she was more surprised that this young boy decided to return it. Someone else might have kept it for themselves.

She was not pessimistic but lately, finding good people was getting more difficult each day. But she was hopeful that a few good men still existed in this world and this boy would not turn out like the monsters she had the unfortunate stroke of luck to meet in her lifetime.

"How did you get it?" Serena was more curious, more than anything else. If the man took it, how did it end up in this boy's hand?

"I did not steal it if that is what you are implying." The boy quickly defended himself.

Serena stared at the boy, debating whether to believe him. "Did you take it from him?" She rephrased the word, avoiding accusing the boy of stealing it.

But she remembered that the man who bumped into her was bulky. So, she doubted that the boy struggled to get it from him unless they were accomplices working together to scam her for more.

"Sort of." The boy finally confided, shrugging his shoulder like it was not a big deal. "You should be careful when walking along this street." The boy warned her before turning away in the opposite direction.

Did this boy steal for a living? Did he grab her purse from that man? That was the only logical explanation as she stared at the young boy before her. "Hey!" She shouted. "Are you here alone or with your parents?" She asked, stopping the boy from getting far.

Judging from his appearance, she would guess that this boy had been fending for himself. He seemed to be intelligent. Street-smart might be a better word to describe him. But she doubted he was a tourist roaming this street with adult supervision.

"Definitely with my parents." The boy was lying, she could tell. "They just went to buy something. They would be back soon." His face was quite convincing.

She knew when someone was acting, recognizing talent when she saw one. And this boy could probably fool many folks, but not her. The boy seemed to be used to scamming people. But was he helping her or scamming her? That was the question.

"Ok. Thanks again for returning my money." Anyway, she better leave before anyone started to recognize her. She peeked inside her purse, seeing that her money was still inside.

She was about to walk away when she felt guilty. The boy deserved a reward for his good deed, even if he was a pocket picker. He did not need to return her wallet, but he still chose to do the right thing.

"Hey, wait," Serena called again, stopping the boy from leaving. "Would you like to eat lunch with me? My treat." She could see that the boy was thinking, slightly seeming reluctant to join her.

Maybe just like her, he did not easily trust anyone. She could not blame him since the world was full of bad people. She was glad that the boy was a cynic. It meant he would not be easily duped and abused by the people around him, unlike her.

"Maybe some other time." The boy said, deciding that it was not a good idea.

"But there might not be another time. We might not see each other again." She insisted as she tried to convince him. "Come on, just a snack. And besides, you seem to know your way around here. Maybe you can show me around while your parents are not back yet."

She figured it might be nice to have someone to talk to while exploring the city. It would be so much better than walking alone. "Besides, I need someone who can protect me."

"I think something is wrong with you." The boy shook his head. "You easily trust people. But fine, I will show you around while my folks are not here." The boy seemed to continue with his charade, so she just accepted it as it was.

"What food do you like? Ahhmmm..." Serena asked the boy, but she had no idea who he was.

"Neil." The boy introduced himself. "I know a place that serves nice Chinese food if you like those stuff." He inquired as he led the way while she followed.

"I am..." She paused when she almost said her name. "Claire." Deciding to use her assistant's name instead. "Chinese is fine with me."

Soon, they were walking on the busy street of the lower east side, where most middle-class people liked to hang out. She had never been to this part of the city before, but she did not mind.

She just had to keep up with her pretenses. Then, she would be ok. Besides, she had Neil to protect her. Of course, that was just her bravado reassuring her. But what could a skinny boy like him do when a mob of people started attacking her?

Soon, they were both sitting in the busy Chinese restaurant, which she believed was in the middle of Chinatown. The restaurant looked fine. Not the usual food place she went to, but it looked interesting enough as she watched the cooks display their mastery in making their noodles.

"You don't look like a Claire." The boy said as they waited for their food. He sat opposite her with his eyes closely studying her face.

She could only wonder if he had any idea who she was. But he was young. He might not be aware of her as an artist. Besides, most of her fans were in the young female demographics. So, it was not likely he would know her.

"Well, you don't look like a Neil either." She finally confronted him with her suspicion. "But we can still be friends, right?" She added, knowing they were both carrying a secret that neither wanted to share.

Chapter 950: Shared the same views

He had been working hard all day, something he had not done in his entire life. He felt like they were intentionally piling up the workload on his desk as if they were testing his limits.

If he was being truthful, there were some points in his day when he wished to quit. But then again, he changed his mind, finding the challenge refreshing. Nobody had dared him to work this hard before. Now, he felt some form of pride for his mini accomplishments.

He was the son of a high-ranking official. Therefore, people tended to give him special treatment, thinking he would follow in his father's footsteps. In truth, he never liked politics, but unfortunately, it was what everybody expected he would do in the future.

"Are you done?" Alona walked to his desk, carrying another set of assignments he had to work on after he finished his present tasks.

Her eyes darted at his desk, focusing on his outgoing tray. Instead of smiling, she shook her head disapprovingly, looking unsatisfied with his current pace.

"I will be if you stop putting things on my desk and barking orders." Zach reasoned against his boss's assistant, smiling and shaking his head since he knew it would not work on her.

She was like a force inside the office. Nobody would challenge her since everybody knew she was almost always right. He was working at full speed, but he could still do better.

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He learned that Alex had placed his training program under her hands for the rest of this week. So, if he had to impress someone, it would be her. He had to prove to her that he could do whatever she placed on his desk.

"You need to work harder and faster if you don't want this piling up on your desk." Alona patted the new folders on his desk to prove her point.

She recognized the effort the new intern exerted to impress their big boss. But she also realized that just like most rich brats she knew, he was a man who did not follow orders easily. They gave the commands, not the other way around.

Therefore, it must be a new experience for Zach to do menial jobs like encoding a file on the computer, photocopying documents, and proofreading them, among other things.

It might not be much work, but she believed it would give Zach an idea of how to appreciate all the employees working under him if he knew how they had worked hard to serve the people on the top.

"I am trying." He admitted. It was not like he had operated a xerox copy machine before or grabbed coffee for someone else while rushing to finish a deadline. "But it is not easy." He ran his fingers through his hair, slightly feeling frustrated. But he was not giving up just yet.

He liked that Alona challenged him to do better, pushing him to do things he never thought he would do. Maybe if he kept up with this routine, he would catch up and succeed eventually with the other tasks given to him.

Besides, he believed this was what he needed. A wake-up call that made him realize how he was wasting his life. Maybe someday venture on his own and not just follow his father's footsteps.

Yes, he grew up believing he would become a politician too. But what if it was not what he wanted? What if he could be something else? More?

"Don't worry. I can see that." Alona smiled at him approvingly. "And he is also taking note of that." Referring to their big boss. It was like Alona could read his thoughts. "I guess you are not that bad."

She honestly thought it would be hard to deal with this young lad. The first time he reported to this office, she believed he would not fit in with them with his attitude.

She waited for him to quit right then when Alex assigned him to the mail room. She was glad he did not because somehow she could see her boss in this young kid. Maybe he just needed direction, someone to guide him.

"Are you psychic or something?" Zach could not help but kid around, wanting the tension in his body to ease up. He was starting to feel the fatigue on his back from sitting too long at his desk.

"You and your jokes." Alona threw the stress ball on his desk at him, but he effortlessly caught it in his hands. "Now go back to work." She commanded as she walked away.

But he knew she was only teasing him as well. Somehow, he was beginning to like her as his supervisor. He was learning much from her, especially about working hard and simple life lessons.

Nevertheless, he wondered when he would have the chance to work closely with his real boss. He wanted to learn from the man everybody was singing praises of because of his accomplishments.

"Yes, Mam." He even saluted to indicate that he was under her command.

Then, he planned to work his butt off throughout the day, hoping to make a dent in the stack of papers on his desk before he left for the day.

"You better stop calling me Mam because I am not yet that old," Alona warned him before she disappeared behind the CEO's office.

The day continued with him, slaving the rest of his day until Alona told him it was time to go home. He wished to work a few more hours, but Alona insisted it was late. Even the big boss had gone home early.

"You can always finish that tomorrow. Anyway, you are already slightly impressing me." Alona kindly told him as she walked away, carrying her bag and leaving him to clean up his desk.

He looked at the empty office with most of the lights already turned off. He grabbed his things and walked away from his desk. But he wondered how the other intern who worked on the other side of this floor was doing.

Was she still working, or had she gone home?

He wished to see her earlier, but what Alona said stopped him. She might be right. He had no business messing with her. First of all, what did he want from her?

Yes, he was so pissed with her the other day that he intended to get even with her. But recently, he realized his faults and somehow understood he could not blame it all on her.

He had acted impulsively, making a big deal of something so small.

Still, what was his intention? Why was he still seeking her out? Did he wish to apologize to her?

"Excuse me!" Zach found a janitor cleaning the floor on his way to the elevator. "Who else is working in there?" He asked, noticing that the lights were still on in some offices.

Suddenly, his mind went back to her. Maybe it was time to clear the air between them. After all, soon enough, they would be working together. It was possible.

"That would be Ms. Josey, the COO, Sir." The middle-aged man in uniform informed him as he stopped wiping the floor to look at him.

"What about the new intern? Did you notice her?" He could not help but ask, wondering if she was still working overtime.

"Oh! Did you mean Ms. Ria?" The man asked him as if he knew her very well. When he nodded his head, the man resumed. "She just left. Maybe a few minutes ago."

"But Ms. Brenda is also still there, working overtime." The man informed him.

"Thanks." He told the man as he ran toward the elevator, pushing the button, willing it to open up. He thought he might still catch up with her in the lobby before she left.

When the door opened, he quickly stepped inside, pushing it to the ground floor. Then, he found himself tapping his foot on the floor, willing the elevator to speed up.

Fortunately, the lift did not have many stopovers since the building was almost empty. Zach quickly ran to the lobby, hoping to catch a glimpse of her. But so far, there were no signs of her. He must have missed her.

He was about to turn around to walk toward the parking lot when he heard his cell phone ring. He eventually answered it, but his eyes were still searching the premises. "Yes!" He said to the receiver, not bothering to look at the caller.

"Zach, where are you, man?" A familiar voice of his friend buzzed in his ears. "You are supposed to join us tonight. Have you forgotten it is my birthday?" The man said in an accusatory tone.

"I am sorry, I am just running late. But, of course, I have not forgotten." But he had because he was busy. But he did not have to say that to his friend. "I will be there in a few minutes, Ryan." He informed him, looking at his watch. It was not that late.

His friend was being overly dramatic. Ryan believed that the world should revolve around him. But he was his friend, so he tolerated him. But lately, he wondered if they still shared the same views.