

## Royal Contract 961

### Chapter 961: A new home, a new start

Jacky would be a hypocrite if she said she was entirely ecstatic to be back at work. But at least it would occupy her mind with something else. Besides, she needed to see other people besides her husband and therapist.

Yes! She missed her boss, but her friend was still away from her office. Dani was confined at her home to rest for the duration of her pregnancy. Honestly, she still felt pain and a pang of jealousy when she thought of her friend.

She could not help but want what she had. She also wished to achieve the epitome of a woman's desire, to have a child to call her own. But, of course, that is not that simple anymore, at least not in her case.

"Ms. Jacky, your next appointment is here." Her secretary showed her face at her door with a friendly smile.

She could feel that most of her co-workers were handling her with kid gloves as if she would easily break. She was not saying that it was not a possibility, but she wanted to feel a bit of normalcy in her life.

She hoped that someday soon, she would be her old self again. She missed her, the one that never stopped fighting and believing that good things could happen to someone like her.

"Send her in." She already had an idea of who was her next visitor. She also suspected that her husband had something to do with this.

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Anyway, she did not mind since she also missed her company. It would be nice to spend a few hours with her to catch up. It had been a while since they had a long talk.

"Jacky, I am sorry to barge in like this. I know you are quite busy, but I need your help." Her sister-in-law walked into her room with a radiant smile on her lips.

She looked like she had swallowed a lamp as she brightened up her room. Or she was just too gloomy that anything else seemed magnified a thousandfold.

"You are too chirpy for someone who has a problem," Jacky expressed skeptically to her sister-in-law, who did not seem to carry any burden on her shoulders.

"I do, but it is not as bad as you were probably thinking." Her visitor continued as she leaned over to hug her and give her a peck on the cheeks.

Then, she was striding to the next available seat and facing her with a pout on her lips. She studied her, wondering whether she should take her seriously, but then again, went against it.

"Drop the act, Haley." She could tell from how she was acting that it was all scripted. "I know your brother sent you here to check on me."

She had an eye for these things. But she still appreciated what she was doing for her brother and her. She was happy that Marcus was finally building a relationship with her sister. Although it still bumped into some rough roads.

"What are you saying? Of course not." Haley completely denied her accusation. "Can't I visit my sister?" She insisted, portraying herself as the aggrieved party. "I am hurt." She held on to her chest to make her point. "I just miss you so much."

"I do miss you, but you can report to my husband that I am fine, but I am happy that you are working together even at my expense." Jacky still pressed on her assumption.

She was rarely wrong when her instincts kicked in, but it worked today like a charm. Suddenly, she realized she had missed this. She could not help but smile at the thought.

"Fine." Haley finally surrendered, throwing her hands in the air. "I don't know how you do that. I know I did great with my performance." She looked perplexed

"Well, I am just a natural." She teased her friend, but honestly, she just knew her husband too well. "Anyway, I am great, but if you are not too busy, maybe we can grab an early lunch together."

She had already cleared her schedule, anticipating her visit. She would still like to chat with her even if this entire charade was just a setup made by her husband. "I already book as a restaurant if you are up to it."

"I will love that," Haley said, smiling genuinely at her. "But first, I have something else to show you before we head out."

Then, she pointed at the large bag she had noticed earlier when she entered her room. Well, she knew that was her work, but what did it have to do with her? She had no eye for home designs or buildings.

"What is it?" Jacky could not help but get curious as she watched her sister-in-law open her architect bag, pulling out a set of blueprints from the inside.

She could only stare at the lines, numbers, and letters on it as Haley spread it on her table, but she would not understand those measurements or the figures around it.

"I just need you to give me some new perspectives." She continued as she flattened the blue paper on her table. "I have worked on these for years but never really finished it. Let us say this is special to me."

Jacky tried hard to understand the structure. She could see it was a house, but how could she help? She could see some divisions. It probably meant the rooms but other than that. She was clueless again.

"So, what help do you need?" She asked since she could stare at it all day but would not know what to do with it.

"I want you to tell me what I need to do, so you and my brother would love it." Haley looked at her with that pleading look. But this time, she knew she was not faking it.

"I bought this lot and fell in love with it, but I don't know what to do with it." Haley continued when Jacky remained silent. She did not even know if Jacky heard her. "Then, last night, I dreamt that you and my brother should be living in it."

Still, Jacky kept staring at the house, not saying a word. She had no tears in her eyes, but she could not read it either. Haley had no clue what she was thinking.

"I want to build a home in it and give it to you and my brother as a wedding gift. I hope you will accept it and help me plan it." Haley finally finished. Now, all she could do was wait for her reaction.

She anticipated that she might react violently to the idea, the same way she did the last time Marcus and Rosella showed her an open house. But she also hoped that she would warm up to the idea of owning their first house.

After staring at it a few more, Jacky looked up at her new sister, not by blood but by marriage. Then, her arms automatically wrapped around her. "I love it." She hugged her tighter. "Thank you, Haley."

Somehow, looking at the skeleton of the house symbolized a fresh start.

It was not fixing what was already broken but building a new one.

It was a new home, a new start.

Chapter 962: Act as a handyman

They both decided that her desk was more appropriate for their lunch meeting since it had a bit of privacy. Besides, the last thing they wanted was for clients to walk into his desk and find them with their mouths full.

Although he was surprised that she could eat fast with her skinny body and tiny mouth, she was already on her last piece, while he still had one more in his box with some vegetables and rice left.

"This chicken is delicious." Munching on the piece of meat coated in some breading, dipped in an orange sauce. "You should give me the name of this Chinese restaurant so I can buy more." Zach was not just saying it, but he did enjoy the food.

But more than that, he also liked her company, even if she was not that friendly. Truthfully, he noticed that she avoided looking at him or asking anything personal about him.

She never tried to make intimate conversations with him as the others did, nor had she answered any of his. She acted professionally in dealing with him like a machine on a mission. But she was never rude or sarcastic, just indifferent.

"Here is their card." Ria pulled a piece of cardboard inside her desk and handed it to him without directly looking in his direction. Then, she returned her attention to the food she was eating.

He could assume that she had intentionally kept their relationship confined to their obligations with the office. But could he blame her when he had done nothing but annoy her?

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If somebody had told him a month ago that he would be working with her, maybe he would have answered, Hell, no! and laughed out loud. But that was him before he realized many things about himself.

At least he planned to mend his ways and intend to correct his grave mistakes. "Thanks." He accepted the card while still gaping at her, even if she was busy doing anything else but giving him attention.

He also watched her play with her phone, but he noticed her fingers were barely moving on the screen, so he knew she was randomly scrolling without seeing much.

Besides, her face remained impassive as if her mind was elsewhere and not the task at her hand. Now, Zach was curious as to what was occupying her mind. Could she have thought about their project, something else, or a man? Did his existence ever cross her mind?

He still did not know what he saw in her. But he could not shake off his fascination with her. He believed he was attracted to her. But why? That was the question when he had dated much more attractive women than her.

It did not make sense, but none seemed to be, not anymore, since he started working in this place. He wanted to believe it would make him a better man, but would that be good for him?

"Hey! Is there something wrong with my face?" Ria glared at him as if looking at her was against the law. "Stop it and finish your food so we can continue with our discussion."

"Yes, Mam." He mockingly saluted her as he chewed on the juicy meat in his mouth and chopstick a mouthful of rice and vegetables. "As you wish." He added while his mouth was full, acting like this was a joke.

She was not laughing as it irritated her more. "Will you stop that? It is not funny."

She started clearing her empty box and throwing it in the trash next to her seat before she took a tissue to wipe a few drops on the table. She was not waiting for her partner to finish.

She was almost through when she looked up and saw a smirk on his face. She noticed that he was staring at her again, which irked her even more. Of course, the last thing she wished was to work with this man because he was arrogant, self-centered, and all the wrong things in a man.

"It is kinda is." He narrowed his lips as if he was controlling himself from bursting into laughter. "But don't get me wrong. I am not laughing at you but only at the situation." Then, a chuckle escaped his lips.

"Are you a moron or something?" She asked because that would explain his behavior. It would give her a reason not to punch him in that smug face because she had had enough of him. "What is so funny?"

But handsome, her mind reminded him. What a shame!

To ruin something so beautiful.

Nevertheless, Zach might be attractive physically, but his attitude had been less desirable. She could do without a man like him, not that she was even considering him or he was even mildly attracted to her.

She quickly erased the thought since it was irrelevant to the current situation. It was a waste of time to think about a man like him.

"You." He pointed directly at her. "As I said, this is not about you but your circumstances."

“What are you talking about?” She could only look at him with confusion. It was like he was talking in riddles.

“You were trying to eat too fast while your mind is probably somewhere else that you have not noticed...” But he did not finish his sentence as he just used his fingers to show her.

Quickly, she looked down at her white blouse, and her eyes almost popped. She could not stop gazing at the orange stain spreading at the upper and middle portion of her shirt.

Damn! She must be eating like a slab, wanting to get it done and over, failing to detect the sauce dripping from her food. She chastised her mind since it kept floating somewhere else, hoping not to think about him.

Then, she blamed herself for being so clumsy and bumping into him in the first place. Now, she was not only a mess in her mind but in complete chaos.

“Thanks for being very considerate.” Ria sarcastically responded, knowing he could have told her earlier instead of waiting till she was a total mess.

“But I was afraid you would blow up in my face. You already have fumes coming from your nose and ears. I could not endanger myself by adding to it.” He replied but with seriousness this time.

“Honestly, would you want my opinion?” He continued, not giving her time to respond. “I don’t think so.”

He tried to tell her before, but she only snapped at him. So, he bit his tongue and kept to himself. Honestly, he had no ill intention. But her serious expression did not match her outfit, causing him to have a fit.

He could not hold it together, so he had an outburst of laughter at her expense. After all, he was just human with a weird sense of humor. But seriously, he would not laugh at her situation if not for her determination to put him in his place.

After considering his explanation, she concluded that he was right. She was also at fault, so she could not put all her anger on him. She should not have allowed her emotion to distract her.

“Fine. Let us forget about it.” She said as she grabbed a tissue on her desk and started dabbing her shirt, hoping to lessen the stain. However, it was no use as the sauce stuck on her shirt. She believed she would have difficulty removing the sauce even after washing it.

“I guess we are even now.” Zach thought it would be a good way to patch up their difference. “We have both ruined our clothes by accident.” He explained when she raised her brows at him.

“Are you sure because your letter seemed to demand something more?” Remembering reading the letter he left to her, asking that she compensate him for the damages.

“I think we should settle that misunderstanding now so we can work better together.” He offered his hand to her. “Let me be the first to say I am sorry if I said things that are offending and for laughing at you just now.”

She looked at him for a few seconds, debating if this was just another ploy to trick her. So far, she still did not understand him. She could not tell whether he was genuinely telling the truth or just messing with her.

Although the other employees, especially the female population, seemed enamored by his charm, not her. She would not fall to the same tricks. She had dealt with men like him before, and he was not fooling her.

On the other hand, he was right about clearing the air between them.

It would be better if they could put the past incident behind them for their current project. That was the only way they could work together without wanting to throw things at each other. At least, that was what she felt.

“Fine. I am sorry, too, if I accidentally threw coffee at your shirt. And if I said things that might have offended you.” She took his hand and shook it firmly, but he seemed to hold her far longer than she liked as she snatched her hand out of his grasp.

But she could not help but notice how soft his hands were as she compared them to most men she knew. For a former mailman, he seemed to have hands that did not handle hard labor in his life.

She believed he had softer hands than she did, feeling a few callouses in her palm from working on her apartment with a hammer. In her defense, hiring labor for simple issues around the house was not cheap.

Therefore, besides being a mother, she also had to act as a handyman.

#### Chapter 963: Soulmate

He had worked hard all day, pushing himself to go faster like a machine on fire, with the sole purpose of going home early to be with his loving wife. As soon as he dismissed his last meeting, he was out the door, and nobody could stop him.

Alex walked straight toward the living room after dropping his bag and coat on the chair by the entrance. He could not wait to see his wife, who was probably lonely without him.

“Dani?” He called out, finding the receiving room empty. Usually, he would find his wife sprawled on the sofa with some nutritious chips and fresh fruits, crying over a silly romantic movie her friends recommended.

It was not like his wife was a crybaby, but the doctors reminded him that her hormones could affect her emotional state. He had to be more sensitive to her needs and avoid disappointing and stressing her at all costs.

However, she was not in front of a movie, so where was she? Suddenly, he did not feel right, as if something was off. Quickly, he called out again as he moved to the kitchen, as thoughts of what happened to Jacky plagued his mind.

“Dani, where are you?” But the kitchen was empty. He ran out of the room only to find his wife’s nurse aide walking towards him. “Where is Dani?” He instantly asked, slightly startling her since she did not immediately see him.

"She is in her room, resting." She informed him as she went to the sink to place the empty plates and glasses in the tub. "But I need to tell you something, but don't be alarmed since it is common for pregnant women to experience this."

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"What is it?" He asked the middle-aged woman, anxious to know what was wrong with his wife as his heart palpitated inside his chest.

Nevertheless, he trusted her since Laura highly recommended her as a responsible caregiver.

Still, he tried to calm himself, knowing that panicking and losing his cool would never help the situation. Dani needed him to be always in control, especially now that she was weak and vulnerable.

"She had a dizzy spell this afternoon since her blood pressure mildly increased. Doctor Reece already stopped by earlier and checked on her." She continued to relay her report. "I wish to call you, but Ms. Dani would not have it."

"I understand, but she is stable now?" He still asked, hoping Sebastian was able to check her thoroughly.

He could not blame their nurse since Dani could be stubborn. But if Sebastian said it was not life-threatening for her and the baby, he could breathe easily.

"Yes, but Dr. Reece recommended you still bring her to her doctor for further testing just for assurance." Their nurse continued.

"Thanks. You go rest now, and I will take over from here." Alex dismissed the nurse and proceeded to their room to check on her in person.

He found her lying on the bed with her eyes closed and steady breathing. He could tell she was in a deep sleep, so he opted to sit on the lone chair near the bed and watched her instead.

He did not want to move the bed and accidentally woke her up. They could always talk when she had her rest. At the moment, he could wait and be content that she was ok.

He could tell the burden of carrying a life in her body must not be easy as he watched her suffer and sacrifice herself to give him a child. Therefore, adding to her pain was the last thing he wanted to do.

"I love you, Dani." He whispered the only thing he could give her at that instant. Nonetheless, he believed he could never return what she did for him, even if he bought her the world.

He must have fallen asleep because he was suddenly woken up by a soft hand touching his face. He snapped his eyes open to see Dani standing before him in her sleeping gown.

"Alex, why are you sleeping in the chair?" Her sweet voice penetrated his sleepy thought.

Then, he felt her sit on his lap, wherein his hands automatically wrapped around her body, gently caressing the ball-like bump in her belly. It was so round that he could almost believe he was touching a basketball.

"You should not have stood up from the bed. You should just have called me if you need anything." He reprimanded her, concerned about her well-being.

He rested his chin on her shoulders, savoring the sweet lavender scent from the shampoo she used on her hair. He wondered how he could survive if something happened to her.

A thought that he did not want to entertain but kept sneaking up in his brain. They said that pregnancy would put a woman in a fifty-fifty situation because of its complication.

Here was his wife already in a difficult stage of his pregnancy. What more if she was about to give birth? It was a fear that was slowly gripping him hard in his heart. The thought of losing her and even their child was a nightmare he did not wish to come true.

"So, I gather that you heard about my incident earlier." She turned to look at him with that assuring look on her face. "I am fine. Besides, I am pregnant, not an invalid." She leaned closer to him until she planted a kiss on his lips before she rested her head again on his body as they sat on his favorite chair.

She did not need the grand gestures, the expensive gifts, or the extravagant trips. It was a moment like this that she wished to savor because this was real.

She could feel the love flowing between them, making them one.

"I know, but I will do anything, and everything, to guarantee that you will remain by my side as long as possible. Losing you will never be an option for me." Alex closed his eyes, using all his senses to channel his energy to her if that was even possible.

He understood he might be overreacting to her condition but could anybody blame him? He had never adored anyone as much as he loved this woman in his arms.

"That is why I know I am the luckiest woman alive." She pulled his hand into her lips, finding it hard to twist her body again to kiss him on the lips. "I have found the perfect husband, my other half, and my soulmate."

#### Chapter 964: Heritage

Watching her tranquil face every morning with her eyes closed and steady breathing was one of the most beautiful sights in his life that he never wanted to lose.

He believed she was the reason for his existence. She inspired him to wake up each morning. She brought hope for a great and happy future ahead for their family. Without her, he was nothing.

After her incident yesterday, he was not taking any chances. He immediately set up an appointment with her doctor for that morning. But waking her up from her deep slumber was not easy as he stared into her lovely face.

"How long have you been up?" She mumbled in her sleepy tone as if aware that he had been watching even when she barely moved, not even opened her eyes.

But her right hand sought him out as it crawled on the pillow and landed on his face. Then, her fingers caressed his cheeks, tracing a pattern around his face, along his nose, and ending on his lips.

He effortlessly captured her hand and pinned it to his lips, loving the feel of her soft skin against his. "Long enough to enjoy watching you sleep." He answered, letting the tremble of his voice resonate in her hand.



It was like magic as he watched the reaction of her petite body to his small gesture. Her eyes opened up, overflowing with emotion while her face glowed, brightening up everything around them and her smile lifted his spirit, knowing she was forever his.

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"I also watched you sleep last night." Reminding him, shifting to her side as she looked directly at his face. "And I love it." She knew he was worried about her, but she did not wish him to feel that way.

Then, she waited until he leaned forward and planted his lips on her forehead, a caressing gesture that always reassured her that all would be well for her and their child.

"And I love you, Dani," Alex whispered as he pressed his body as close to her as allowed with the bulk of her belly.

Soon, she was lying on another bed but not in their bedroom at their home. Her husband held her left hand. On the other side, her doctor was doing another ultrasound of their baby, checking their child's condition.

Of course, the last thing she wanted was for harm to come to their child. So, she volunteered and asked her husband to take him to her doctor. She knew he would drop anything for her and their child without hesitation.

"How is my baby?" Dani asked as she looked at the ultrasound, fascinated to see the image of their child flash on the screen.

The baby looked so tiny and vulnerable, barely moving, but the heartbeat that echoed in the room seemed strong. At least, in her opinion, that was her interpretation. She could only hope that her child would come out of this world without any problem.

"I don't see any issues so far with the baby." The doctor told them as she checked her monitors and asked questions about her patient. "But you should be more careful with yourself. You should slow down on the salts and sugars."

Dani smiled at what the doctor said, knowing she was guilty, remembering using food to alleviate her boredom. But she would try to find something else to occupy her time for her baby's sake.

"I promise I will only eat healthy food from now on." Dani touched her belly, trying to feel her baby kick against her skin.

She was sorry for overindulging in things that almost harmed her child. She did not mean to, but she was mending her ways. She was temporarily distracted from what she needed to do.

"I will also remind her to eat properly," Alex said, knowing he was guilty of

indulging her and consenting to her every whim. But he learned his lesson. He could not keep his guard down concerning his wife and child. Even to such menial issues.

"Are you still determined to keep the sex of your child a secret?" The doctor asked as she continued monitoring the screen while her hands worked on her belly, moving the cold, ticklish probe around her patient's skin.

"Can you see it?" Alex asked, slightly curious. They both agreed that it would not matter if they had a girl or a boy as long as they had a healthy child. So, the first few times, they declined to know the sex of the child.

Did he now have a change of heart as he looked at the screen?

"If you want to know, I do not mind," Dani told her husband as her eyes glanced at her, seeing the longing in his eyes.

She did not see the point of prolonging the anticipation either as the moment of her birth slowly ticked closer. She might have wanted the surprise then, but now, she was dying of the suspense.

"I do." Alex looked again at the screen before turning to his wife, who had an approving smile on her lips. He knew then that she wanted it as much as he did.

"Then, shall I reveal it now or give it to you on a piece of paper." The doctor asked, giving options according to most of the preferences of her other patients.

A few minutes later, they were heading back home with silly smiles on their lips, holding a sealed envelope that they opted to open later. All the worry lines disappeared from their faces, replaced with ease and contentment.

"Promise me, whether our child is a boy or a girl, we will love our child just the same." Dani would not want their kids to suffer, believing they preferred a gender, remembering her father who loved her just as if he was his son.

"I will not have it any other way," Alex declared, leaning over and planting a gentle kiss over her belly, swearing not only to her but also to their unborn child.

"And one more thing. We will raise our children here and in your hometown. Hence, they can experience both worlds." Dani expressed her wish, giving their child and their possible children the chance to know their heritage.

## Chapter 965: The story

After watching the Kingdom announce the upcoming Royal Matrimony between the current heir and his betrothed, she had never felt peace again. Her mind kept replaying his dead eyes over and over in her head.

Then, when Evan had talked to her alone, convincing her to reconsider telling Lance about Luisa, she was adamant that it was for the best. However, her guilt would not let her stop thinking about it.

But was he right? Was she making a mistake?

Suddenly she was more confused than ever.

"Sarah, they are asking for the report. Have you finished checking it?" Her Junior reporter asked her as she stood by her new office.

As the new Senior Investigative Reporter, she handled most of the pressing stories and oversaw the other reporters with their work. Not an easy task but a challenge she liked to take.

She knew she could do better, but that would mean exposure to the public eye. She would settle for a position behind the desk if it meant hiding her identity from those seeking her out from her hiding.

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"Yes, here it is." She pulled the file from the stacks she had already finished a moment ago and allowed the younger reporter to take it to their producer, who would decide its fate.

No matter how good the story, the producer and the people on top would decide whether it would see the light of day. Whether the story had any entertainment value because the news was not just telling the truth, it was also about making tons of money.

Her job was to look for something worthy to tell and make it as compelling and intriguing as possible without compromising the truth. At least not much, as far as she could manage. Unlike others who would bend the truth for a large buck.

"Can I ask you a question?" The reporter asked as she remained standing in front of her desk.

She looked up again from what she was doing and nodded, curious about what she wanted to know. It was seldom anyone dared to ask her personal questions at work, earning her the title of the Ice Queen.

But in her defense, she did not have time to socialize with them and no life or past to share. Therefore, making friends was the least of her priority, making her concentrate on her job more than anything else.

"Why did you pass up the News Anchor position? Most would die to have it, but you said no." The young woman who probably also dreamed of the title had this look of curiosity, skepticism, and wonder, mixed into one.

She was not surprised by the question. She was already aware they had been whispering about the incident behind her back. Many would think she was a fool for passing up the chance.

Regardless, she did not care what they thought. She had her reasons, and that was her priority. Money and fame were the least of what she desired in this world but doing what she loved were rewarding enough.

"Because that is not for me." She answered her, not giving her further explanation for it. She did not owe anybody a reason for her choices in life because she had to take responsibility for it on her own and with nobody else.

"I think they are already waiting for those papers." Eida, or Sarah, as everybody knew her, pointed the papers at the hands of the young reporter, effectively dismissing her and stopping her from asking her further questions.

She could not blame her young woman since it was inherent in every reporter to be nosy or else they were working at the wrong job. Only those who were brave enough to stick their necks and noses to someone else's business would be successful in this line of profession.

In her case, it was not the eavesdropping or the spying that interested her in this career. But the thought of seeking the truth. It had been her motivation from the start, not the money or fame.

In the meantime, the incident made her forget her woes, putting her concentration back on her task. She worked like a soldier on a mission. Nothing could distract her as she finished one file after another. Until.

“Sarah, the boss wants you in his office.” Her new secretary informed her. One of the benefits of being promoted, she also got an assistant.

“Thanks. I am on my way,” Sarah said as she closed the file on her desk and walked over to the door, marching toward her boss’s office.

“Sarah, I trust you are adjusting well to your new position.” The producer of their show asked her as he offered her a seat.

“I think I am getting the hang of it.” She answered honestly. There were a few hiccups, but nothing she could not handle. There was no need to inform her boss about it unless necessary.

Besides, this was not her first rodeo in this job, even if the others thought she barely had any experience in her current position. Of course, she could not reveal who she was to these people.

She might be a nobody now, but if they knew her past, she would be the news tomorrow. It would not have been that bad since she was used to it, but she had a daughter to think about and protect.

She could not allow her past to touch her daughter’s future.

“I know you are busy, so I would not take much of your time.” Her boss said without waiting for a reply from her. “I need you to take on a special project.”

She was expecting that since that was part of her new duties. “What is it?” She anticipated excitedly, knowing that it must be a big story for her boss to look eager about it.

“I am sure that you will love this one. I need you to cover a Royal Wedding.” Her boss enthusiastically announced to her, making a big spectacle about the subject with his hands. “Of course, you have to travel and...”

Her boss continued explaining the details of what she had to do, giving her specific instructions about what he expected from her job. But she never heard anything else after the Royal Wedding.

She did not even have to hear his name to know it was about him.

“Do you have any other questions?” Her boss asked. “Sarah?” He continued to ask, increasing his voice to call her attention.

“Can somebody else cover this story?” She could see her boss’s face change from ecstatic to concern. She knew that any reporter would jump at the chance to be at the center of this international story but not her.

“Are you not up to the challenge? I am sure that despite your lesser experience, you can do this job superbly.” Her boss said, still expressing his confidence in her abilities. After all, he was one of the people who supported her promotion.

“Of course I am. But...” She was supposed to make some excuse, but he interrupted her.

"Then, it is settled." He smiled confidently at her, concluding their meeting. "I know you will do a great job." That was her boss dismissing her.

Was fate playing a trick on her? She asked herself as she walked down the hallway, wondering what she would do next. What should she do now, finding herself in a tight situation?

What was the worse thing that could happen? Simple.

She would become the story.

Chapter 966: Committed a crime

As she watched her child sleep, a heavy burden seemed to grow inside her, filling her heart with so much pain. Could she truly go through their lives, keeping Luisa a secret from her father?

It would seem like fate was not on her side as she once again faced the possibility of meeting the father of her child. But would that be wise when she had done everything to stay far away from her past?

"How was work?" Amelia asked when she peeked into the nursery to check on Luisa. "I did not notice that you have arrived."

She also did not see her friend when she walked into the apartment. She went directly into the nursery, wanting to see her little angel, needing her support through her pain.

She turned away from her child and walked toward her friend, not wanting Luisa to be disturbed by their conversation. The last thing she needed was a crying child while she was conflicted.

"It is tiring," Eida did not elaborate, not ready to tell her about her latest assignment. "But I just got back." She closed the door behind her, leaving her child in her quiet room. "Where is Angela?" She did not notice her either.

In the meantime, she would keep that information until she figured out what to do. Besides, there was no reason to trouble everyone if she could handle it.

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"She is in her room. She was a little winded earlier. So, I ask her to take a nap before dinner." Her friend told her as they stood in the hallway.

"Why don't you rest in your room, and I will call you when dinner is ready." Her friend offered, probably noticing the exhausted look on her face. She was not entirely physically tired, but her mind was quite overwhelmed.

"Ok." She quickly agreed, using the opportunity to resolve her problem in the confine of her room.

She quickly strode away, leaving Amelia to deal with dinner, hoping to be alone with her thoughts. She did not even bother to change as she dropped her body with her hands spread across the bed.

But instead of closing her eyes, she kept her gaze on the ceiling, seeing nothing as her thoughts ran wild. As the faces of people that she loved stretched across her eyes, fighting for her attention.

Followed by the people who she had hurt and ruined their lives. Could she let Lance marry another woman when all she ever wanted was to be with him, to be his wife?

Did her child deserve the future she had planned for her? Could she allow her to grow up not knowing her father? Was she ready to raise her, knowing she denied her true identity?

What about Lance and his right to his child?

"But what about the Count?" She mumbled in the air as if she was daring fate to answer her question, blaming her destiny for her current predicament.

As she tossed and turned in her bed, unwanted thoughts kept creeping into the forefront of her mind. Rebellious ideas flashed across her eyes that could easily lead her to trouble.

But was it worth it?

"The heck with it." Eida cursed in the wind as she scrambled out of bed, grabbing her bag and phone. "The hell with him." She swore under her breath as she exited her room.

She turned to the nursery, peeking at her little angel, then moved closer to her crib, watching her sleeping child. With her fingers, she touched her chubby cheeks and stared at the pinkness of her lips.

She looked more and more like her father. She could only wonder what else she would pick from him. What traits would she inherit from a father living a hundred miles away?

"I need to leave for a few days. But I hope when I come back. I have good news for you." She softly whispered in her ears as she leaned forward to give her a tender kiss on her silky cheeks.

After a few minutes, she was out of the house, driving her car like a madman or woman, cruising the busy street, stopping only due to the traffic and the red lights.

She did not even bother to say goodbye to Amelia, knowing she would only subject herself to millions of questions by telling her friend about what she had in mind.

She opted to text her instead, giving some lame excuse about her job.

Then, she made arrangements before she lost her nerves and changed her mind.

"Have you gone mad?" She shrieked, banging her hands on the wheels as she quickly pressed on the break when a car suddenly cut her off at her left.

She almost bumped into the steering wheel. Luckily, the belt did its job. Was that a sign that she should turn back and stop this foolishness? She wondered as she looked at the busy street.

But a honking at her rear snapped her back to the present as she gently pressed on the gas to keep moving. The traffic might slow her down, but it was still getting her to where she needed to be.

She glanced at the clock on her dashboard, seeing she still had time to spare. All she needed was to get out of this traffic jam and into the highway. Then, she would be on her way.

"What now?" Eida muttered under her breath, seeing a commotion just ahead of her.

She tried to stretch her neck to see what was happening and could only sigh. A man came out of his car and started shouting at the driver of another vehicle before him.

She concluded that would create more traffic. She looked at her options, seeing that the other cars were moving away from the accident. She just needed to maneuver her car until she could detach herself from the jam.

Well, it took her more time than she would want, but at least she was moving again. However, checking on the time, she knew she would not make it if she did not speed up.

“You can do this.” She psyched herself up, not having driven fast for so long. She could see the traffic light ahead, and it was still green. She knew she could make it, but the car before her crawled at a snail’s pace.

She was not going to make it as she saw the changing lights on her windshield flicker before her eyes. But for some divine force within her, she stepped on the gas instead of the break.

The devil may care, but she did not. She ran through the red light like a criminal on the run. She must be insane, risking her life at that moment. However, the thrill that went through her body was through the roof.

She felt she could do anything.

She knew she could do this as it lit a fire within her.

Until.

The siren behind her told her that she was going nowhere. She had to stop before her situation worsened, pulling to the side of the road to deal with authorities. She believed she had just committed a crime and could not do anything about it.

Chapter 967: Put a ring or a dot

“Sometimes I wonder if you are ashamed of me.” She teased him the other night.

He could still hear those words as he drove his car back to his apartment after a busy day at the office. He wondered if Haley would drop by tonight or if she was already there.

She was right to ask him that since he had been avoiding taking her out in a public place since they had been seeing each other. It was true that he did not want to be constantly seen with her but not because of what she thought.

“Is that you, Darling?” Gerald automatically heard her voice as soon as he entered his apartment. Honestly, he had been looking forward to it all day. He hoped she would be at his home, waiting for him.

Was Mike right about his assumptions? Was he falling for her?

No. That was insane.

He never did love. He never will.

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But he would admit that he cared for her. That was the best he could give her. And he did not wish to hurt her or for her to get into any harm. It was the only reason he did not want his enemies to associate her with him.

"Yes," Gerald answered as he walked towards his living room, dropping his bag and coat on the lone chair. Then, he sat on the sofa, propping up his feet on the coffee table and loosening his tie.

It had been a long day at the office. But it was not just the legal cases that occupied his time but also the other things he had been working on under the noses of almost everyone.

"I hope you have not eaten dinner since I made lasagna." Haley walked out of the kitchen and went straight to him.

First, she stood behind him, letting her fingers crawl on his shoulders, massaging the tightness in his muscles and then working its way to his nape, just below his earlobes.

"Not yet." He remembered eating at lunch, but since then, he had been busy. But subconsciously, he believed she would be here with a ready meal waiting for him.

Eventually, she moved around the couch, straddling his lap while she continued removing his tie.

"Would you like your dinner now or something else?" Moving her fingers, unbuttoning the upper portion of his shirt this time.

He could feel his body responding to the timbre of her voice. His hands automatically circled her waist to wrap around her back. Then, he pulled her closer until their lips locked into place.

He could sense her hands moving along his chest as she continued to remove the remaining buttons of his shirt until she had pushed them off his shoulders, baring his upper body to her touch.

"Let me help you relieve some of the stress in your body." She whispered into his ears before she slowly and torturously let her lips travel from his ears and neck down to his chest, lingering longer on his pectoral muscles.

He could only bury his fingers in her hair, enjoying the feeling of her lips as they scorched his skin on fire. She was not as experienced as the other women he bedded before, but what she lacked in knowledge, she made up with her naturalness. As if she existed to pleasure him.

He knew that was a selfish thought, but he was a greedy man. He was not a virtuous, ethical, moral man. On the contrary, he was the opposite of everything defined as good.

But why was he thinking of what would be beneficial for her? Why did he wish to keep her safe? It did not make sense to him. Still, he did not want to dwell on these thoughts as he buried them in his mind and concentrated on the swell of his pants.

"You are so beautiful." He moaned as her fingers slid further down his body, massaging his hardened muscles on the top of his zippered pants.

If other people could see them, they would think they were already a married couple as she performed her wifely duties. And he was the doting husband who could not wait to be home with his wife.

But that was not what this was.



He was not marrying her because he wanted this to be a real marriage. Or he wished to have a family with kids running around. He only wanted a trophy wife that he could show off to the people around him.

"I guess we better eat first because I am starving." Stopping her from going further in her movements and removing his pants.

But he could feel that his body was protesting. He wanted what Haley was offering, but could he keep doing this? Could he keep pretending that he could give her what she had been dreaming of when he knew too well that it was impossible?

To her, this was real, but for him, it was not.

"Ok!" She answered, but he could tell she was surprised by his response. Under another circumstance, he would have kissed her and had his way with her.

He could see the confusion in her eyes, mixed with a slight disappointment. He could sense that she did not expect his rejection, but she still smiled and pretended that she was ok as she guided him to the kitchen where the table had the lasagna, still hot from the oven.

"That looks great and delicious." He complimented, pretending that his hunger was the only reason he did not want to have sex. At least, not right away while he figured out what was wrong with him.

However, tonight, he felt different and needed some space from her to think. But he did not want to scare her away by telling her what he felt. Not until he had thought of this through.

He believed he still needed her and her father to pursue his political plans. Without her and her father's backing, he might not win. But that would surely put a bullseye on her back.

She would be a constant target for his enemies to use against him. Could he afford to lose her if she died under his watch? But why should he care if he got what he wanted from her?

Was he starting to have a conscience? If this was another girl, he should not care about her feelings. Now, he was more conflicted about his emotions. The more he analyzed his situation.

At that moment, he contemplated whether to put a ring or a dot on their relationship.

Chapter 968: Forever a prisoner of the past

At the police station, someone approached her, acting as her lawyer even though she had not asked for one. She did not even know that they were filing a case against her. But what was the charge?

"What is going on?" She demanded as she sat inside a holding room for criminals. Luckily she sat on a chair without a handcuff on her wrist.

But she was not a criminal. It was only a speeding ticket, a minor offense, and not a capital crime. She was not a lawyer, but she was aware of her right and the law. What they were doing was an unlawful arrest.

"Please, wait here while I figure this out." The man she did not even get the name said to her. He just said that he was her lawyer. He would do everything he could to clear this matter, and that was it.

She did not even know she needed a lawyer since the arresting officer had not charged her with anything yet. It was a first-time offense, so she could not be facing serious charges.

She should not even be in the police station unless the officer in charge of her case found a compelling reason to arrest her. Then, a thought occurred to her, alarming her and making her heart quicken its beating.

Was there something wrong with her fake papers? Had anyone discovered her true identity? That could be the only explanation for all this trouble. She had to call Evan. He could sort this out.

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"Excuse me, is anyone out there?" She moved closer to the door and knocked on it, hoping someone would notice her.

Unfortunately, no one answered her. She tried to open the door, but it seemed to open only on the other side. It made sense. It was supposed to keep the criminals from escaping. But her situation was different. She was not supposed to be in here.

"Excuse me, can somebody open the door? I need to make a phone call." She tried again, but nobody still responded.

She turned and faced the glass, knowing that it was one-way glass. Somebody on the other side might be watching her. But why? Why would these people go through such trouble?

She could tell that she had already missed her flight. There was no way she would be flying tonight out of here. She did not even know if they would release her from this place at any time soon.

"Hey, this is illegal." She finally moved to the mirror, looking at her haggard face. But she knew somebody else was behind her reflection, watching her. "You can't hold me here without properly charging me. I know my rights."

Still, she faced silence as she stared into her eyes, conflicted once again with her situation. After a few minutes of pacing inside the small confinement, she heard movements and voices outside the door.

She stopped near the table and faced the door, waiting for whoever was behind it. She could not wait to tell them what she thought of their unfair treatment of her.

She would ensure this would get published in the news and expose their unorthodox and unlawful practices. But first, she had to prepare herself for whatever charges they would file against her for whatever reason.

"I am sorry about that." A voice said as the door opened and revealed a man, not the one who introduced himself as his lawyer nor any of the officers she had seen earlier. "Pardon these people for treating you so poorly."

She did not recognize the man, but she could tell he was somebody in high authority, judging from the expensive suit he wore and the way he stood before her. Even the tone of his voice held no nonsense.

"Who are you?" She asked as she stared into his face. "And what is going on here?" She continued, hoping this man could finally answer her questions.

The man did not immediately answer as he looked around the small space before sitting on a chair by the table. "Why don't you take a seat so we can talk properly." He gestured for her to follow him.

He turned to the glass behind him and signaled something before returning his attention to her. She noticed the red light above the mirror disappear as she stared above his head.

"Don't worry. Nobody is recording or watching us anymore. I promise. We can talk freely without any disturbance." His voice sounded reassuring.

Nonetheless, he had not answered her questions. Eventually, her eyes landed on his wrinkled face and thick white beard. She still had no idea who this man was and what he wanted from her.

"I assure you my name is not relevant in this situation. But I was sent here by a common friend to discuss something with you." He spoke again without waiting for her to say anything as if he could read her thoughts.

"Common friend?" She asked but doubted. She hardly had friends in this place. Therefore, that was not likely accurate. They could not have any friends in the same circle.

"He heard that you are planning to go home, Eida." The man said with a friendly smile on his lips.

If the situation had been different, she would have thought she was speaking to Santa Claus with his joyful voice and cheerful face. She would have asked for a gift for Luisa. But instead, what she heard was that she had been naughty.

Hearing her name come out of his lips told her that she had not escaped the past she had tried hard to leave behind. He had learned of her whereabouts and her new name and had monitored her movements.

It meant he was also well aware of Luisa. A thought that had brought chill through her entire body, frightening her to the deepest part of her heart. She was not afraid of what could happen to her, but she could not allow anything to happen to her daughter.

In conclusion, she understood now she had never been free because he would never allow it. It was foolish of her to think she could change the course of her future.

However, she would do everything to save her daughter from her fate by accepting she would be forever a prisoner of the past.

#### Chapter 969: An unreachable star

Serena was finally seeing him again later. Not on a date or a set but in a conference room between their legal teams. This time, they would not discuss a script, rehearse a line or fool around.

She was suing him for his abusive behavior, inflicting physical and emotional pain on her during their relationship and threatening her life. Finally, she wanted to be free from his clutches forever.

"Hey! I am sorry if I took time before I could answer the door." Serena said as she hastily opened the door upon seeing who was behind it through the peephole.

She was in the bathroom when the bell rang and had to rush out of the tub to answer it, thinking it could be her manager. Now, she was dripping on the floor with her wet hair.

She did not intentionally plan to be late, regretting listening to soft music while taking a bath, realizing too late that it was not a good idea as she dozed off in the tub. Now, her lawyer was here while she was not yet ready.

"I am sorry if I am a bit early," Adam said as he stood at the door, slightly feeling awkward at the scene before him. "Maybe I should get back a bit later." Thinking of giving her time to finish fixing herself.

He checked his watch, wondering if he had made a mistake with the time and come too early, but he was on the dot. Still, he did not want to intrude, seeing that she was still in her robe and fresh from the shower.

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He wanted to drop by early at her place to discuss a few more minor details of their case before they proceeded to meet with the other counsels. He just wanted everything to run smoothly at the meeting, but he could see that she needed more time to prepare.

"Don't be silly. Come in." She said, opening the door wider for him to enter. "I am the one who should say sorry because I am the one late." Feeling bad that she had to make him wait.

She was sure the man had more things to do with his time than wait for her. She also valued time since she had always been professional in her career. She never wanted to waste anyone's valuable time because of nonsensical excuses like what she just did.

She suggested he occupy the vacant sofa on the other side of the room. Then, she proceeded in front of her vanity mirror to dry her wet hair and apply makeup on her bare face.

"Are you sure you don't want me to come back later?" Finding the entire scene unusual.

He expected that she would have her dress on and her manager would be here, not alone with her, in her robe. Fortunately, the room was spacious and had a small waiting area on the side, or he would probably be sitting on a chair near her or the bed. That would seem more uncomfortable.

Of course, he had been in the company of naked women before, not that she was completely undressed. Still, she was a client, and he had to set some boundaries even if he admitted to finding her attractive.

"Nah!" She indifferently responded. "It is good that you are here so we can discuss your plans for later while I finish." She suggested as she blew her hair dry. "I hope you don't mind." She added as if it was nothing of the ordinary for her.

She was used to having people around while she was fixing herself, one would be doing her hair, and another one her makeup as another person discussed a script or oriented her with a job.

People hovered over her, even in some scenes where she was almost naked. She had never agreed to nude scenes, only sexy shots of her body. She never believed in using her body as an easy ticket to stardom.

However, she had her fair share of allegations of using her body to gain leading roles in big film productions. But those were vile accusations by people who had nothing better to do with their lives.

It was just a coincidence that she had a relationship with a top-notch producer, but he had nothing to do with securing the job. She had worked hard in auditioning for those parts and asked nobody for help.

But like this one, her break up with her other relationship had been scandalous. Therefore, she would like to avoid another similar thing from happening with this one.

“Ok. Ask your questions while we are waiting for Nora.” She told him as she tossed her hair to the side to dry the bottom part, exposing the back of her neck and shoulder within his sight.

“It is just basic questions we have already discussed and some recommendations I like you to hear before we face the other team,” Adam said, hoping that he could focus on the papers and not the woman before him.

He had no idea what was wrong with him when he had never acted so irrationally toward a client. Given that she was a famous star, still, he had dated models and beautiful, charming, intelligent women before. So, this should not be such a big deal.

“Fire away. Don’t worry about me. I am good with lines. I am an actress, you know.” She teased him, noticing a bit of tension in his actions.

She never thought of herself as intimidating, but her status did make some people, even a few men, stutter in her presence. Not that Adam was jumbling his words, but he seemed anxious and uncomfortable in his seat.

She always thought that her lawyer was immune to her charms since, in their previous dealings, he seemed not to notice her as a woman. However, she wondered if she was wrong.

“Yeah, of course.” He suddenly felt embarrassed, acting like a lovesick fool in front of his first crush. What was wrong with him? He shook off the unwanted thoughts that had crawled into his mind.

He had to focus since she was an important client and should not be messing around. She was David’s sister, for fuck sake. He reminded himself, chastising himself for suddenly fantasizing about her.

Besides, she was an unreachable star.

## Chapter 970: Fairytale

She knew it was morning, peeking at the lights coming from the windows. She should be getting up and starting the day. But last night still shook her up, not allowing her time even for a quick nap.

She did not know how she managed to drive home in her condition. Her body must have moved automatically, but she was glad she had not met an accident and landed on her bed without a scratch.

“I am so stupid!” To think that she could go back to her hometown and reclaim what was hers.

She thought that if she had made that flight, she would storm to the castle and asked Lance for forgiveness. Then tell him about their child. Did she think that could be that easy?

She did not even make it to the plane because fate and the Count would not allow it.

"You're a fool!" She muttered to herself as she kept her eyes staring into blank space.

All she remembered was walking directly into her room from the main door and throwing her keys and bag somewhere in the room. Then, she stared at her ceiling all night, afraid to close her eyes.

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She did not want to dream or have a nightmare. She just wanted everything to stop spinning, but how. Whether she closed her eyes or opened them, nothing seemed to matter.

"Eida, are you finally awake?" Amelia shouted outside, knocking on her door. "I already have breakfast in the kitchen." She slightly lowered her voice as if waiting for an answer.

Her friend must be wondering what had happened to her last night when she suddenly disappeared and where she had been since nobody was awake when she came home way past midnight.

She saw the messages, slightly concerned that Amelia could not reach her. But she had managed to text her friend when she retrieved her phone from the officer.

She told her about a late emergency meeting she had to attend. Of course, she had to lie. She just hoped that her friend had bought that excuse because she had no way of explaining without revealing the truth of what had transpired in that police station.

Last night, she accepted that her life was going down the drain. At least her relationship with the love of her life had its final nail in its coffin. She was not dragging her friends with her, not especially her child. She had to learn to move on and never look back.

"I will be out in a second." She knew she had to answer to keep up with her lie, or her friend would suspect something and try to bug her.

Then, she still had to determine how to decline the job to cover the wedding. She knew she could never watch the man she loved marry another. Besides, she had to consider also what happened last night.

It still took her half an hour before she could finish fixing her face to look presentable. She looked like a walking ghost without her makeup and polished-looking hair.

"What happened to you last night?" Angela asked, probably wondering why she did not join them for dinner. "Amelia said that she could not get hold of you."

Eida kissed her friend on the cheek as she greeted Angela before answering her. "Somebody called with an emergency story. I tried to fix it immediately, but the reporters screwed up big time."

She breathed a heavy sigh, pretending to be disappointed with her team. In truth, she was guilty of lying to her friends. However, she had no choice, knowing she could not put them in the middle of her problem.

Besides, she had already decided to let her past go and move on with her life. She could not ruin other lives because she was selfish enough to want Lance to be hers.

"I am all about you focusing on your career. Just make sure that Luisa also gets ample time with you." Angela reminded her, knowing how much she valued family time.

Angela patted Luisa on the cheeks while the child was in the arms of Amelia, sitting beside her. "She deserves all the love in the world." Her aged but wise friend continued.

"I understand." Eida agreed with her as she moved closer to Amelia. "Did you miss me?" She took her baby from her friend and cradled her around her body.

She could feel her heart was about to burst as well as her eyes, so she turned to look at the window outside, hoping she could pull herself together.

Would the pain ever end? She wondered as she gazed at the beautiful blue sky outside. Every time she thought she had passed this dreadful misery. Even a single memory would trigger it all again.

"She did," Amelia stated as she stood up to get a fresh plate and utensil. Then, she grabbed a freshly squeezed orange juice before returning to her seat and passing it to her.

"Yes, she did." Even Angela seconded her friend. "That was why we were trying to call you."

"Oh! I am sorry, my darling. I will not do that again." Eida kissed her baby on the forehead, glad that her tears did not fall and that somehow she was back in control of her emotions.

"She cried all night as if there was a big fire. But amazingly, I tried what I saw you do the other night, and it worked. She slept like a log." Amelia continued, but this time, she looked fascinated.

"What are you talking about?" She asked as she played with Luisa's cheeks.

"I played the video on your tablet. The one saved on your favorites, and Luisa loved it." Amelia cheerfully stated as if she would remember it. "It probably connected her with you and her dad."

Then, she finally remembered. She had not played that video of Lance's race for some time since it reminded her of him so much. But it did calm Luisa and made her fall asleep.

Now, she was back in memory lane, fighting hard to keep her emotions intact. However, something else bothered her. What if Luisa started asking for her father? What would she tell her?

What fairytale would best suit their story?