

## Royal Contract 971

### Chapter 971: Flowers, balloons, and chocolates

Unfortunately, her ex had a legal team, while she only had Adam. She thought as she watched her lawyer sit opposite him in the limousine that her manager brought with her.

They were on their way to meet with her ex-boyfriend with his panel of lawyers. They were about to discuss the case she was filing against him. Adam said it would be better if they could settle this out of court.

But, of course, they had to hear what the other panel would say on the matter and see if they could agree on acceptable terms. But at the end of the day, it was her final call. Whatever she decided, that was what they would do.

“Are you ok?” Nora asked her, concern covering her face beside her thick makeup that tried to conceal her age.

In this industry, age was not just a number. It was everything. Youthful appearance would always be the key to reaching the top. So, better milked it while young before the beautiful and youthful appeal fade.

She had hoped that she would have established a reputable career before that happened, but it seemed that her career would never see the next light of day. She could kiss what she had worked hard for goodbye.

“Yeah, I am good, just thinking,” Serena answered her manager, not wanting her to worry about her.

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Since she had left her family, Nora had acted more than just a manager to her. She was not exactly a mother figure, but she had been there for her through thick and thin.

“I know that I rather had my legal team handle this. But Serena picked you, so I hope you are up to the challenge.” Nora was not the type who would play with words. She spoke her mind with brutal honesty.

She would not sugarcoat her words to please anyone but because she only wanted honesty. According to her, that was the only thing in this world that worked.

Saying things that she meant and not lying about anything. At least to the people that mattered to her. But for the rest, the hell with them. Those were her words.

“You can trust me that I will do my best and would only have her best interest at heart,” Adam said, and he meant every word.

He had already made that promise to his friend, David, and he was not in the habit of breaking his promises. He would defend her case in his best capacity and find a way to win her case if need be.

In case, the other panel decided to take this to the next level and disagreed with their proposal. Sometimes, even the best-laid plan could mess up because the other party thought they had something better.

“I know you will,” Serena said as she extended her hand to his, squeezing his hand tight.

She did not know why she did that. Maybe a force of habit, but if David trusted him enough to recommend him to her. Then just maybe, he was better than all those expensive lawyers who only looked at the big picture but not what was best for her.

Half an hour later, they sat in a large conference room in one of the largest firms in the city. Of course, only the best for the famous movie star, the son of a great producer.

"Can you wait here?" The woman who escorted them into the room said. "They will be here in a few minutes." Then, she was gone, leaving the three of them to stare into each other and the view outside the massive windows.

"This is just how they play. They make you wait and believe that they have the upper hand. So, don't let them intimidate you." Adam whispered to her ears, seeing the growing agitation in her eyes. This time, he took her hand on her lap and squeezed it firmly, reassuring her that he got this.

It was not his first battle against corporate giants like this. He knew the rules they were playing, and he had beaten some of them in their games. However, they had many tricks in their sleeves, so he could not let his guard down.

Besides, he was not entirely alone in this battle. He also had the backing of one massive firm behind him. He was not showing them all the cards to make them believe they had the upper hand.

"Ok. As I said, I trust you." She nodded in his direction before looking at her manager. "Thank you." She knew she had not thanked her enough for all her support.

She did not have to be here, risking her career for her. But she chose to stand by her instead of saving her skin. By supporting her, she was putting her profession in jeopardy.

The influence of Elliot in the industry was enormous. His family could have Nora banned from the business if they wished. Make it hard for her to get new clients or make it hard for her clients to get a job.

"You know I can never abandon you," Nora said, tapping her shoulder to show support. "After this, we have to talk about your next contract." Her manager said, but she knew Nora was only trying to cheer her up.

Soon, the meeting started, but her ex-boyfriend was a no-show. The lawyers only offered a counteroffer but did not accept theirs. Adam had warned her about this, but she hoped they could have settled it and gotten it over with now.

Now, they returned to her apartment with Adam promising to review the counter-proposal before advising her anything. Somehow, she believed she might not like it from the initial look on his face and the way he had argued with the other lawyers.

She might not be a lawyer, but she also did not like the sound of what they offered. However, she would wait for Adam's advice before making any decision.

"Thanks!" She said to him when he offered to walk her back to her apartment. Nora opted to leave after dropping her back at the hotel. She did not know why, but she felt safe when he was constantly around.

"I better go. I still have other cases to deal with." He said as he stood outside her door. "But are you sure you are ok?" Adam asked, feeling slightly reluctant to leave her alone.

"Yeah, I am good. Go and save other lives." Serena could not help but tease him, making him smile like a schoolboy with the dimples displayed on his cheeks.

"I'll call you to set up another meeting soon." He told her before walking away.

Soon, she was alone again in her room. She suddenly felt alone, a feeling that she had never enjoyed. She liked to be surrounded by people or even just one, but not on her own.

Maybe that was why she could not get out of a terrible relationship, even if it had not been healthy anymore, because she was afraid to be alone. But she would soon change that.

Then, a knock on her door made her turn around. Quickly, she opened the door, wondering why Adam would return. Or was she hoping he had come back?

A man stood outside her door with flowers, balloons, and chocolates.

Chapter 972: An upcoming battle to win

She thought he had returned for her or forgotten to tell her something as she opened the door expectantly. However, the smile on her face faded abruptly upon seeing the man behind the door.

The flowers might have obscured her view of his face, but she would recognize him even from a mile, smelling the stench of his perfume. Why did she even fall for this guy? She thought as disgust overwhelmed what she felt for this awful man.

"Wait!" He shouted when she attempted to close the door without bothering to greet him, not wanting to see him.

Besides, she was also afraid to be alone with him, especially after what had happened the last time he came to visit her. She was not subjecting herself to the same situation.

However, the door stopped closing as he braced his body against the wooden panel. Then, he pushed the door, forcing his way inside the room, not bothering for an invitation.

"Get out!" She shouted, but the man only smirked at her, ignoring her. He proceeded inside the room but not before closing the door behind him.

She had no choice but to keep backing up, avoiding getting close to him. She had to find a way to make him leave since forcing him was out of the question.

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However, how to do that was the question since she could already feel her pulse racing, her hands trembling, and her heart beating speedily inside her chest. Now, she truly wished she had taken the taekwondo lessons her brother insisted.

"Why? Don't you miss me? I brought your favorite chocolate." He let go of the flowers and balloons on his hand and let them drop on a nearby table while waving the chocolates at her.

"I don't need those. So, please get out. You should not even be here." She shouted again, hoping her voice would carry some weight and make him leave.

"Now, you are hurting my feelings. Why are you even doing this to us?" He threw himself on the bed, propping himself on the pillows as he made himself comfortable.

"Us?" She yelled incredulously, not caring if she caused a disturbance on this floor. However, she doubted anyone would hear her. "There is no us." She looked at him, finding his words hilarious.

"And you believe that I will just let you go like that. I made you, Serena. Without me, you are nothing." He said as he placed his hands behind his head. "Don't bother to run, my darling. Anywhere you go, I will find you."

Coming from him, it was a threat that she should never ignore because he came from an influential family. She did not wonder how he found her. Somebody from the hotel must have reported that she was there.

He was right.

Wherever she hid, he would find her. But it did not mean she should give up and let him win. No! She had had enough of these men using her and thinking they could get away with it.

"I don't owe anything to you. I work hard to get to where I am." She pointed to herself, making an effort not to let him think that he had the upper hand. "And I am not afraid of you. If you don't leave immediately, I will call the police and have you arrested."

She moved to the other side of the room, grabbed her phone, and was about to dial the emergency number, but he was fast. He snatched the phone from her hand and laughed.

"Are you going to call your new loser boyfriend?" He did not even bother to look at the screen but just threw her phone on the nearby wall, bashing it to pieces.

"I heard he is taking your case. That is so sweet." He mockingly muttered as he clutched a handful of her hair as she tried to run away from him, preventing her from reaching the door.

"Let go of me, Elliot. You are hurting me." She begged him as she tried to pry her hair away from his fingers, but he held her tightly, taking her captive.

"Did you consider that you are hurting me by leaving me? So, why should I take pity on you." Elliot said, dragging her to the center of the room and pushing her to the bed.

She scrambled on the linen sheets, hoping to get away, but before she could crawl out of bed, she felt his body cover her, pinning her to the bed. At that moment, she knew she had to find a way to get away before it was too late. She could not give up without a fight.

"Please, let me go." She still tried to beg even though she knew it was futile. But she had to do something to distract him, even if she had to feed his ego.

"Not until you accept that you are forever mine. Let go of this nonsense and retract your suit against me." He said as he lay on top of her, one of his hands wrapped around her neck, forcing her to look back at him.

"I think she already answered you. If you did not understand her with your pea brain, I am willing to repeat it for you." A voice said behind them. "Let go of her." The familiar voice said in his commanding tone.

"Don't you know how to knock? You are trespassing and interrupting a private moment." Elliot shouted angrily, not moving from her position. "There is the door. Leave! And Adam, lock it on your way out." He ordered as if he was talking to a hired help.

"It is you who should let her go and leave this instant." This time, Adam did not wait for him to answer as he pulled him by his collar and dragged him away from her.

But before Adam could react, the other man threw his fist into his face, landing a solid blow into his jaw and making him wobble on his feet. But he quickly recovered as he prepared for his next punch, docking before it hit him.

He threw his arm in his opponent's direction, landing one on his cheeks. When Elliot fell on the floor, he started kicking him, wanting him to learn his lesson and stop bothering Serena again.

"That is enough," Serena shouted, finally finding her voice from the shock of another assault.

Honestly, she slightly took pleasure in watching her former boyfriend hurt as he did to her. She also wanted revenge and made him suffer. But it did not mean she wanted Adam to kill him.

"Stop." She repeated as he pulled Adam away from the injured man. Then, she noticed something else.

A man seemed to stand by the door with a phone in his hand. When he saw her, he turned away and ran. She knew it was either a paparazzi or a bystander who noticed the commotion and decided to take pictures. But that was the least of her problem.

"I guess you win." Elliot pulled himself into a sitting position, holding on to his injured chest from the kick he got from Adam. He gradually stood up and staggered his way to the door.

"I am going to miss you, Serena." He shook his head as if he was sorry. Then, he blew her a kiss before walking out of the door.

Serena could only watch him leave, hoping that was the last time she would see him. But that was wishful thinking since they still had a case to finish. She still had an upcoming battle to win.

Chapter 973: Start of a brand new day

It had been a daily struggle but something she had endured because of the support of her loving and devoted husband. If not for him, she would have given up on life after her traumatic incident.

And, of course, her loving friends, who also did not leave her side and constantly made her feel that she was not alone. She would not make it to her depression if not for all of them.

Jacky admitted she had not yet fully recovered, but she was getting there. All she had to do was to focus on the present and hope that there was a better future for them.

"You have to lift your ass off that bed or else." She warned him as she shook his body to wake him up. But he barely moved as he kept his eyes closed and only moaned in response.

She knew it was the weekend and the only time he could rest. But she wished to surprise him, finding only this moment to show him. They had been busy during the weekdays that they barely had time for each other.

Guiltily, she had been busy trying to catch up with her work which she had neglected all those times that she had been away. Then, she also had to help with the other obligations Dani left behind while she was on leave.

"Come on, Marcus. I know you are tired, but I need you to wake up." Then, she felt him finally move. But instead of lifting his body, his hands snaked around her waist and pulled her on top of him.

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"Can we just go back to sleep and wake up later to whatever you are planning." He sleepily suggested as he returned to sleep with his arms wrapped around her petite body.

Since the accident, she had lost a lot of weight, hardly eating much most times. But she was trying to rectify that by filling herself up with healthy foods and eating on time.

"No." She pushed hard on his chest as she tried to extricate herself from his hold. It was firm but not painful as she struggled to make him let her go. "Come on."

"Yes." He countered as he shifted in his position, pulling her with him until he trapped her underneath his body. "Now, go back to sleep." He commanded as he nuzzled his head between her chin and shoulder blades.

Tempting as it was to remain in his arms and return to a deep slumber, she had already planned their day. She had to force him to stand up and do her bidding. Then, she thought of an idea.

"What are you doing?" He chuckled a bit as her fingers crawled to his soft ticklish part. Then, he rolled to his left, giving her space to move and shift position. Then, she straddled him and kissed him on the lips.

"Jacky!" He moaned as he said her name, complaining and enjoying her action.

If that did not wake him up, then nothing would.

But, of course, her method was effective as he started to take over, moving his hands to her hips to give him more control of her body, guiding her to where he wanted her to go.

However, it was not her point as she pulled herself abruptly away from his body and out of their comfortable bed. This time, she saw him open his eyes and grumble.

"That is not fair." He groaned as he tapped the bed at his side. "Come back to bed and deal with this." Pointing to the tent in his sleeping shorts.

As much as she wished to help him with his problem, she had something else as her priority. "I will take care of that after you do what I want." She negotiated as she walked out of the room, knowing she had accomplished her job.

She believed there was no way he was going back to sleep with his current condition. And just like she predicted, he was striding toward her after just a few minutes in the kitchen.

Instead of waiting on the counter for his coffee, he walked directly behind her as she prepared their breakfast. Then, he wrapped his hands around her body, pushing his body against hers.

She knew what he was doing, but there was no way she was giving in to desire.

"You are a real temptress." He whispered in her ears, making it sound like a nice compliment as he rubbed himself at her back to make her feel his arousal.

He was far from mad or irritated with her but a bit frustrated. Moreover, he was glad because he was finally seeing more and more of her old self. He wished this was not just a phase but the beginning of her full recovery.

"Well, this temptress will fulfill all your desire once you do all her bidding for the day." She promised. "But not before." She added.

"So, what is it you wish me to do again?" He asked, kissing her one more time on her exposed neck before moving away from her, accepting defeat.

He poured coffee into his cup and sat quietly on his chair, watching his wife move around him.

"Eat," Jacky placed a plate in front of him, even picking a piece of the roasted bacon and gently guiding it to his lips, which he munched on with delight.

"Then?" He playfully questioned as he took a piece of bread into his mouth.

"Bathe." She scrunched her nose at him while leaning closer to his armpit.

"I don't stink." He whined but raised his arm across his face and sniffed himself. "See. I smell like a freshly bathed baby."

"Yeah, you are such a baby. Hurry up and get dressed." Jacky teased him again as she also ate her breakfast.

Soon, they were heading out of their apartment with his arm wrapped around her shoulders. After a few more minutes, he drove while she led him in the direction of her surprise.

She hoped that this would be a start of a brand new day.

Chapter 974: A mother and a housewife

Evan watched his family gather around the table, laughing, bickering, and bantering about everything under the sun. Who would have thought that he would end up in this situation? A man who had shied away from commitment.

Now, he had his grandmother, Angela, who had stood by his side all his life. Amelia, who would be his wife soon, hopefully. Eida had turned out to be a good friend, more like a sister he never had. And, of course, their precious Luisa, who had been a light in their darkest days.

"Arrrgghhh!" Goliath had been a small but adorable part of their lives as he barked for his attention. He leaned down under the table and tapped the little rascal on the head, showing him that he was indeed part of the family.

"You are quiet. Is there a problem?" Amelia leaned closer to him, whispering in his ears. She must have noticed that he had not joined the conversation and enjoyed watching the view before him.

"Everything is just perfect." Evan softly uttered, widening his lips into a satisfied smile as he turned his head to face her.

"Hey, you two. I hope that you already have a date for the wedding." Angela shifted her attention to them. "I don't care if you are dressed in rags as you stand in front of a minister, priest, or someone who looked like Elvis, but I want it done soon."

Her biological clock was ticking, and she could not wait for long engagements. She knew when she saw two people so much in love. "But you need to marry Amelia immediately before she bumps her head, realizing she is making a mistake and changing her mind."

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"That is funny, Grandmama. Amelia loves me, and I love her. And nothing is going to change that." He proclaimed, suddenly realizing that it came out of his lips naturally, something he never thought he would ever do in his lifetime.

"Well, then go on with it. I need to see my grandchildren before I pass on to the next world to meet your Grandpapa." Angela insisted. "Besides, Luisa needs cousins to play with and grow up with, don't you, my princess?" Angela touched the child's chubby cheeks, causing her to giggle.

"You see, even Luisa agrees with me." Angela pointed out as she raised her glass to their little pride and joy. "I only wish to see my first grandchild, so I have more to tell your grandfather and parents when I finally see them in the afterlife."

Suddenly, she could not help but feel nostalgic as her eyes filled with tears she refused to shed. It was not a day of sorrow as she placed a beautiful smile on her lips, but a celebration of more good things to come to this family bounded out of love.

"I do agree with Angela. Grand weddings are highly overrated." Eida announced as she stood up and excused herself. "I think our little princess needs her nap, so I am taking her back to her room."

"I am also resting before meeting up with my friends." Angela stood from her chair with the help of Bea, who quickly assisted her.

She met a group of elderly in the community who gathered every weekend to chat, read books, or play for recreation, besides telling their stories about their younger years.

Soon, Evan and Amelia were left in the kitchen to clean up, together with Goliath, who lazily lay on the cold floor. But the two thought it was best, so they could be alone and finally discuss the wedding of their dreams.

"What do you think of what Angela suggested?" Amelia was the first to break the silence that enveloped the room when everyone had left.

She stood up from her chair and started clearing the table, ready to dump the dirty plates on the sink. She did not mind managing the house since she never did have the desire to run an empire.



If she had a dream, it was not a grand wedding or a castle to live in, but a loving husband and children who would come home to her every night. A family she would love and care for all her life.

"Which one?" Evan curiously asked what Amelia was referring to when she hardly paid attention to his grandmother's grumbling.

He also took the empty glasses on the table, helping his future wife with the house chores. He also did not mind doing mundane duties since he had lived most of his life with his grandmother, who taught him to be independent.

"About getting married in front of Elvis." Referring to going to Vegas and having a quick marriage without the fuss.

Her friend was right about not needing a grand ceremony to declare their union. Besides, she hardly had many relatives and friends she would want to invite. In truth, she wished it to be solemn matrimony with only a few people who were dear to them as their witnesses.

"Are you serious? You want to get married at..." Evan seemed surprised by her words, but she believed he had misinterpreted her meaning.

"Not that. I am just saying that we can make it a simple ceremony. And if you don't mind, we can do it soon. I can buy a simple white dress and book a small restaurant for the reception." She explained what she had in mind.

She had not thought about the wedding much but after what Angela said, the idea suddenly formed in her mind. And it was getting her very excited. Who did not want to be married to Evan Blake?

She always thought that she would be Mrs. Amelia Wellington, but Mrs. Amelia Blake seemed to be much, so much, better. Who knew that after losing the man she had loved almost all her childhood, she would find someone else more suitable for her? The man that fate had designated to be her better half.

"Are you sure that is all you want? I don't mind spending on the wedding of your dreams. Don't feel obligated to follow my grandmother's whim." He said as he stood behind her as she worked on the dirty plates before her.

"But that is my wish. I only wish to be married to you and be your loving wife. Isn't that enough?" She knew it was not what most women would want. But to her, there was nobility in being a mother and a housewife.

#### Chapter 975: A grain of salt

He marched into his new warehouse, determined to get to the bottom of his dilemma. He just learned that they caught another one of the people spying against him, another one of his men who had betrayed him.

Tonight, he was determined to get to the bottom of the root of the problem. He had to determine if it was the same man behind this or another enemy he was yet to name.

It would seem that more and more were forming alliances against him. He wanted to know who was fueling this rebellion and why? Did it have anything to do with his association with Haley or his ambition to run for office?

"He is here." Mike followed him into his small office, informing him that the man he wanted to see had arrived. "Do you think he would admit that he had betrayed you, or would he concoct some lie about his involvement in all this?"

He immediately took one of the chairs before him while Gerald sat behind his desk, brooding about his current situation. He could not blame his friend because he would not want to be in his shoes right now.

He bet the man would lie through his teeth to deny leading the mutiny against their boss. They all trusted him, only to discover that he promoted the uprising against Gerald as the new head of the organization.

"We will find out soon enough," Gerald said as he entwined his fingers together in front of him and squeezed it tightly, wanting to feel the pain that he wished to inflict on the man if he had no good excuse for what he had done.

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He had treated the man with much respect because of his close association with his father. Then, in addition, to his support for his position. But he would not tolerate whoever that man was and whatever he had done for him if he would eventually stab him in the back.

"Sir, Don Lorenzo is here to see you." One of his men guarding his office announced by the door.

"Send him in." Gerald touched his gun hidden underneath his desk, itching to shoot the man right between the eyes if he decided to say the wrong words.

He had already proven to them that he had every right to lead this organization, but they seemed determined to replace him with whom? Some stupid asshole who could not differentiate between his face and his ass.

"Gerald, you have a nice place. I heard this is newly acquired." The man confidently greeted him as he entered his domain. He seemed to have no clue why he invited him or was good at acting innocent.

"Don Lorenzo, it is nice of you to accept our invitation," Mike responded to his guest. "Why don't you take a seat beside me?" He offered the other available seat in front of the big boss's desk.

"It is also nice to see you again, Don." Finally, Gerald greeted him, unhooking his hand from his gun to extend his hand to his guest, which the other man took without reluctance but with a friendly smile.

Gerald had to commend the other guy for being calm and collected despite their current situation. But he had more experience in this business than he did. However, he was still the brain of this organization, not him, for a reason.

"As I said, if you need me, I will come to your aid," Don answered him like he was hiding nothing from him.

He wished he could believe his old friend. But once he had proven this man had betrayed him, he would also suffer the same fate as the others. He could not let him live and tell the tale.

"Good." He clapped his hand as if he was happy with his answer. He wanted to see if his demeanor would somehow change, but it remained calm as always.

“So, I am sure we are not here to talk nonsense. Do you have anything you wish me to do for you?” Don asked as if he was in his service.

“Of course, I will not want to waste your time,” Gerald answered, his voice void of absurdity. “So, I will be straight with you.” Gerald shifted in his seat, assuring he had easy access to his gun in case this line of questioning would go south.

“That is what I like about you. Always straight to the point.” Don interrupted him before he could say his question. But he could see that he also made a gesture that alerted his man standing near the door.

As he suspected, he was not clueless about this meeting. He was expecting that he would confront him about his disloyalty. But he would not judge him until he had heard his reasoning and the rest of his story.

“Then, you would not mind answering why you are leading a revolt against me.” He asked, calmly leaning forward to his table to get a better position against the man before him.

He knew his friend was already alerted by his action. So were his men, who Mike had already briefed on what to do. Don Lorenzo might have brought his best men, but he had the numbers. He had the upper hand and control of the situation.

Don remained calm despite his question. He even widened his lips into a smirk while sitting comfortably in his chair. The older man did not seem alarmed by his accusation. Then, he crossed his legs and tapped on his pants as if dusting them off.

“I believe in you. That is why I help you get where you are now.” The man started explaining. “But you have grown weak and soft.” He continued, shaking his head in disapproval. His face looked like he was disappointed in him for some reason.

“Your father knew a traitor, an enemy, and a friend from a mile away. I thought you inherited the same trait as he had. But it took you a while before you caught one of my spies in your organization.” He continued as if he was teaching him a lesson.

One, Gerald noticed the man said. But he already caught two. But Don might not be aware yet of his latest captive. Still, he remained silent, wanting to hear everything he had to say.

He was glad that he was sharing this information without the need for him to force them out of his mouth. At least that would save him the trouble. But still, he had to take everything he had to say with a grain of salt.

Chapter 976: Alive?

This older man might only be planting ideas in his head, telling him lies. Still, he would like to listen to the rest of his tale. After all, he had nothing to lose when he had the upper hand.

“You cast aside our advice as if it meant nothing but shit while you embraced the word of our enemies like it was fucking gold.” His guest uttered in disgust as he finally stood from his chair and slammed his hands on the desk to make his point.

Still, he did not take that as life-threatening but as his mentor, expressing his disappointment. He could tell that his friend almost pulled out his gun, but he signaled him to stand down.

“Are you accusing our leader of concerting with the enemy?” Mike finally spoke up in his defense. He was also outraged by what the other man had said.

“Mike, let him speak. I think he is just explaining his actions.” Gerald calmly stopped his friend from losing his temper.

It was not the time to lose their cool since he wanted to hear what the rest of the man had to say about him. However, he was partially alarmed by what the man had implied with his accusations.

“What are you saying, Don?” It seemed he knew something that he did not. It might be why he was losing the support of the parties in the organization. “Shall we cut the bullcrap?”

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Don might have fed them with these lies, or he had done something he was not even aware of, and now, he was paying the price. But he was done listening to bullshit, wanting to know the root of the problem.

Still, he had to determine the truth before it went beyond his control. He also wished to know if he could still trust this man that had his back for as long as he could remember.

Or should he end his miserable life right here and right now?

“Rosley is not who he says he is,” Don said with a facial expression void of emotion.

He could not read his thoughts, whether the man was telling him the truth. But what he implied was huge. It would mean that he had lost his touch. Maybe his mentor was right about him.

Don Lorenzo fixed his coat, straightening it before stepping away from his desk. Then, he stared at him one last time before turning around, ready to leave.

“Wait!” He shouted at the man before the older man could take another step.

He moved out of his chair and walked toward him. He did not want their conversation to end in a stalemate. He wanted to know where he stood. Was he still an enemy or an ally?

“You can shoot me in the back if you don’t believe a word I just said. But I am telling you the truth.” The man turned around and faced him. “I like you. I even love you like a son.” Don’s hands landed on both sides of his cheek.

“But if you don’t correct your ways. You will lose not only me but the entire organization.” He spoke gently, like a father, advising his son.

He could hear the warning in his words, but not a threat to his life. He was still an ally, but only if he did what his mentor told him. He might be the head of this organization, but without the support of its leaders, he might as well put his head on a spike.

“I hear you.” Gerald finally answered him, grabbing him by the shoulders to reassure him.

Still, he had to conduct his investigation into these new allegations. In their world, there was no absolute certainty except death. The rest was a power game. It was either kill or get killed.

At that moment, there was a gun pointed at his head. Whoever was holding the trigger was still having second thoughts. He had the choice of convincing him not to pull it or shooting him first. But what was the wiser move?

“Good!” The man said as he let go of him and continued on his way, exiting his office with his security without looking back.

He watched his back disappear from his line of vision, but he still kept staring. He debated within himself whether to believe his last words. Did he become weak and soft, as his mentor claimed?

“Do you believe him?” Mike did not like to admit that he was right all along, but Gerald should have listened to him from the start.

“Oddly, I do.” Gerald could not discount the possibility since Mike had already warned him about his association with Haley and her family.

But he was still puzzled by the involvement of the members of the organization in his personal affair. It seemed that he was missing a piece of the puzzle. But he was not stopping until he solved this riddle.

“Do you want me to dig deeper into Haley and her family?” Mike asked, seeing that Don might be telling them the truth.

“Yes.” He said, but he had already done that. He found nothing out of the ordinary. Or was he blinded by his growing affection for Haley that he could not see beyond what was in front of him?

Maybe with Mike’s help, his friend would find something he missed. He had to figure this out soon before the entire organization went against him and ousted him from his throne.

Would that be so bad? Yes. It would mean his death and the people he loved.

But he would not let that happen. As far as the organization was concerned, he was still the best choice to lead them. Don was too tired and old to take his place, while the rest were not as competent as he was. That was the only reason he still had no bullet on his head.

He was lucky that they had no better choice than him. But how long could he assuage them that he was still the only option if they kept losing their faith in him?

How long could he keep Haley alive?

Chapter 977: In a class of her own

Working together on a project and finding it enjoyable was not what she expected from him. She thought she would discover him annoying, self-centered, and a full-blown narcissist, as she first assumed.

But it would seem she had judged him too unfairly. Working together showed them a different side to each other, but trust was not easy to give even if he showed her all his good side.

She had too many bad experiences not to be skeptical of the people she had just met, especially men. Although, she would give him the benefit of the doubt and the chance to prove himself for the success of their job.

"I like what you have done so far." Brenda praised their work, nodding in approval. "I think you two work well together." She continued with a wink, thinking they might be a good match other than work.

But she disagreed with her boss and her matchmaking. Aside from work, she doubted that the two of them would have anything in common. Besides, she could sense that something was wrong with him. He was different. She just could not pinpoint it just yet.

"I think Ria is very good at what she does." Her partner complimented her job, bestowing her the credit.

"I think it was a team effort. Zach also did well." Ria countered, sharing the merit of their work. "But we are far from accomplishing our task." She admitted that they were just halfway through.

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Her boss shifted in her seat before her desk as she faced them. She handed their initial work back to them and spoke. "I still think you two have already done a great job, and I think I will assign you again to another project."

"Thanks." Both of them simultaneously answered, both looking forward to their new assignment.

"Now, get out of my office." Brenda jokingly said, dismissing them with a wide grin on her face.

Ria could already foresee the teasing she would endure when she was alone with her immediate supervisor. They had started to grow close, liked friends since the night her boss took her clubbing.

Brenda believed she was right about the two of them, that they looked good together. But, of course, she begged to disagree. The last thing Ria needed at the moment was office romance. She was here to work, nothing else.

"You know Brenda is right. If not for you, this project would have gone to the can." In truth, Zach believed he was good, but his arrogance sometimes led him astray.

But with Ria contradicting him at every turn, she had managed to direct the project in a more productive outcome. At the same time, she had taught him a few things about himself and how the world worked on the other side of the fence.

Growing up surrounded by people saying that they were better than the rest of the population, it was not easy to change his way of thinking. But now, he finally saw the truth. Without the other people around them, they were also nothing.

"Don't sell yourself short. You also have great ideas in that head of yours. You just needed a little direction." She explained to him, not wanting him to think that she was better than him.

Admittedly, she also thought that he was intelligent. He just needed to be guided in the right direction. But if he learned to control his impulses, he would be unstoppable.

Although she thought they were competing in the same spot, she could not deny that he had a better chance of getting this position. Still, she was not giving up easily. She would also do her best to prove she was worthy of it.

"I guess I better get back to my other work before Alona gives me a wide eye." Zach jokingly said, slightly chuckling, showing off his boyish smile. "Shall we meet again later when you are free to discuss the rest of the paperwork?"

"Sure. I will text you if I have some spare time." She informed him as she proceeded to her desk.

He stood in the hallway, ready to return to his desk but stopped to call her. "Ria." But she was suddenly hesitant to ask her what was on his mind. It was not like him to be tongue-tied like this.

"What is it?" She halted on her steps to look at him. But when he did not answer immediately, she added. "I do not have all day." She stamped her feet impatiently as if that would hurry him up.

"By the way, is there any chance you will want to go out to dinner with me tonight or another night." He swallowed the saliva that had gathered in his mouth before finding the courage to ask her.

He did not know what was wrong with him when it involved her. He had never been like this before with anyone. He never felt unsure about himself, thinking he was inadequate in her presence.

She certainly made him feel that he was not the king of the world with the way she treated him. Unlike the people who knew his family, his name, and his father, she made him believe he was just an ordinary man.

"What?" She was not expecting that again from him. She thought she might have heard him wrong, but she knew what he had said.

"I am asking you out." He finally bluntly enunciated. "On a date." He added, believing he did not stutter and not wanting further confusion.

She looked at him like he had grown a horn or something. She could not fathom what insanity had entered his mind. Did he believe that she was into this kind of game?

"I am sorry, but I am not in the habit of going on a date with a stranger." She answered him, not particularly thrilled with his offer. As far as she was concerned, he was still someone she barely knew.

Although she did feel a pang of excitement go through her body with his suggestion. Still, she was not about to act on her impulse, not again. She was not an innocent girl anymore that would fall for such lines.

"If I see any stranger lurking around, I will guarantee that you will be the first to know. But I am not one, so maybe you can reconsider." He was certainly not used to being turned down, but somehow he had expected it from her.

She was unquestionably in a class of her own.

Chapter 978: No say in the matter

He did not expect his wife would surprise him with a brand-new house. At least a plan to build them one. After the last time he had suggested they moved into another home and failed miserably, he opted to keep his mouth shut about it for now.

Therefore, he could not believe she would go out of her way to work with Haley on this new project, building them a home. He was thankful, of course, to his sister, who suggested it to her, even gifting them the lot and offering to build them their dream house.

At this moment, he could not keep his eyes off the beautiful woman pacing around their living room or what it would be when the house finally finished.

“What do you think?” She turned to him after she explained what she planned to do with it. She wanted his opinion and input on it, but he could not care if they lived in a shoe box as long as she kept smiling at him like the one she had on her lips right now.

“Perfect.” He uttered, but he barely heard what she said, only referring to the woman who had already fulfilled his dreams.

He never thought he would find the perfect person to fill up the emptiness in his heart. Luckily, she crossed his path and owned him from head to toe. He never had a chance with her because she snared him.

He did give a fight, ridding hard of his feelings for her, but she was just too persistent. Her presence filled the room, and her absence created a void, leaving him to seek her out. He knew then that without her, his life would be empty.

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“You are hardly listening.” She complained. “Marcus, please be serious.” Her hands went to her waist as her head tilted to the side. A sign that she demanded his attention.

“But I am serious. You are doing a great job, Jacky.” He complimented his wife. “You, too, Haley.” He turned to his sister, listening attentively to what they would want to do to the room. “I don’t think I need to mess it up with my ideas.”

Honestly, he liked what Jacky had done to his bachelor’s pad, mostly getting rid of his things that screamed too much masculinity. She managed to create a harmonious room that suited his style and hers.

“You are not just saying that,” Jacky said, still skeptical, but he knew she could see that was the truth.

She moved toward her husband, standing before him and staring into his eyes. She wanted to see if he was saying that to appease her. But she would like his opinion on this.

It was not just her home they were building but their future together. She might have been sidetracked by what happened to them, but she was trying to get back on the right path.

“Believe me. Marcus is telling you the truth. My brother would not know anything about style.” Haley moved forward to join them. She might be teasing, but that was one thing his brother did not inherit from their father.

Still, his perseverance and determination was an inherent trait of a Rosley. She was still proud of her brother for his accomplishment, even if he did not carry their name. He had managed to become successful through his merits.



In her case, she still had a lot to prove before she could get out of the shadow of her father's name. That was the difference in living under her father's influence.

"Fine." Jacky raised to her toes and planted a gentle kiss on her husband's jaw. "You win." Then, she turned around to face her friend. "Let us proceed with the plan." Deciding on the matter.

"Then, if you would step out of the way and go on your trip. I have a lot of jobs to do." Haley pointed to the door, indicating that she did not need their presence anymore at the scene.

She heard that the couple had decided to get away for the weekend. She believed it was a good idea. She was thankful that Jacky seemed to be getting back on her feet, and her brother seemed happy about it.

She always believed that they were a perfect couple. They were two people scarred by their past but were able to heal through their love. She wanted that, more than ever, for herself.

She envied Jacky for having someone to love her like that. She also wanted someone to would do anything to make her happy. Someone who would give his life for her to prove how much he loved her.

"Thank you, Haley, for all of this," Jacky said as she hugged her sister-in-law. "By the way, how is Gerald? I have not seen him much." She asked, knowing that the two were still seeing each other.

She heard rumors of a wedding in the mix, but since she had been out of circulation, she was a bit late with the updates. But she hoped to change that by making time to spend with her friends as soon as she got back from their short trip.

"He is busy with his career and the possibility of running for office," Haley answered her friend, but her eyes glanced to her brother, who had an unreadable expression.

Marcus already expressed his displeasure about her relationship with Gerald, but he would not exactly tell her what it was about Gerald that he did not like.

But Jacky seemed clueless about it since she was excited about her relationship with the man in question. But as far as she was concerned, the only one who mattered in this relationship was her and Gerald's opinion and no one else.

"I think it is time that we leave because we might miss our flight." Marcus was not interested in talking about his sister and lover.

He had already expressed his opinion on that matter, but as her sister had pointed out, she was a grown woman capable of deciding on her own. He only hoped that she was making the right decision, or better yet, she would realize that she was making a mistake with that man.

But if he had his way, he would not want Gerald to be part of her sister's life now or ever. He would not trust Haley's life with a man like him, but this was not his life and his decision. He could only give advice but had no say in the matter.

Chapter 979: The dynamic duo

She looked at herself in the mirror. It seemed like she had drastically changed since she had a child. She noticed that her hips were broader than before, and she had extra fat that was not supposed to be there. It was nothing an exercise could not fix.

Her face was still the same upon gazing in the mirror, just tired and needed a few exfoliants and pampering to remove the dead skins and the eye bags. Other than that, she believed she was still the same.

“Are you truly, absolutely doing this?” She asked herself upon looking at her reflection in the mirror after taking a long warm bath to relax her nerves.

But the face that stared at her had no answer. Her reflection was as clueless as her as she debated again within herself. Things were different now, she told herself.

She did not even know if she was convincing or trying to talk herself out of doing it. She was so conflicted with her current situation that she could not even move out of the bathroom to pick up a dress, and time was running out.

“The difference is...” She mumbled to herself, trying to weigh the pros and cons of her situation. “I have a child now.” She pointed out her number reason not to go through with it. “But you are also alone and lonely.” Her mind reminded her.

But did she need a companion in life? She believed having a child should be enough. But her friend insisted that she should go out and date again. But it did not feel right. Or was she just afraid to try again?

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She stared at her face, focusing on her eyes, wondering if she could read something in their depths, an answer to her dilemma. But all she saw was confusion. The same thing she felt inside.

She wondered how the single ladies with kids did this. How did they forget the past and move on to the following chapters of their lives? Did they ever love the father of their child? Or they could just easily fall in love with the next guy.

“Sarah, hurry up! Luisa and I want to take pictures before you leave.” Amelia teased her outside her door, probably carrying her child in her arms as they waited for her to finish fixing herself with her date.

Yes, she finally agreed to go out on a date. But now, she was having second thoughts. Was she feeling guilty? She believed so. She was in love with the father of her child. By going on a date, she felt like she was cheating.

But the man she loved was about to get married to another woman. He was about to father another child with her. Therefore, she was also free to do the same. But then again, her heart would not seem to want it.

She felt she was still a prisoner in that relationship. Would she ever be free? She doubted as her heart continued to long for him. Maybe this was her fate. It was her punishment for all her wrongdoings, whether in her previous life or the present.

"I am not going to the prom." She shouted back, hurrying out of the bathroom and quickly picking a dress she could wear to this dinner date.

She might as well get this over with, not wanting to stand her date when she already agreed to go out with him this once.

After seeing the story about the Prince and his impending marriage to a beautiful and probably deserving woman, she decided to focus her life on the future of her daughter.

There was no more need for her to mourn her loss because she did not lose something she did not have in the first place. All she could do was move on and concentrate on things she still had control of, like her child's life.

"But this is your first date after a while. Luisa and I want it to be memorable." She heard her friend behind the closed door, giggling with her little princess.

She could already imagine her daughter making those gurgly smiles as Amelia forced her to laugh. She learned that Luisa was ticklish in her toes, remembering the same trait that her father had.

Now, why did that thought enter her mind? She quickly tried to shove it at the back of her memories, not wanting to ruin what could be an enjoyable evening. Those were Amelia's words replaying in her brain.

"Just let me finish in peace." She smiled as she stared at her face in the vanity mirror, hoping her friend was right about this.

Maybe she just needed to meet new people. Not necessary to hook up with them, but to make friends. She had been living in this city for months now. Yet, she barely knew anyone except the people she worked with at her job.

"Fine, but let us see the finished product before you leave," Amelia said as she and Luisa walked away from outside her door.

She had asked her date not to pick her up. Instead, they would meet at the restaurant for their dinner reservation. Yes, it was the owner of the establishment they had their celebration.

Yesterday, she noticed the card was inside her purse, stuck with her things. She did not remember putting it there. Truthfully, she remembered leaving that card on the table, untouched.

But when Amelia saw it on her desk, she immediately texted him and set up a date with the man they met the other night. Her friend was pretending to be her, of course.

Nonetheless, Amelia and Angela had convinced her to show up to this date, saying that she needed to get laid. But that was not the reason she was going.

She only wanted to prove to her friends that she was happy with only Luisa at her side. She did not need a man to complete her. It was the only reason why she was dating this man.

She only wanted to confirm that she could be happy and content without a man in her life. She and Luisa were better off with just the two of them, a perfect team of mother and daughter, the dynamic duo.

## Chapter 980: A carbon copy

She stared at her date for a few seconds, looking outside the window of his restaurant. She could turn around and head back to her car before he noticed her or go straight to the door and meet him. It was her only two options. But which one to choose?

Eventually, propriety won.

He seemed a decent man and did not deserve for her not to show up. Besides, what was the worse that could happen? They would have a terrible dinner and would not want to see each other again. Would that be so bad? She doubted.

"I am here to meet with..." But before she could finish talking to the hostess at the front of the fancy restaurant, she was interrupted by the manager.

"Ms. Sarah Richmond." The man called, and when she acknowledged her name. "Please follow me to your table." Then, the man ushered her inside the room.

She was expecting to see her date in the room, but he seemed to have disappeared somewhere. Then, she followed the man in his black suit as he guided her further to the far end of the restaurant.

It seemed to be a more private area. But a spacious room for only one table. Or it was stripped of the other tables, leaving only one for this particular occasion. But that sounded ridiculous.

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No one would do that for her. Although, she could think of one who would go through the trouble of doing that for her. But this man was not the man she loved.

She was also not the same girl as before. The idea was absurd, stopping herself from making a fuss over such a simple matter. It was a mere coincidence and not a date to win her heart.

"Please take a seat." The man offered, helping her to the chair. "Mr. Martin will be joining you shortly. Can I offer you a drink?" The man picked up the wine bottle from its ice bucket and was about to pour it into her glass, but she declined.

She did not want to consume alcoholic drinks while breastfeeding her child for as long as she could. It was a small sacrifice she would make for her baby and her health.

Although doctors said it was safe in moderation to drink, she still felt she could wait until she had stopped feeding her child with her breast milk.

"Thank you." She said before the man left her side, giving her a menu to peruse while she waited.

Suddenly, she felt neglected and alone as she stared at the beautifully decorated room. With the other guests, she would have something alive to observe. Instead, she had nothing else to do but stare at the exquisite paintings on the walls. She had to admit. It was boring.

Suddenly, she regretted not having that drink as she waited. Fortunately, she did not have to wait long as her date finally strolled into the room and joined her.

"I am sorry, Sarah. I did not mean to be late on our first date, especially in my restaurant." He quickly approached her and apologized profusely, taking her hand and planting a gentle kiss on it.

"That is ok. I understand that you are a busy man." She said as she pulled her hand gently away from him, not comfortable that he was holding it firmly in his.

"I know this is not the first impression I wish to show you." He continued as he took a seat next to hers. "But you are right. It was an emergency I could not avoid." He explained, smiling at her apologetically.

"Anyway, have you chosen anything you wish to order?" He asked as he waved his hand in the air. The man from earlier immediately strode to them with another younger man in tow.

"Everything on the menu seems appetizing. Maybe you can recommend something special." She suggested, wanting to be gracious to her host.

She dropped her menu since she hardly looked at it and handed it back to the younger boy taking their orders. Her date immediately complied with her request and eloquently dictated their orders.

"I hope you have no allergies because we serve the best seafood dishes in town." He announced when the two servers left them to be alone again in the room but not before he noticed that she declined the wine from the younger wine.

"You don't drink?" He asked, lifting the wine glass in his hand while looking at her disbelievingly. "This is our finest wine." He declared with a bit of curiosity in his tone. "I am sure you will love the sweetness and fruitiness of its flavor."

"I love a fine wine, but I am abstaining from it while breastfeeding my child." She bluntly stated, not planning to keep that a secret from him.

Besides, it might be best to get this charade over with, knowing he would lose interest in her once he learned that she recently gave birth to a bouncing baby girl.

No single man, who looked like a very eligible bachelor, would want to be tied into a relationship with a woman who had a child out of wedlock. It was better to get rid of that illusion than to believe in a happy ending.

"Oh!" He looked surprised but not appalled. Was that a good sign? She did not know as she kept her eyes focused on him. Where else would she look when there was no one else around?

"Is it a boy or a girl? But let me guess." He continued after the initial astonishment. He stared at her face as if studying her, showing no sign that he was uncomfortable about her situation.

"A..." She was about to answer him, but he stopped her.

"Wait, don't ruin it for me." He protested as he held his hand before him. "I think it is a girl." He assumed. "A beautiful and adorable girl who looks like you."

The beautiful and adorable part was accurate, but looking like her, she begged to differ. She believed Luisa had taken most of her looks from her father. That was why it was harder and harder to look at her every day without being constantly reminded of him.

Her child was a carbon copy of her father. An apple that did not fall far from the tree.