

## Royal Contract 1041

Chapter 1041 Continue the act

Despite how much she tried to ignore his closeness, she could not. She could feel his warmth seep through their clothes and travel through her body. Instead of being uncomfortable, she craved more.

She tried to concentrate her attention on the other couple, but she could not dismiss the effect of his skin against hers and how his fingers seemed to caress the top portion of her arms.

“Simple.” The older man said as if it was a no-brainer. “All you have to do is say yes to everything she tells you.” He proudly said, directing his words to Zach, who seemed to listen to him attentively. “I believe that she is always right.” The man added.

The woman, in return, tapped her husband on the cheeks. “And I usually am.” She seconded her husband’s statement. “But learn to acknowledge his efforts.” The woman looked at her as if she was talking to her specifically.

But Ria could tell that she loved her husband with all her heart, the same as him. She could read it in their body language, the smile on their lips, and the depth of the love in their eyes, how deep their affections were for each other.

She suddenly wished she could find a man that would love her the same way. But not just her because that was not the tricky part. He also had to love her son unconditionally.

But where should she look for such a man? It seemed impossible, just like looking for a needle in a ton of haystack. She was not saying he did not exist. But he might already belong to someone else. Or in another part of the world where she could not reach him.

Still, she would settle for not so perfect man. But someone who could respect her and her son. Then maybe someday he would love her for what she was, with all her faults and weaknesses. And treat her son right.

She turned to the man, whose arms wrapped around her shoulders, watching him laugh with the other couple. She could not help but be wary, knowing that, in a way, she was falling for him despite all the warning bells.

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He was not the man, yet her heart seemed to choose him.

Thankfully, the elevator doors opened, and they had to part ways with the other couple.

“Are you sure about this? I will rent a car, and then we can be on the way.” Zach removed his arms around her and faced her instead as they stood on the lobby floor. Then, she remembered that she was supposed to be running away.

“Yeah, I will love to join you on this trip.” She gave her approval, wanting to be safely in the confine of a moving car, speeding away from this place.

And minutes later, he showed her that he got a key dangling on his finger. Then, he assisted her to the front of the hotel, where a car was already waiting for them.

She only normally breathed when she heard the engine steadily humming on the street as the wind blew on her hair. It was almost dark, so there was not much to see, but the air was cool to the skin.

"I can close the roof if you don't want the wind to mess with your hair." He offered, seeing that her hair was flying everywhere.

She turned to him, contemplating for a second but shook her head. She liked the wind on her face and did not care much about how her hair would look later.

"No, I like it just the way it is." It was her first time riding a convertible. She had always wondered what it would be like on it when she saw someone driving it on the street. Now, she could say she knew the feeling.

"Me too." He glanced her way, giving her a boyish smile that made him look younger and sweet.

She had to look away, pretending to admire the view outside even if she barely saw anything but the few areas where the light of the lamppost touched. Other than that, the shadow seemed to grow as darkness took over most places.

But deep inside, she was afraid that the more she spent time with him, the more she would fall deeper into this pit. Then, finding a way out might be impossible.

"So, what made you change your mind?" He finally asked again the question that was left hanging earlier.

It might be a long way to their destination, and she figured she could not keep dodging his question. She debated whether telling him the truth was better or concocting a lie was the safer course.

But one way or another, she had to tell him something as she glimpsed at his face, which seemed to be void of the playfulness he had earlier.

Could she trust him?

Did she want him to get involved?

But did he wish to be part of her messy life? She did not think so.

"Ok. Let me change my question." He moved the car to the side of the road and parked it before turning to her. "What spooked you that you were running away like someone was after you?"

Of course, he noticed that.

"I was running away from..." She started, but still, she hesitated to tell him as she turned to look outside.

He seemed to be a good guy. Yes, it looked like he liked her. Was that enough? Would it be fair to involve him in her situation? No. He might think he could help, but he would find himself in the crossfire. In the end, he would regret meeting her.

No, it was not ok to tell him. It was enough that he helped today. That should be enough.

She could see that he was waiting, so here was her answer. "...a large rodent in my room." She covered her face, pretending to be ashamed of her pettiness.

"The hotel staff is dealing with it now, but I don't want to return to my room until I am sure they have taken care of it." She finished her story, hoping that her acting was believable.

For now, she would have to live with her lies. She believed it would save her from more complications. At least this man had saved her, even if he did not know that.

"That was it. You seemed to be running for your life because of a rat." He exclaimed, looking skeptical.

She hated lying to him but knew it was for the best. But when she nodded, confirming his statement. It made them both laugh. At least on her part, she would like to continue the act.

Chapter 1042 Father material

He drove her home after they visited the hospital, but silence filled the air around them. When they entered his apartment, he could feel the tension that was growing between them.

He could tell there was a big elephant in the room, but he still chose to ignore it. Until now, he did not know how to address their current situation.

"I will be in the kitchen." She uttered without looking at him as she went straight to the other room while he went straight to his office and buried himself with work.

However, his eyes were staring at the letters but nothing registered in his mind. His mind kept reverting to the woman in the kitchen, either cooking dinner or crying her eyes out.

He had seen how she looked at the baby in Dani's arms. She must be imagining it was their baby. He noticed the longing in her eyes and sensed her wish to build a family, but she kept it to herself.

"Damn!" He hissed at himself as he slammed his hands on the wooden table before sweeping all the contents on the surface onto the ground, leaving the floor littered with his things.

He leaned into his chair and tilted his head to the ceiling, staring blankly at the white space. He inhaled a large amount of air into his lungs and slowly expelled it out of his mouth.

He knew he had to find a solution to his situation because they could not keep going like this. He stood up from his chair and left the mess he had created on the floor. He would deal with it later. In the meantime, he had something else he needed to face.

As he expected, the living room was void of life. He knew she would still be in the kitchen, waiting for him. When he entered the other room, he found her behind the counter, staring at the food she had made.

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"I was about to call you." She said without looking up, but he could not tell if she had been crying.

"Dinner is ready." She announced as she turned around to get some plates.

Emotions were not his forte, so it was hard for him to deal with situations like this. It was the only thing that his father had never taught him. In truth, his father told him never to cry because it was a weakness that could kill him.

“Let me help you.” He offered, moving closer to her position, getting the glasses and utensils nearer his side.

Then, he helped her set up the table, but no one dared to utter another word. At least not until they were both sitting on the opposite side of the table.

“I already schedule a doctor’s appointment for tomorrow.” She said, finally looking at his face, probably reading his reaction. “I am not saying you come with me, but I will not mind if you want to.”

He contemplated her offer, weighing the complication of the situation. Of course, he expected she would get an appointment to confirm her pregnancy.

But after the day she told him about her pregnancy, they had never discussed it again until now. So, he assumed she would go to the doctor without informing him.

“Do you want me to go with you?” He returned the question to her, determining how much she wanted him to get involved in this pregnancy and their child if, indeed, she was pregnant.

He read that some pregnancy tests could test positive. However, after a thorough examination, it could turn out negative. Yes, in some way, he was hoping that she was not pregnant. That would mean fewer complications. But that was unlikely to happen since that was just a slim chance.

Although, she was not showing any signs that she was carrying his child. She believed she was. And they said mother instincts were never wrong. At least, that was what he remembered his mother always told him when he was young.

“Only if you want.” She answered, which only meant yes, based on her tone and body language. Despite what she said about raising their child without him, she still wanted him to be part of it.

Yes, he could marry her and be the father of their child. But what future would he give his family? A life of crime was not the way to raise a child. He would know that since he grew up in one.

He never wanted commitment.

He never wanted a wife.

And he unquestionably never wanted a child. But here he was, facing all the things he never wanted.

“But you don’t have to, Gerald.” She added, probably seeing the hesitation in him. She lowered her eyes to the plate before her, pretending to concentrate on her meal, but she hardly ate anything. The food went in circles, except for the few bites she put in her mouth and forced to swallow.

“I am sorry, Haley, but I have a valuable client tomorrow that I can’t cancel. But if you text me the time and the place, I will try my best to catch up.” He knew it was not what she wanted to hear.

But, if he showed up in that clinic, her life would automatically be in danger. His presence alone would make his allies and enemies suspicious of his current situation.

If they confirmed her pregnancy, his enemies would use her situation as leverage against him. They would raise her life and their child as potential targets.

On the other hand, if he created a diversion that would put the spotlight on him, away from her, nobody would bother to look her up. She could have herself checked without anybody being the wiser.

"That is ok." Haley sounded disappointed, but what did he expect? She would jump for joy. "I understand."

But did she? He doubted.

"I am..." But before Gerald could apologize, the shrilling sound of his phone interrupted the silence. He immediately excused himself from the table upon seeing Mike's name on the screen.

He knew he was running away from his responsibility, but he believed it was for the best. He might have found a fragment of his humanity, but was that enough to make him a father material? No, it was not.

Chapter 1043 Heading into a trap

Gerald believed he was not a total monster like everybody thought. At least those people who knew his real identity. But he had to be one under some circumstances. His position demanded it from him.

Otherwise, he still considered he was a decent human being deep inside. What her mother taught him still resided inside his heart, only overshadowed by his father's influence.

But somehow, meeting Ethan shed some light in the darkness that cloaked his identity. Somehow, he had recovered some humanity when he felt his love, despite the short time he became a father to him.

Still, it was not enough.

"Yes, Mike." He quickly answered his call, knowing that it might be urgent. His friend was not likely to call at this time for social calls. Either it involved business or trouble. However, most of the time, it was the latter.

He walked away toward the balcony where he could have some privacy. He could not return to his office since he had trashed the place, but he could not stay where Haley could overhear their conversation.

"Are you secure?" His friend asked, which automatically sent alarms in his mind. It could only mean one thing. There was trouble around the corner. "But I doubt that you are."

He suddenly looked around, checking if there was any danger around the vicinity, but all seemed quiet. Therefore what was his friend talking about on the line?

"I have intel, but I need to meet you as soon as possible in the Playground." He knew then that this was no drill. Something big was happening, and it was coming for him.

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"Give me thirty minutes." He told his friend since he still had to assure Haley would be safely back in her home before he left her.

But whatever was happening, he could not let it touch her. She could not be involved, especially if she was carrying his child. At the moment, she was his priority.

“Ok.” His friend said before the call ended. There was no time for chitchat because whatever was about to take down. He could not wait for it.

He rushed back to Haley’s side, but instead of continuing their meal, he had to tell her they had to leave. He knew she would feel like he rejected her, but it was better than seeing her lying on the floor, bathing in her blood.

He would have to find a way to make it up to her when all of this was over. But the question remained. Would it ever end? What he had here was his life. Nobody walked out of this life standing.

“I am sorry, but maybe we can continue this conversation some other time because there was an emergency and I have to leave. I can drop you at your place before I head back to the office.” He offered.

The look he gave him told him she was incredibly disappointed with him. But he would accept her reaction than see her hurt. Then, she stood from her chair without saying a word.

She gracefully walked toward the counter and took her bag and keys from the marble top. Then, she turned and walked toward him. He expected she would slap him on the cheek. After all, he deserved it.

On the contrary, she leaned over and planted a soft kiss instead before she stared into his eyes. There was no anger in them, just sadness. As if she had accepted their fate.

“I can drive myself home. But be safe.” Haley uttered with her soft, angelic voice. “Maybe we will see each other around.” It sounded like a goodbye as she calmly said it before leaning again to kiss him on his lips.

But could he blame her if she decided for him? She had said what he was afraid to tell her. It was over between them. What about if they had a child? He believed it was better if he was not in the picture.

Now, he understood the decision that Ethan had to make when he decided not to look for him. Because he thought it was the best for him. But what if he was making a mistake? What if his child needed a father?

What if he needed his child? Would he regret this moment?

No, he could not think like that. A child had no place in his world. She also did not belong in the darkness. She was the only light that shone in his black heart. He could not taint her with the evil that was him.

“Maybe,” Gerald answered her with all the resolve he could muster. He knew he had to let her go. “Be safe and take care of our baby.”

Finally, he had said what he needed to tell her. He knew it was the final string that held them together. Now, he was setting her free. It was the only right thing to do.

“Thanks. It was great until it lasted.” She lifted her hand into his face, caressing his cheek for the last time before she walked away and never looked back.

She was out the door by the time he turned around. But then again, he still remembered the danger. He could not just let her leave without the assurance that she was protected.

He moved like his life depended on it, checking his phone in his pocket and grabbing his keys on the table by the door. He rode his car, following hers at a considerable distance. He did not want her to notice that he was following her.

When he saw her enter the domain of his father's mansion, he knew that nothing would happen to her. She would be safe for now under her father's protection.

"I am sorry." He uttered one last time before he turned his car around to the location of his meeting with his friend.

As he drove down the busy street of this buzzing city, he gradually slowed down near a pickup truck with garments filling his backload. Then, he threw his phone into the back of the moving vehicle, ditching anything that could trace his whereabouts.

Whoever would be tracking him would follow the truck instead. He also used one of his old cars that had no GPS tracking. When his friend said the Playground, he was not referring to his club but a place where only they knew.

He drove fast, making several detours to lose anyone who might follow him. Then he went straight to his destination when he guaranteed he was alone.

Despite the years of his friendship with his friend, Mike, he still could not fully trust him. It was not that he sensed anything wrong with him. His father's words would not allow him to put his life in anyone else's hands.

Not even his friend, who stayed and supported him in every battle. He could still end up betraying him in the end. He grabbed his gun hidden in a secret compartment underneath his seat.

Then, he checked the magazine, hoping it had enough bullets if he ended up in a gunfight. Then, he tucked it in his pants, underneath his jacket. He had to be always ready.

Still, he could be heading into a trap.

Chapter 1044 Not much

Still, she was glad that she had escaped the clutches of her ex-boyfriend. That was the only important thing at that moment. She would not be shocked if Ryan resorted to his dirty tactics.

He was not a man of his word and had always been a bad loser. It was unfortunate that she fell for his act and believed his lies. If she had listened to the few friends who had warned her against him, she would not be in this situation.

Still, she did not want to regret meeting him because he gave her a handsome and adorable son. She just wanted to learn from that mistake and never do it again.

"You seemed to be so far away." He sneaked up behind her. Not intentionally, she guessed, but she did not notice him approach since she was engrossed in her thoughts. "Are you ok, Ria?"

She was just mildly startled by his sudden nearness, but not enough to scare her away. After all, she had easily identified his voice. Still, the knowledge that he was standing inches away had made her body more aware of him. It was like her instinct was starting to recognize him.

“I was just admiring the view.” She pointed out the beautiful city below them. At least the various lights illuminated the entire large area below them, creating a sparkling view that almost competed with the stars above it. “Thanks for taking me here, Zach.”

He took her to an elevated spot where they could oversee the entirety of the landmass covering the city below. Then, he made her stand on the edge of the cliff. But, of course, safety handrails prevented her from toppling down the crevice below.

The only highest point she had been to in her life was the office she had been working at present. From there, the only view she saw was the other high-rise building surrounding her and the sky above it.

“Just be careful not to slip.” He pointed at the dark cavity underneath them that seemed to have no end. “That is a bottomless pit. Nobody that fell there had ever been recovered alive or dead.” Zach warned her, using a voice that sent chills down her spine.

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That forced her to let go of the handrails and step back, making her accidentally bump into him. In turn, it slightly frightened her since she almost lost her balance.

She did not want to fall in there and be the next victim. Her son still needed a mother. That was the first thought that came to her mind as fear spooked her within.

“Hey, I am sorry.” He suddenly held onto her shoulders as he tried to steady her before she lost her equilibrium. “I was only kidding. I did not mean to scare you.” He quickly explained when he realized what he had done.

“It is just a few meters fall but still high enough to break someone’s neck.” He added, which did not help in the situation.

Sometimes, she wondered how women dealt with men’s immaturity. It seemed their reasoning stopped developing even if their body kept growing. Or was she misjudging everyone because of her unfortunate incident with one?

Nevertheless, her fear had been her guide through all these years, preventing her from making the same mistake. She knew it would never lead her astray as long as she avoided getting involved with men.

“I think I have enough of this place. Is there anything else you would like to show me?” Ria told him as she got out of his grip and moved back to the car, slightly annoyed at his insensitivity.

As much as she would like to avoid spending more time with him, she believed she picked the lesser evil by going with him instead of staying in her hotel room.

“Well, we can grab dinner in a diner not far from here and continue on our trip if you don’t wish to return to the hotel just yet.” He suggested as he joined her inside the car.



She pulled the seatbelt and locked it before deciding to answer his question. "Ok." She believed it was better than going back since she had no idea what was waiting for her in the hotel.

She believed that if she made her ex wait long enough, he would eventually lose interest in her and go away. Then, this fiasco would be nothing more than a terrible memory she could shove aside.

She could return to her peaceful life with her son as if she did not have a horrible encounter with her ex-boyfriend. Because staying away from Ryan was the best for her and her son.

"Again, I am sorry. I did not mean to scare you." He probably sensed her irritation, making him look guilty and apologetic.

She could tell he would like to say more but instead decided to stay quiet. He probably had nothing good to say, so it was better to keep his mouth shut.

"That is ok as long as you won't do it again." She decided to help him, sensing his sincerity. At least his eyes seemed sorry as she glanced at him, but still, she wanted him to learn his lesson too.

It was no joke to play with someone's life since the result could be devastating not only to them but the people who would be affected by the chain reaction.

Who would take care of her son if something terrible happened to her? She would not want him to end up with his irresponsible monster of a father and his horrific family. That would be the last thing she would wish for Edison.

"By the way, that was not a good joke. Never do it again." Ria informed him before they both fell into silence. He started the engine and drove while she gazed outside her window and pretended to admire the view.

Were men always this childish that everything to them was either a game, a joke, or a prank? She began to question. Or she seemed to be hanging with the wrong crowd or man.

But there were times that she saw him as someone responsible, kind and caring, but there were also those few times that he seemed to be the opposite. What did she know about him? Not much.

#### Chapter 1045 Stupid heart

She remembered how she hated it when Ryan played with her feelings and then said sorry, using all the tricks in the book to make her forgive him.

As she said, she was stupid and naive then, so she did, repeatedly, until it was too late. She was already pregnant when she learned that Ryan only used her because he needed to win a wager. She was the pawn that they manipulated to play their betting game.

First, he had been kind to her until he befriended her. She was one of those girls who would concentrate on her studies rather than attend some stupid party. So, she had become a nice challenge for the frat boys.

"Come on, Ria. I need help with this. I will be eternally grateful to you if I pass this exam." Ryan walked to her after class for the first since she studied at their school.

She thought nobody noticed her except her few friends, so she was surprised he was talking to her. But the naive her still entertained his request and helped him. For a couple of weeks, he had constantly hanged out with her.

Second, he pursued her, sending her flowers and chocolates and taking her out to dinner when she finally accepted a date. She was overwhelmed by the attention he was giving her. After all, he was one of the most popular guys on campus.

“Are you sure you would like to take me out?” Not that she had not been on a date before, but not with a guy like him. He was the guy that every woman in their class wanted. Why would he pick her?

“Why not? You are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen.” Of course, she would have never believed him if she had been thinking clearly. Unfortunately, she allowed his charms to cloud her judgment.

Third, she remembered it started with a kiss, giggling at the thought that he would want to kiss a girl like her. She was no one but a wallflower. Someone that nobody saw in a crowded place.

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“What are you doing, Ryan?” She asked as she stared into his mesmerizing eyes. In her defense, he did have great orbs that seemed to hypnotize her. Still, it should not be enough for her to let him take advantage of her.

“Kissing you if you let me.” He leaned closer until their breath mingled in the small space separating them. But the stupid her, let him.

Then, lastly, taking what she never actually held sacred but still would have chosen to give to a man who deserved it. At that time, she thought it was him. To her, it was the best memory of her life until it became a nightmare.

“I don’t think this is a good idea.” Ria stopped in her tracks when Ryan pulled her inside his room, away from the others.

He took her to his home, where a party was underway at the poolside of his family’s massive mansion. But everything was getting rowdy, so he suggested showing her around the place.

“Why? I only want some quiet time with you.” He told her as he continued to coerce her until they had reached his bed. Then, he tapped the side of the bed, inviting her to join him as he sat comfortably.

“Come on, Ria. I don’t bite.”

The naive her took over, accepting his invitation even if something deep inside her told her to take precautions. But her inexperience was no match against him and his charms.

“You are making me the luckiest man in the world,” Ryan whispered in her ears as he peppered her skin with soft kisses that seemed to immobilize her in her spot.

She gave him what he wanted, believing they had finally consummated their love. All she saw were butterflies and rainbows, thinking it was magical. She was on cloud nine as she stared at the man beside her.

After that night, he began to ignore her. He always had an excuse not to see her.

And then, one day, she was looking for him, and one of his friends pointed to the gym. "Ryan," She was about to call him but stopped. He had his arms wrapped around another woman.

She recognized her as his ex-girlfriend, who dumped him, the one who broke his heart. Were they back together? She asked herself. Then, she witnessed him kiss her thoroughly and watched his hands roam around her body, making out in the corner of the gym.

She could not believe it, but she had to find out why. What was going on? Were they over since she had no idea if they had broken up? But then again, were they even together in the first place?

"I thought you might have fallen in love with that girl and left me." The girl pouted as she momentarily pulled away from his kiss.

She knew the other girl saw her as she approached them, but instead of stopping, that girl wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him again as if claiming him.

"Of course, that is not possible. You know what the bet was. I can't lose." Ryan convinced her to understand. "Besides, do you think I would fall for a girl like her? Ria was a joke."

She felt like a knife had just gutted her heart as she saw the sly smile on her lips when she glanced her way. His answers had torn her into pieces as she listened to the rest of their conversation.

She would not have believed this if she did not hear it with her ears. She had fallen madly, deeply in love with him that she had imagined a future with him.

What a joke!

But the funny thing was, she was the joke.

Not long after, she heard mild giggling behind her. When she turned around, their pack of friends surrounded her. Then, they started laughing louder and louder.

Eventually, she looked at him, hoping he would say this was a prank. He was only kidding, but the smirk on his lips confirmed what she did not want to believe.

He fooled her. And all she could blame was her stupid heart.

Chapter 1046 There was hope

"No!" She uttered, almost out of breath. She could hardly hear her voice, finding it hard to control the pain gripping her entire body.

It was like someone held her heart in his palm and squeezed it tightly, rendering her paralyzed, unable to breathe. She forced her hand left and right, up and down, but to no avail. She remained just staring.

At what? That was the question.

When she opened her eyes, everything in her dream seemed to vanish. Jacky could not picture any image and hardly remembered anything that had transpired while unconscious.

The only remnant that she had a dream, or more or less a nightmare, was her quickened heartbeat, the sweat on her forehead, shaking hands, and heavy breathing. But everything else became a blur as her eyes stared at the blank space above her.

“It was nothing but a dream.” She told herself as she shook off the odd feeling that had cloaked her body.

It had been quite a while since she had a nightmare. But probably seeing her best friend cradling a baby in her arms triggered her longing for a child, her lost child.

It was not easy to get over their loss, but she had tried hard for her sake, her husband, their future family, and even their lost baby so she could finally rest in heaven.

“Ohhhmmm!” She heard the man at her side make some noise as he turned on his side, finally facing her, but his eyes remained tightly closed.

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She watched him lovingly as he slept soundly beside her. She thought she had woken him up but remembered she had barely made a sound. At least not enough to wake him up.

She stood from the bed and decided to get some water. Her heavy breathing must have caused her mouth and throat to feel dry. Carefully, she slipped out of the room, avoiding making an unnecessary sound.

As she passed the living room going to the kitchen, she still could feel the chill that passed through her spine every time she imagined the blood on the floor. Although the effect on her had lessened, it was still there, nagging at the back of her mind.

She could not wait for Haley to finish their new house, so they could finally leave all of this behind. But still, she believed that facing her fear had helped her slowly heal. Though it would still take time, she had faith that she was getting there.

“Wherever you are? If you hear my voice, know this. I love you so much even if I never had a chance to meet you.” She looked up above, beyond the ceiling.

In her mind, she was picturing a child smiling. At least, that was what she imagined their child would look like if she had the chance to be born. She always wanted a girl. But if her child had been a boy, she would have loved him just the same.

Then, she proceeded to get her glass of water, ready to let go for now, and returned to the present. Then, an idea came to her as she relished the cold water as it passed through her body.

Was she ready?

Then, she recalled how happy Dani was as she held Ares in her arms. Then, she saw the envy in Marcus' eyes as he watched his friend, Alex, stand beside his wife with pride.

Marcus was the best husband she could ever dream of, and so far, he deserved more than she had given him. He wanted a big family. That was his dream.

Still, she knew he would not force her to do something she was not ready to do. But how would he know if she was ready? Again, would she be prepared to face another loss if that ever happened?

But it might not happen.

She drank the remaining water in her glass and returned to their room. Slowly, she slipped back into the bed, pushing herself further beside her husband until her face was just inches away from his.

“Marcus!” She called his name so softly that he probably did not hear it at all. “Marcus!” She repeated louder this time as her hands caressed his cheeks.

This time she intended to wake him up.

Then, he stirred in his sleep and opened his eyes, looking surprised that she was staring at him. Instantly, he was wide awake, probably worried again about her.

“Did you have another nightmare?” He anxiously asked as his hands automatically moved to her face, moving her hair away from her face. He was presumably checking if she had been crying.

But she did not shed any tears tonight. She had felt pain but not enough to make her cry. Instead, it gave her another emotion she had never felt for quite some time, a reason to fight.

“No, it is not that.” Jacky did not want to talk about that since she had something else on her mind that was her priority.

She pushed herself closer until there was barely space between their faces until their breaths mingled in the same place. Then, she took another inch forward, connecting their lips.

“What is this?” He still asked when their lips separated for a few seconds.

She could tell he was slightly surprised by her action, but that was what she wanted. He had done too much for her. It was time that she returned the love he gave her.

“I think I am ready.” She said, not elaborating more. But she waited for her words to register in his mind.

It was like his eyes suddenly sparked with new hope. It had been a while since she had seen his eyes glisten with delight. He might be joking around her, appearing happy, but she knew something was still bothering him.

“Just make love to me.” She whispered into his ears, not wanting to explain in words what she wanted to say.

Finally, he pulled her into his arms, kissing her like a starved man. It was not like they had never had sex, but this was different. Or at least, it felt the way they were before the horrible incident.

His lips traveled from one place to another, exploring her body, claiming again what was his. Then, his hands held her by the waist, pulling her until she straddled him, giving her control of their situation.

She planted her feet on his side, holding onto his shoulders for support. Although he had waited for this moment, he was still slightly hesitant to take the lead. She could not blame him. He was afraid to hurt her again.

"I am ok. I want this." She promised him, assuring him that this was what she wanted.

"You don't have to if you are only doing this for me." He said, looking at her with still a slight skepticism in his eyes.

He was about to grab a pack by the side table, but she stopped him. "We don't need that. As I said, I am ready to try again."

She pulled his hand back to her side, then leaned over to kiss him again. She wanted all his attention back on her. She wanted this moment to be the best memory of them together because this was the moment they would consummate their love and create something extraordinary and magical.

"Are you sure?" Still, he asked her again as if he was afraid she was making a mistake, but she had never been sure about this.

She wanted this. She wanted to try again because she hoped it might be different this time. But she was also ready to risk her heart from being broken again if it would not turn out to what they expected.

At least this time, she knew what she was facing. She would be ready, and her loving husband would be there again to give his full support. She believed having a child was worth all the risk.

"Yes!" She answered him, fully determined, showing him that the Jacky he knew was back. She would fight for him, their family, and most importantly, her life.

She wanted to fulfill the dreams they shared and make them a reality. It would only happen if she put aside her fear and allowed love to flourish again in their relationship.

Then, she moved carefully on top of him, allowing their desires to mingle until they were one. But this was no ordinary satisfaction of the flesh. It was more than that, so much more.

As their bodies molded together and he filled her with all the seeds of his desire, she hoped it would produce a life born out of their love. But if not, it would not be the end of their dreams because she knew they could always try again.

"I am not afraid anymore." She unconsciously told herself in her mind. "Because she knew she was not alone." Marcus would always be at her side.

It was stupid for her to think it was the end of her world when she lost her child. But it was not. As long as people still cared for her, she could still love. Then there was hope.

Chapter 1047 Kill or be killed

It was dark in most parts of the vicinity, with only a few lamps working in a few segments of the area, but he could still see his friend standing alone in the middle of the playground.

He used to go to a similar place like this when he was a child to escape his father and the life his father wanted for him. His mother brought him to a place like this a few times which was not far from where they lived.

He loved going there before his father forbade him to play with the other kids.

"What are you doing?" He could still hear his father's voice, furiously shouting and echoing in his ears.

He remembered his father standing not far while he was running with the other kids, happily laughing. When he saw his angry face, he quickly rushed to his side, knowing he had done a terrible thing.

“I was only playing with the other kids.” He reasoned, thinking why the other kids could play while he could not. Maybe even for this once, his father would allow him some freedom.

No, he did not. “I already told you that you are no ordinary kid? You are the future leader of our organization. You have no time for this nonsense. If you want to play, I will teach you something better than this.”

His father dragged him out of there and back home. He told his mother never to let him go back to that place. But when he still got the chance, he sneaked away from home to play with the few friends he had met there.

Then, one day his father caught him again. This time, he did not take him home but somewhere else. “Where are we going, Dad?” He was slightly frightened since he knew how frightful his father could be when he was angry.

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“Just wait patiently, and you will see.” His father told him, having no choice, he sat quietly in the passenger seat and watched the road instead.

He did not wait long before his father entered what seemed to be an abandoned place. He could only see a few of his father’s men scattered on the ground with their long guns slung on their shoulders, but other than them, it was silent.

It was the first time his father had taken him to such a place, and honestly, it gave him the creeps, seeing the old condemned building with its dilapidated walls.

“Are you working on rebuilding this place again?” He had seen his other offices, and it was great. But not like this one.

“No, this is perfect, just the way it is.” His father answered, confusing him more, seeing that no one would want to enter such a place.

“But why would you want to work in a dirty and old place like this?” He did not understand the logic of it as he stared again at the structure before him.

“Because it served my purpose. And before you ask me another question, I want you to observe as quietly as possible what will happen inside that building.” His father pointed at the broken door where they were about to enter.

“But...” He still had many questions, but his father silenced him with a glaring stare.

But he stopped him as soon as they crossed the line and faced him. “Remember.” He held him by the shoulder as he leaned down on him. “Observe quietly. No speaking.” He reminded him.

“Promised me.” He only nodded, afraid to utter another word.

“Then, we will never talk about this in front of your mother or anywhere else, but I need you to remember everything. What you will see will be your life now.” His father’s words stuck in his mind.

It was the words he had lived by ever since that day, ever since he witnessed how they tortured a man. Gerald wanted to close his eyes, but his father would not let him.

His father cruelly made him watch as the man begged for mercy. He wanted to think that it was just his imagination, but the stench of the man’s blood, vomit, and pee reminded him that it was real.

The sound of his voice as the man cried in anguish and shouted in pain was like a broken record playing in his brain. He could not switch it off even if he wanted.

But the last part had been the worst part of his ordeal when his father asked him to take his gun and aim it at the broken man. He did not want to do it, but he kept saying to shoot him, and even the men around them cheered for him.

“Go on, son. Pull the trigger.”

It was sick that he finally dropped the gun and puked his guts out. He could not do it. How could anyone hurt and kill a man? He did not understand why his father would do such a thing.

He knew his father was a strong and courageous man. He could be angry a few times, but he never imagined that his father could do this. Yet, he witnessed the full extent of what his father could do. He finally realized that his father was an evil man.

Then, his father called him. “Son, I need you to look.” Then, two of his men grabbed him and forced him to watch as his father pointed the gun at the head of the man and shot him point blank.

From then on, that had been his life. At a young age, his father had taught him that the life of others had less value than theirs. To survive, they had to live by the rules of their organization.

Then, he heard his friend’s voice calling him, snapping him back to the present. He must have spotted him as he stood not quite far away but under the cloak of the shadows.

“Gerald?” He called again when he did not respond right away.

His eyes scanned the place, looking for any other signs of life. Once again, he remembered that the park was the only place where he could remember he had been happy as a child.

But now, he wondered if this was where it would all end as he felt his gun underneath his jacket. He remembered again what his father had said to him.

Kill or be killed.

Chapter 1048 Acting like children

“Hey!” A voice broke into her thoughts. “We are here.” Suddenly she woke up from her dream, or was she even sleeping? However, it was not a dream but a nightmare that had come true.

She had fought hard to escape her past, but why did it start chasing her again? Why did she have to see him again? Why now? She only hoped that this was an isolated case. That after this trip, she would never see him again.



She finally saw the diner outside her window and remembered his offer to take her to dinner. At least this was far from the hotel. She doubted that her ex would even think of looking for her here.

“What are we waiting for?” Ria asked, unbuckling her seat and exiting the car, not waiting for him to ask questions. “I am famished.”

She noticed how he was looking at her with concern. But she was not about to feed his curiosity by behaving weirdly. So, she decided to act normal, like nothing was wrong. At least, she would try.

Zach immediately followed her inside the small establishment, where they sat in the corner. At least in this position, she could easily see the people going in and out of the diner without being too obvious.

“I will have a burger, fries, and that ice cream combo.” She pointed at the dessert special.

Suddenly, she felt hungry since she hardly ate anything much. Although lunch with Jay was delicious, she hardly ate much since she was too busy worrying about her client, only to realize that he was not like the men she knew. He seemed to be a genuinely friendly guy.

“I think I will have the same one.” Zach did not even look at the menu as he smiled at the waitress, which seemed to like the attention she got from him, even though it was just a simple smile.

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“I don’t see you as the burger type of man.” She suddenly uttered, not realizing that she had voiced out her thoughts. Her hands automatically went to her lips, but it was too late.

Honestly, she was confused about him. From the first time she bumped into him, she was positive he was a spoiled rich boy who had everything handed to him. She believed he had never worked hard in his life.

But then again, she found him working, or slaving away, in the mail room, acting like he was one of them. He did not behave like the rich guy she had associated him with before.

But there were times he seemed more than what he appeared to be. As if he was hiding some big secret from everyone. But she could never confirm what it was.

“What type of man do you think I am?” He suddenly asked, as his attention turned to her, looking fascinated with her statement.

She did not know how to answer him. She could not just blurt out her speculations. It would appear like she was interested in him because partly that was the truth, but she would never admit that to him.

“Well, I just don’t see someone like you eating a burger,” Ria said as if that made any sense, but she had to say something before he thought she was hiding something.

“Ok. What sort of food do you think someone like me would eat?” Zach asked, smiling like he was enjoying this moment. He could probably sense her discomfort about the situation she had placed herself into, blaming only herself.

“Oh, ok.” She decided to play the part since she had no more options left.

She hummed while she thought about it, tapping her fingers at the table underneath her fingertips. Then, she looked at the man opposite her, finalizing her analysis of his food choice.

“I think you are the kind of man who would prefer real meat over extenders. So, prime rib, a quality roasted steak, or lamb chop would be your preferred meat.” She gave her verdict as she thought of how she saw him.

“That is a good guess, and I can say you have a good eye. What about you? Can I also guess what food you like?” He countered, seemingly enjoying this little game going on between them.

“Fine.” She challenged him, allowing this little activity to distract her from her other thoughts.

“Let me see.” He seemed to ponder deeply about it as he rubbed his fingers underneath his chin before he leaned backward, settling his body on the chair as if getting more comfortable. Then, he crossed his arms across his chest, letting his bulging biceps go on display before her.

She quickly pretended to look at the noise from her right as some silly kids started fighting over a bottle of ketchup. It was not out of the ordinary since young toddlers could do far worse. She would know.

In truth, she only wanted to avoid ogling at his body since it was doing something funny inside her. She had avoided this feeling for far too long, but the longer she spent time with him, it seemed it only intensified.

“I...” But he had to stop as the waitress returned with their order and started flirting with him.

She did not want to interrupt, so she fixed her food and started with a big bite of her burger before she proceeded with her fries. After all, it was not like she owned this man. She had no right to stop him from picking up girls.

But he only entertained the girl’s question but did not seem to encourage her. Then, the woman must have taken the hint that he was not interested and left but not without leaving a napkin with a number on it. She saluted the woman for her efforts.

“Where were we?” He asked as he focused his eyes on her. “Ah yes, your favorite food.”

She only smiled at him, marveling that he remembered. She thought that they were passed that and had moved on. Anyway, she waited for his conclusion.

“I think you like burgers, fries, and ice cream for dessert.” He seemed satisfied with his answer as he also munched on his food.

Then, he leaned over toward her and extended his hand. It happened so fast that she barely had time to react to his action. His finger suddenly glided just beneath the corner of her lips.

“You have some sauce.” He pointed, showing his finger glistening with the mayonnaise and ketchup that must have dripped from the burger.

Then, he grabbed several pieces of her fries and shoved them into his mouth.

“Hey, that is mine.” She protested, pouting her lips at him.

“You see. That proves my point about how much you love your fries.” He teased her. Then, he picked several pieces of his and moved them toward her lips. “Come on, let me replace them.” He offered. “Open up.” He played with her like she was a child.

“Stop that.” She said, suddenly wondering if other people were watching his foolishness.

“Not until you open your mouth and accept my apology.” He continued, still holding the fries close to her face.

“Fine.” She took a big bite, mildly hitting the tip of his fingers.

“Hey, that hurts.” He playfully complained, but they both knew it did not.

Soon, they were throwing fries at each other, acting like children.

Chapter 1049 Rich friends

“Do you know where you are going?” She gazed at the unfamiliar road that seemed to go onwards. She seemed lost in this endless path without buildings, landmarks, and visible street signs.

She would probably tremble in tremendous fear if she did not trust the man beside her since they seemed to be treading in unknown territory. But thankfully, somehow, she knew he would not put her in danger.

At least her gut feeling told her. She only hoped that her instinct still functioned the way it should, or else she would be in big trouble. It did fail her before, as her mind kept reminding her.

“Of course! I do.” He confidently answered as he turned to a narrower track away from the highway.

She noticed they were already on the outskirts of the main town. From her observation, they were heading further into a rocky rough road part away from civilization.

“Where are we going again?” She could not help but ask, but funnily, she sounded calm.

She guessed this would be the perfect place if he planned to do anything dreadful with her. She could scream at the top of her lungs, and no one would hear her. He could dump her body on those bushes or bury her on those soils, and no one would probably find her.

But that was her silly brain starting to imagine things as the light from the main road disappeared, and the darkness enveloped the entire place. The only light in their path came from the headlights.

“I told you I would show you something more spectacular than the view you saw earlier.” He reminded her of this morning.

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She remembered, but she was not paying much attention to it since she had no intention of going out with him. If not for her ex-boyfriend, she should be slumping on the couch, eating junk food while watching an old re-run.

But instead, here she was, running away, hiding from the man that could ruin her and her son's life again. But she would deal with him if he started to pursue her and her son but not now when she was not ready.

"Isn't that what the psycho killer says before they whack their victims?" She asked in her internal monologue as she gazed ahead. She was not thinking of the man beside her but picturing the father of her son in her head. He was the biggest psycho that almost destroyed her life.

The dim glow of the tiny piece of the moon barely helped with the visibility as the shadow overpowered it. But still, she appreciated the millions of stars that littered the sky.

It had been a long time since she had seen such a sight. The smog polluting the air in the city had almost covered the atmosphere. People hardly see so many stars anymore covering the sky, not like the one before her.

"I would not know since I am not one." He answered as he glanced her way before concentrating back on the road.

She just realized she had spoken her thoughts loudly, and he heard every word. She quickly looked his way, afraid he might be offended, but he did not seem to be.

His face appeared more amused than anything else as a smile curved into his reddish lips. "I'm sorry. Maybe it would make the situation better if I said I was not thinking about you when I said that."

What else could she do but apologize? Although, she was not lying about what she said. In her mind, Ryan was the psycho, and she had better found a way to stop him if he decided to come after her and her son.

"That is good to hear." He smiled at her, pretending to look relieved. But she was surprised by what he said next. "Then, who was it you were referring to?" As he glanced her way.

She had no idea what to say to him. Should she tell him the truth or come up with another lie? But she was not good at creating a story. She was terrible at lying.

"Is this the place you are talking about?" She looked outside her window, noticing the beautiful house standing in the middle of nowhere. She was indeed surprised, but she also used the moment to ignore his question.

"Yes, this is the place. But that is not the surprise." He pointed to the house, parked the car at the front, and then turned off the engine.

She hoped not because she could not find anything extraordinary about the view before her. Yes, it was a massive structure constructed beautifully, but it was still just a house.

"Whose place is this?" She asked because she did not want to get caught trespassing on private property. Although the gigantic gate had automatically opened when they arrived, it did not mean they had any right to enter the premises.

"I called a friend who owned it and asked to borrow it. We loved to go here during vacation. It is the reason I am familiar with this place." Zach explained to her.

He exited the car and immediately opened her door, waiting to assist her. She was getting used to it. But, of course, he must be like this to all the girls. She was nothing special.

Soon, they entered the lovely home since he knew the passcode of the alarm system. Maybe he was not lying about knowing the owner as they proceeded into the living room.

“Are you thirsty or hungry? I think the caretaker of this place always replenishes the stock in case there are guests.” He offered as he walked towards the bar with a mini fridge hidden underneath it.

She guessed he knew his way around the place as she looked around the spacious ground floor. When she tilted her head, she saw that it had rooms on the second floor, with long spiral stairs on the other end.

She realized it was a home built more for comfort than a luxurious getaway. No wonder they would like to go here on vacation to relax. Even the cushion was inviting as she stared at it.

“Just water.” She told him, feeling the food was still digesting in her stomach.

But she could see the appeal of wanting a place like this. She liked this house more than the hotel where they were staying. It was quiet and relaxing.

Maybe if she worked hard enough, she could afford a place like this one day. She could dream but making it come true was another matter. Still, there was no harm in it.

“Why don’t you sit down while I make a phone call? I want to inform the caretaker that we are here so he would not be alarmed, thinking we are intruders.” He walked to another room, closed the door, and left her to explore.

Aside from the expensive paintings and decorations, there was nothing personal that she could see except for a portrait of a couple. She would assume that they were the owners of this place.

Probably the parents of Zach’s friend.

But they looked oddly familiar, but what did she know about faces as she moved along? But she could not help but wonder if Zach did belong to a prominent family. How else would he have rich friends?

Chapter 1050 For the best

She picked up a remote, thinking it was for the television, but instead, when she pressed a button, the lights suddenly dimmed, and the fireplace lit up.

That was not the plan as she pressed another button, but the television remained off while soft music played, echoing in the walls. She looked around the room, wondering if this house was playing with her.

“What is wrong with you?” She mumbled as she frantically tried to return everything to normal.

She did not want him to think she was trying to seduce him. That was what she would think if she walked into a room like this.

“Wow!” His voice reverberated along with the song. “I did not know that you are this romantic. You did not have to set the mood.” He could hear the teasing in his voice.

"I am not, but whoever designed this place is." She handed the remote to him since she had no idea how to use it. "So, where is this surprise you are talking about."

She knew this was it, so she could only expect that it was somewhere out there, on the other side of the house. But based on what she had heard earlier when they arrived, she could expect a gigantic body of water waiting if they went out the glass backdoor.

"Shall we?" He only smiled at her comment but did not respond as he led her toward the door. She was right all along as she heard the waves even before she saw the view outside.

She surmised that they might have traveled to the other side of the beach, away from the crowded tourist destination. She just realized this place must have cost millions.

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He guided her to the patio and then a lighted pathway that she assumed would lead them to the beachfront. From her standpoint alone, she already knew this place was already enchanting.

She could not wait to see the rest of his surprise, wondering if it could be better than what she had seen earlier. But how could it be when it was already dark out there?

"I appreciate the suspense and all but is it still safe to be out there when we can hardly see anything?" She could not help but be skeptical as she saw the lights fade away as they continued down the path until they reached the soft sand that slightly buried their feet.

She thought somebody could hide in the shadows and surprise them with a knife. Or they could have an accident or something. She could not help but think of the worse things that could happen to them while out there as she stopped in her tracks.

"You have nothing to worry about since this place is safe. There are hardly any people living around this area. And I know this place like the back of my hand." He assured her, holding her hands as he gently pulled her toward the shoreline.

Although she was hesitant, she still allowed him to lead the way. Somehow, she trusted him. In all honesty, she was also curious about what else she would find out there.

"But first, we need to remove our shoes." He suddenly dropped to his knees and slumped onto the sand as he started taking off his sneakers and socks and folding his long pants. "Can I help you with those?"

He pointed at the slip-on she wore. "No, thanks. I can do that." She declined since she could easily do it herself.

She took it off and folded the bottom of her pants, not wanting them to get wet with the tide. Then, she carried her shoes with one hand as they moved along the coastline.

She felt the water tickling her toes as it glided smoothly along her skin, just like this morning. The only difference was she could barely see where they were going. The tiny sparkling light on the water's surface was the only thing guiding their path.

"What do you think?" He asked as they continued their stroll on the sandy shore as the tide continuously went back and forth.

"I have to admit that this is interesting." She could not lie. She was enjoying this simple leisurely walk. She also noticed that her companion did not avoid the water anymore. He did not mind getting his feet wet this time.

Suddenly, he stopped her, slightly making her wary. He held her hand and silenced her with his finger. Then, he pointed at something not far from where they stood.

"I think I saw something moved." He whispered close to her ears as he leaned down.

"What is it?" She asked, growing more concerned that it could be dangerous, but her eyes could not focus on the object he pointed to since it was still dark. But she noticed something.

"I think it is a turtle laying its eggs." He told her as he gazed at the dark portion of their path. "I guess we have to wait till she finished. We don't want to disturb her." He concluded as if they had no choice.

"Oh!" She sounded a bit disappointed since maybe somehow she had been looking forward to his surprise. "Shall we go back to the house?"

But she was suddenly curious at how the turtle laid their eggs as she looked at the oddly shaped object. She did picture the back of the animal as it gently moved in the shadows.

"No, we don't have to. We can sit over there." He pointed to the dry sand just a few meters away from the water. "... and wait till she finished. I don't think she would take that long." He added as he pulled her to the dry area.

She seemed to have no choice, so she sat with him as he talked about the gentle ancient creature and how they loved to come here and lay their eggs.

"How did you know all this?" She asked since she did not see him as someone who would be interested in such things.

"I like turtles, so I read about them. I also like dogs and many things." He added as if it should matter.

"What about you? Do you like taking care of pets?" He asked as he turned to look at her.

She could barely see his face, but his eyes seemed to sparkle like the waves on the water as she stared back at him. Somehow, she could suddenly feel the tension building up inside her.

It was as if she was reading his thoughts and did not like them. She quickly blinked her eyes and looked away. Instead, she focused on his question.

Did she like animals in general? She never owned a pet, but she remembered playing with dogs several times at the park. It was fun, but would she own one?

"Does my son count? I love taking care of him." She believed it was the first time she mentioned him in their conversation.

She did not know if it did not come up in any of their topics or if she avoided talking about him. But why was she telling him now? Was she trying to scare him off? Well, maybe it was for the best.