

## Royal Contract 1101

### Chapter 1101 Protector for the night

He woke up with a splitting headache, aching muscles, and a sore thumb. What did he expect as he smelled the alcohol on his breath? But wait! What happened to his thumb?

He remembered visiting his friend at the hospital. Then, he went to the bar across the street. Of course, he had drinks, too many for his limit. After that, he had a chat with the girl. He could not even remember her name.

“Ooohhh!” He groaned out loud. He had never had a hangover since he was back in college. He never did find a solution in a bottle.

But last night, he was not thinking. He just wanted to dull his senses.

However, he remembered the girl leaving to join her friends. Eventually, the bartender refused to give him more drinks.

How did he go home? He was home. Right?

Immediately, he scanned his surroundings and found himself in his living room, lying on his couch. That explained his aching muscles. Unfortunately, he did not have a comfortable sofa.

He was not dirt poor nor super rich. He had enough savings to live a comfortable life. But he did not see the point of wasting his hard-earned cash on material things. Besides, he barely stayed in his apartment anyway.

“Who was she again?” She questioned, trying to piece in the missing puzzle in his mind. Maybe if he remembered her name, he would remember the rest of his memory.

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But at least he got home in one piece. Then, he patted his pocket, feeling his wallet was still there. Then, he checked his wrist. His watch was still safely attached to his body, concluding that nobody had robbed him last night.

Still, he had to solve the mystery of his sore thumb with a plaster covering it. He could only guess the slight trace of blood on his shirt had come from his wound. But how did he get himself hurt?

He shook his head, trying to clear his head and get rid of his headache, but it was not working. He gradually stood up and stretched his muscles, hoping to relieve the tension. Then, he walked toward his kitchen sink to wash his face.

He hoped the splash of water would make him fully alert and remind him of the rest of his night. And a full glass of water would get rid of his headache. But, alas, it did not work.

“Damn!” He still could not remember. He finally grabbed his temples, massaging them. It seemed that his headache was not going away that easily.

Then, when he finally turned around, he noticed his house keys on the counter with a piece of paper underneath it. He did not remember putting them there. But he did not recall going home either.

Therefore, the mystery of what had happened to him last night continued as he walked closer to the counter. Was that a receipt from the bar? But who asked for that in a bar? Anyway, he grabbed it and held it in front of his eyes.

YOU WERE DRUNK, AND I FOUND YOU ON THE STREET OUTSIDE THE BAR, ALMOST PASSED OUT.

So, the paper was a note.

SORRY, BUT I LOOKED INTO YOUR WALLET FOR YOUR ADDRESS.

That explained why his wallet, which he usually placed in his left back pocket, was now on his front.

BY THE WAY, YOU SCRAPED YOUR THUMB ON THE WALL BY THE FRONT OF YOUR BUILDING WHEN YOU ACCIDENTALLY TRIPPED WHILE I WAS CARRYING YOU TO YOUR APARTMENT.

SORRY, BUT YOU WERE HEAVY.

I JUST CLEANED IT AND PUT A PLASTER ON IT. AND, OF COURSE, I LEFT A PAIN RELIEVER WITH YOUR KEYS. IT SHOULD HELP WITH THE HANGOVER. AND DRINK PLENTY OF FLUIDS.

His eyes darted at a pill that was beside his keys. He took it with the glass of water still in his hands.

ANYWAY, IT WAS NICE TO MEET YOU AGAIN. R

“R?” Who was R again?

The only person he was talking to was that girl. He vaguely remembered what they had discussed. But he recalled her face from bumping into her earlier.

She must have found him on the street and was kind enough to bring him home.

PS.

WE DID NOT SLEEP TOGETHER. SO DON'T WORRY.

NO NEED TO LOOK FOR ME TO ASK ABOUT THAT.

That was good to know.

He thanked her silently as he checked his clothing, which looked disarrayed but was still on his body. It would be terrible if he had slept with her and did not remember it. And worse, not even knowing her name.

“R?” He repeated, hoping to jog his memory for the complete name. She must have mentioned it in their conversation. But he was still drawing a blank.

AND NO NEED TO THANK ME EITHER. I WOULD HAVE HELPED A STRAY CAT IF I FOUND ONE.

Wow! Did he look like a stray cat? Maybe, but he stank like he just came from the alley trash.

He finally put down the note on the counter and strolled to his bathroom. He believed he badly needed a long shower. And looking at his reflection in the mirror, he looked like a mess.

No wonder she did not sleep with him. But that was great because he did not need more complications in his already intricate life. He still had to get over one heartbreak before entering another messy relationship.

Not that he equated sleeping with a woman to automatically ending up in a relationship. But he never randomly slept with just anyone without involving his heart.

Still, "Should I go and see her? At least thank her." He asked himself as he stared at his reflection.

But she clearly said that there was no need for him to look for her. It sounded like she did not want to see him again. It might look like he was stalking her if he suddenly appeared at her workplace.

He guessed he could always thank her if he coincidentally crossed paths with her again. That was if he would recognize her again. He was lucky that someone like her found him on the street.

And not some stranger who might have taken advantage of his drunken state. It would seem someone was still looking after him. Was she sent to be his protector for the night?

Chapter 1102 The office gossip

Ria had been at work all morning, trying to catch up with some of the things she had missed since she had been away and sick. Thankfully, Zach had accommodated some of her work, lessening her workload.

However, she had not seen Zach just yet. But she believed he could be somewhere in the building, busy with work. But he texted that he would take her to lunch later.

She could not help but wonder if anyone had suspected they were now a couple. Was she ready for their friends and co-workers to know about their relationship?

She had not considered this, and they had not talked about it yet. It had slipped her mind since they had been busy with other things. She just hoped there were no rules concerning fraternizing with a co-worker.

"Ria, I know you just got back and probably still recovering, but I need those files before lunch." Brenda walked to her small cubicle and pointed at the papers still in her hands.

Of course, she should not be daydreaming at a time like this. Everybody was on alert because the big boss was not around, and many things were happening under their watch.,

"I am on it." She responded, looking at the pile of papers in her right hand that needed photocopying, and on her left were papers that she needed to submit to the finance department. "It will be on your desk before lunch."

Then, she looked at several more papers on her desks needing different things, but they should be on her boss's table before midday. If she finally got the promotion, she would not be doing this anymore.

She would have her larger cubicle, not the same as Brenda or Josey, but at least a step higher to a better position. But that would mean Zach would be out of the job since they only offered it to one person.

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She remembered asking him about it yesterday before he left for home. She knew they were competing in the same position. But he said. "Don't worry about it. I think you deserve it more than I do."

But she believed he also deserved it since he worked hard for it. But he would not have it. Besides, he said that working for Alex had taught him a lot. That was more than enough to find his path in this world.

She wanted to ask him more about him. But her insecurity still prevented her from snooping around what she believed was not her business. Besides, it was still too early in their relationship for her to assume anything.

"Ok. Thanks, Ria." Brend snapped her back again to the present as she exited and returned to her position.

She had to stop zoning out because she had tons of things to do, shaking the clouds in her mind and focusing again on her tasks. She could always daydream later when she had completed her work.

She rushed to the machine room, hoping that no one was there. She did not want to waste her time in line for the photo machine. Thankfully, the place was empty, and she could finish her work in silence.

"Here are the papers you asked for." She handed the papers to her boss fifteen minutes before her deadline. "The other documents were already on their way to the department heads." She informed her.

"Thanks, Ria, you are a lifesaver," Josey said as she looked up from her desk. "I am glad that you are now feeling better. We missed you around here."

She could see the genuine concern of her boss, who had become a good friend to her. At least outside of office time. She would miss working with her if she got promoted or canned. It was either of those two.

"I also missed you all." She honestly said to her boss. "I hope I was not in trouble for my long absence."

She still wondered if her lack of performance jeopardized her promotion. They could have thought that she was more of a liability than an asset to the company. But she hoped not. She needed this job and would work harder to prove herself to them.

"Of course not. Don't worry. I still intend to fight for your promotion at the next board meeting." Josey assured her.

So far, the board would only reconvene when the big boss returned. At that moment, Sir Alex had to attend to matters with higher priority than giving her a promotion.

"No worries. I am just glad that you are considering me for the position." She felt lucky enough that she had landed this internship. But it would be nice to get a permanent position in a prestigious company like this.

Somehow, it would secure her and her son's future if she had a stable job with a high-paying salary. Then, she could stop accepting the funding that her ex-boyfriend was sending. She could finally cut off all her ties with him and his family.

She was still thankful that her ex's father had agreed to the settlement deal. But she would not think it was a debt she had to pay. It was his son's obligation to help their son, but now, she could finally sever all his responsibility to her son.

"Of course. But don't worry. I think the board is just a formality. You are as good as hired permanently." Her boss assured her again. "Now, go take a few minutes rest and grab some lunch. We still have a lot of work later."

She quickly left her boss's office and returned to her workplace. She cleared her table and readied herself. In a few minutes, Zach would come to take her to lunch.

Then, she quickly dashed to the female comfort room for her private business before Zach arrived. Once inside the small cubicle, she relieved herself. When she was about to go out after finishing, she heard two female voices talking.

She was unsure, but she believed they were from another department. But that was not what had caught her attention, but the topic of their discussion.

"They said she seduced him on their trip." One woman said.

"Did she honestly believe a man like him would even take her seriously?" The other responded with a pitch that said that she was in disbelief.

They had not mentioned a name, but she could guess what and who they were discussing. And if she stayed long enough, she would not like the rest of their conversations.

Nonetheless, she discovered that her fear had finally materialized. She was now the talk of the town, the topic of the office gossip.

Chapter 1103 First official date as a couple

Zach arrived on time for their lunch. He said he would like to take her out, but she declined. She told him she could not have a long break because of her deadlines. Partially, it was true.

But her other reason had something to do with what had happened earlier in the bathroom. As expected, she did not like what she heard afterward. But she could not come out of the bathroom and make a scene.

Therefore, she stayed hidden until the two left.

They indirectly accused her of being a gold digger, claiming that Zach was super rich, although they were not saying names. They said she must have bewitched him, using some witchcraft to seduce a man like him.

"Are you ok?" She suddenly heard him as she turned to look at him. She quickly nodded before he suspected anything. "You must be tired. Don't worry. I already ordered, and it is on its way."

He repeated what he said since she was too distracted by her thoughts. "Great. I am starving." Ria offered that they eat at her table, not wanting to go anywhere at that moment.

She knew she should not listen to what those mean girls were saying about her. But she could not help but think about it. Again, she doubted her worthiness to be with a man like him.

She guessed that he was not like her. She noticed it with his manners, his things, and how he carried himself. He was loaded. But she never considered that he could be super rich like the other girls said.

She remembered that he was working in the mail room. Then, when they were together, he never made her feel like there was a zillion difference between them. Yes, he never complained about money, but he never flaunted it too.

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"I still am unfamiliar with your favorites, but I hope you like pasta." He declared as he walked over to her side. "I found a good one that was just around the corner." He informed her as his fingers landed on her shoulders and massaged her aching muscles.

"Oh!" She loved what he was doing. "I love pasta." She added as she closed her eyes, letting his fingers do their magic. It was untangling the tension on her nerves. But at the same time, creating a new one in the pit of her stomach.

"I love to do more, but I don't think this is the right place." He suddenly leaned over and whispered in her ears.

Was he trying to torture her? If anyone was bewitching anyone, it was him. He must have put a spell on her because she could not stop thinking about him.

"You..." But they had to stop when a knock interrupted them as both stared at the source.

It was the delivery of their food.

Quickly, Zach took and paid for it, making her wonder again how much her boyfriend was worth. She had never bothered to google him since she was not like that. She never bothered to check on her ex, so why would she check on this man?

But maybe she should have.

She should have investigated his background before jumping into a relationship with him. Who was Zach Andrews? Suddenly, she was anxious about what she would find on the internet.

Maybe she should ask him. But as she said before, was it too early to ask him too personal questions? She did not want to scare him away. What was the protocol in a relationship? She had no idea.

"Are you sure you are ok?" Suddenly his hand lifted to touch her forehead, checking if she was sick again. "You seemed to be zoning out again." He pointed out.

She was not sick, just having too many thoughts running inside her head. Somehow, the idea that he could be super rich was bothering her. How would she fit in his world? What about her son?

Now, she could see the bigger picture as she stared at him. She could now see the little signs suggesting he was no ordinary guy. How could she be so blind? But was that a big deal?

She reminded herself that he was not Ryan. Zach was so much better than her ex. There was simply no comparison between the two. She was sure that Zach would never hurt her as Ryan did.

“Yeah! Just a bit tired.” She reasoned, not yet ready to question him about the things bothering her. “But hungry.” She took the food he offered and told him to sit and eat with her.

Soon, he started telling her about his day and some funny moments he had done earlier. Soon, they were laughing. She temporarily forgot her troubles as she enjoyed his company.

“Thanks for lunch.” She said as she helped him clean her table. “It was delicious.” She told him while he threw away the trash.

She decided not to bother him with her issues. In the meantime, she wanted to get to know the man, not the size of his checkbook or his family’s fortune. She did not want to include that in the equation.

If they would work on their relationship, it was because they genuinely liked being together, not because she could secure a future with him. He was not her sugar daddy because he was too young to be, but she would not be with him because of his money.

“I also enjoyed it. But we should go to dinner.” He suddenly said. “I want to take you on a date. What about tonight?” He asked.

She would love to go out with him. She could feel the excitement of going on a date with him. But she doubted she would be good company tonight. She believed she might be too tired by then.

“Sorry to rain on your parade. But I don’t think tonight is good for me.” She felt disappointed with herself, but she still had a child to care for afterward. She could not just dump her child on the family next door while she went on a date. She did not want to abuse their kindness.

“I understand. But maybe Saturday night.” He suggested, looking hopeful.

“Ok. Saturday will be perfect.” At least that would give her enough time to prepare for it.

She wanted to look perfect for him. And not a haggard witch that could hardly open her eyes.

Suddenly, she could hardly wait for their first official date as a couple.

#### Chapter 1104 The secret meeting

She had been fighting between her depression and her desire to live. Honestly, it was not easy. Thinking about the only man she ever loved gone made her want to consider dying.

On the other hand, she also willed herself to live, considering the child growing inside her. She could not let any harm near their child. She must protect her baby at all costs.

Therefore, even if the last thing she wanted to do was to go out of her room. She did. She went to work as if nothing had happened and worked like any other day.

Nobody knew she was suffering from a loss since only a few knew she was in a relationship with him. Only her family and close friends had been aware of their love affair.

“I am going home.” She finally told her secretary, signing off the last paper on her desk.

She packed her things, not wanting to stay a minute longer. Usually, she would not mind spending a few more hours at the office if there were tons of work left for her to finish, but not today.

She just wanted this day to be over with and go home. She intended to work again tomorrow but only until she finished her task. Her mind worked like clockwork, on the dot, not a minute longer, while her body operated on automatic.

“Yes, Ms. Haley. But your father wants me to remind you about the meeting with the board in the morning.” She informed her.

But she already knew about it since her father had mentioned it today, at least a couple of times when she spoke with him. Of course, she would attend since her father needed her vote on a merger he wanted to be approved.

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“Thanks.” She told her assistant as she grabbed her things and walked out of that place.

Suddenly, the place she had devoted her entire life to had finally lost its meaning to her. She thought that this company was her life. But now, she could not feel anything about it. Her father’s legacy could burn to the ground, and she would not care about it.

She finally learned that having a family to love was the most important thing. She had dreamt of marrying Gerald for the right reasons. Not because her father wanted her to for political connections.

She did not want to force Gerald to marry her because she was pregnant. She hoped he would declare his undying love for her and tell her that he could not live without her. But that was not the case. He never did tell her that he loved her. He died not saying anything about love.

“Good evening, Ms. Haley.” One of the maids greeted her as soon as she entered their mansion.

“Good evening, Zeny,” Haley responded, always liking the middle-aged woman who smiled a lot. “Would you know where my father is?” She asked, hoping to have a word with him before she retired for the night.

She could always ask one of the maids to bring her food to her room so she would not bother to come to the dining hall for dinner. She did not feel like having other company while she ate. She believed her child was all she needed.

“He went straight to his office with a guest.” The woman told her. “But he said not to disturb them.” She warned her, stopping her from going to his office.

“I am sure that he would not mind if I join them.” She told Zeny, who looked worried.

“But, he would be mad at us.” The woman seemed scared as she blocked her way. “No one could come near his office when he is in a meeting.” The woman reiterated.

She abruptly stopped in her tracks, seeing that she was not going to pass her without using force. She was indeed a slightly bigger woman than her. She might get hurt if she insisted.



But she was curious as to what the meeting was all about. Why the secrecy? “Does my father always have this kind of meeting?” She curiously asked, assuming this was not the first.

The woman seemed hesitant to answer, but after some more persuasion, she finally said yes. “They usually have one or two meetings like this within a month.” She confided with her in a whisper as if afraid someone would hear her.

“Who is with him in the meeting? Do you know?” She asked the older lady as her interest grew.

She was rarely home early, so this was the first time she heard about this meeting. If the forum had anything to do with the company, her father would have put her in the loop.

Besides, he should be conducting the meeting at the office and not at home. Therefore, what was this meeting about, and who was there with him?

“I don’t want to get in trouble, Ms. Haley.” The woman said.

She hastily pulled the woman to the other side of the mansion, away from the prying eyes of anyone who would suddenly pass by. Then, she looked her in the eyes and assured her that she would not get in trouble.

“I will not tell anyone that you told me. I promise. Or else, I will go in there and check for myself.” She threatened her instead, forcing her to speak.

“I don’t know their names since I did not receive them. But I once heard the name...” She paused as if trying to recall. “...Don. I don’t know what the rest of his name was.”

“I am sorry, Miss, but that is all I know.” She added. “Please, don’t come near his office because we don’t want to get fired.” The woman begged her.

“Ok. I am going to my room.” She finally said after contemplating what she said. She turned to the stairs, seeing the relief on the other woman’s face.

But she could not stop thinking of the name Zeny said. “Don.” She believed she had heard that name before, but where?

She moved toward her room, still rummaging through her brain for more information about the man. If she could recall where she had heard or met the man, maybe she could determine what the meeting was all about.

“Don.” She repeated. But she still came blank.

What was her father doing? What was the purpose of the secret meeting?

Chapter 1105 A friendly voice

Zachy? That was the first word she heard from her son when he came home with Sasha. “Where is Zachy?” He quickly scanned the room, looking for him.

Was that a good sign? It meant that Edison truly liked Zach as he called out his name and looked behind her as if he would find him there. But she asked Zach not to visit tonight since she knew she would need some rest.

Moreover, she wanted to take their relationship at a slower pace. This last week had been a roller coaster ride for her. And she needed her equilibrium back before she lost sight of her focus.

She knew she was falling fast into the comfort of his embrace. She was afraid she might be unable to let go when he decided he had more than enough of this.

“I am sorry, my baby. Zach is not coming tonight.” She tried to explain to her son, who pulled a long face.

She could not help it if she still had some skepticism about their blooming relationship. Experience had taught her not to hope too high because it was hard when eventually, she had to fall back to the ground.

Besides, it was not just her who was starting to hope. She could already see it in Edison’s eyes. He was falling in love with him, just like she was, but what about Zach? Was he falling madly in love with them?

More importantly, was he willing to give up everything for them when the time came that he had to choose? Yes, she looked him up on the internet. She was curious.

She could not help but wonder if he was rich enough to land on the social network’s radar. And indeed, his face and body were all over the net. The first article she saw said he was one of the most eligible bachelors in the country.

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She quickly closed her phone, not wanting to see more. She was afraid if she read more, she would be afraid to continue with this relationship. It did not seem fair to Zach when she promised to give him a chance.

“He promised we play...” He mumbled as if he was about to cry.

She had seen how the two had bonded. Of course, she would love to see more of those. But what if, just what if, Zach changed his mind? And he realized this scenario was just too much for him. What then?

She would be left to pick up the pieces of her heart again. But also try to fix her son at the same time. Maybe they could bounce back again, or maybe not. Who knew what the future held? But she would try to be careful this time.

She could not simply abandon reason for love. She was not closing her heart to him, just taking extra precautions this time.

“He promised the next time you will.” She said instead. It was hard to see her son disappointed. But it was better he realized while it was still early that Zach was not yet a permanent part of their family.

Quickly, she picked up her son and carried her to the kitchen. “Would you like to help me cook dinner?” She asked him, using that as their playtime.

She worked on cutting some vegetables, knowing that he liked them, while he played around with the pan and a plastic spatula. He was not helping, but she could watch him while she cooked.

Finally, she had finished putting Edison to bed after their meal, a short movie, his bath, and reading his favorite book. It was time to clean the remaining dishes in the kitchen and tidy up the place.

Afterward, she wondered if she should still do the laundry, but she was already exhausted. Eventually, she gave up on the idea, slumping on the couch, and rested.

She debated whether she should call him or wait for him to call. But she said that she was retiring early tonight. Therefore, he might not want to disturb her.

“Just call him.” She told herself, finding herself missing him. She thought it would be nice to hear his voice.

But he might suddenly drive over if she told him how much she missed him already. Then, it would have beaten the purpose of slowing their pace. She might as well go down on her knees and ask him to marry her.

“Ooohhh!” She hated this feeling. She wanted him very much but was unsure if she deserved a man like him.

She grabbed the tv remote before she ran to get her phone and called him. She decided to entertain herself with a movie so she would not have to think about him. Maybe she would finally fall asleep on the couch in a few minutes.

However, half an hour later, a buzzing sound reverberated in the other room just when her eyes were getting droopy. The constant ringing alerted her, making her move to her feet and grab the phone that she had left on the kitchen counter.

“Yes!” She quickly answered, her voice sounding a little raspy, thinking it was Zach. Well, she was not expecting any calls. And her mind was wishing it was him.

“Ria.” Somebody said her name. “I hope I did not wake you up, but I think it is still early.” The man on the line seemed to hesitate, probably checking the time.

Suddenly, she was awake, wondering who was on the other line. She was confident the man was not Zach. But it did sound familiar. “Who is this?” She finally asked, unable to match the voice with a face.

She also looked at her clock, and it indicated that she must have dozed off for almost an hour on the couch. But the man was right. It was still not that late for a phone call.

“Elias James.” He introduced himself. “Fine, I think you still need some jogging of your memories. It’s Tabby.” He finally announced after a few seconds of her being silent.

“Tabby?” Suddenly, she remembered, of course. “I am sorry. I am still getting used to having you around again.” She tried to reason. “And your voice had changed.” She realized it thickened compared to his original tone that she recalled.

But she was glad that he called. It is nice to hear a friendly voice.

#### Chapter 1106 The old times

It was hard to explain how she felt about her friend now, or more or less the only brother she used to know. Her bond with him had been strong compared to her relationship with the other kids in the orphanage. But it had been such a long time.

Maybe this time, they could mend the time and distance they had been separated and return to what they used to be. Would that be so nice to have a family again besides Edison?

What about Zach? That was still questionable. It was still too early to tell if they could build a family together. She was afraid to presume anything.

“Yeah! I guess. I did make a lot of growing up.” He admitted. “Anyway, I called because I have something to discuss with you. But I don’t want to discuss them on the phone.” He told her. “Do you mind if I visit on Saturday? In the morning.” He asked.

She thought about it but only for a second. She knew she was going out with Zach, but that was still in the evening. Therefore, she was free around that time.

“Of course, I like that. We can finally catch up.” She believed it was time that they made up for the lost time. But she was also curious about his reason for visiting.

“That is great.” Tabby did sound excited, but she could also hear something else in his voice.

“Can you at least give me a hint?” She questioned. “I think we don’t have to wait until we meet for that.” She insisted, not wanting the mystery hanging over her head.

She believed she could not wait for Saturday to know what he had in mind. Somehow, he had piqued her interest or more of her anxiousness about what he had to say.

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With the things that happened to her these last few weeks, she did not want any more surprises that would shock her. She believed seeing Ryan was more than enough.

“As you said, I also think it is time for us to reconnect.” He said, but she could still hear something else in his voice. “I just want to make sure that you are ok.” That was it.

She believed it was his concern. She remembered that he was always reluctant to say anything when worrying about something. Then, she would urge him until he spilled it out.

“Why would I not be ok?” She was suddenly alert again. Her apprehension was back. Gone was her excitement earlier about seeing her childhood friend.

She could not help but assume that it could be something more than just a friendly visit or getting updated with each other. Her friend was coming here for something else.

“It could be nothing,” Tabby said as if reluctant to tell her more. “Maybe it is better once I am there and have more information.”

She knew it. Her friend knew something but was somewhat reluctant to share it with her. Need more information? What information? Her interest only grew more.

“What is it?” She could not stop her curiosity since she sensed it might be more than nothing. She wanted to know what it was, especially if it had something to do with her.

“You know what. I should not say anything. Now, I think I am making you nervous. But it might be nothing.” He continued as if trying to calm her down.

How could she even stay calm when her mind was already working overtime? He should not have said anything if he did not want her to ask questions. He should have known better. That was if he remembered what she was back in the day.

“You should have thought of that before you opened your big mouth.” She reprimanded him, thinking that he had already caused damage. The only way to resolve it was to spill his guts out.

“Ok. I get it now.” He said, seemingly apologetic for his blunder. “I heard something at work.” But he stopped as if thinking how to phrase his following sentences.

“Just say it.” She was running out of patience. She was exhausted but worried at the same time.

When he said work, she quickly rummaged through her memory about what he had told her the other day. He mentioned that he worked in the military. At least, he used to. Then, he came out there on a job.

“We have a new case. It was red-flagged as an urgent case and top priority. I am not sure yet, but I think your name is on it.” He finally informed her.

Now, she remembered that he was currently working as an investigator. Was someone having her investigated? That was the only explanation for her name coming up on his radar. For what?

“Are you sure it is me, not just someone who might have the same name as me?” She could not help but hope that it was just a mistaken identity.

It was very likely since her name might be usual in this part of the world. But that was wishful thinking, knowing that there might be one man looking for her at that very moment.

Damn! What did he want with her? Not her son, she hoped. Why could he not just leave her alone? She never broke their arrangement. She hoped that he would also stick to his end of the bargain.

But she guessed that was too much to ask from a man who had no honor and could not keep his word.

“That is what I am saying. I still have to see the entire case. I just called because I want to know if you are ok. But my big mouth doesn’t know how to filter its words.” He admitted, sounding contrite. “I am sorry again.” He added.

“Would you call me if you have more information? But you are still welcome to see me on Saturday. I am looking forward to that.” She asked him, wanting to be ready for whatever was coming her way.

She was not afraid, but she could not help but worry. Ryan had money and the backing of the law at his side. Compared to him, she was nothing.

“I will double-check everything before getting back to you. But don’t worry, as I said before. We are now family again. I have your back.” Tabby assured her, reminding her of the old times.

Chapter 1107 A criminal

She had been pacing in her room, unable to stop thinking about the meeting her father was currently conducting downstairs. She was not supposed to snoop around. But she could not shake the feeling that something was off with this secret gathering.

She would not be surprised if it occurred on rare occasions, knowing that some transactions needed privacy and secrecy. But Zeny informed her that it had been happening for months. Therefore, it was not something that she could ignore.

“What is going on, Dad?” She looked outside the window of her room, finally noticing the security roaming their lawn.

She was suddenly aware of her surroundings, temporarily forgetting her grief. She could see that the patrolling guards seemed unusually active. It was like they were on high alert.

Was her father in trouble? Maybe just like Gerald, he had received death threats that he was not telling her. Could it be someone from the opposing party who felt threatened by Gerald’s popularity?

There had been speculation that they might have something to do with his death. She heard about it at the funeral. Still, they had no proof to support such an accusation.

Still, it was well-known that his father had intended to back up Gerald in his political plans. Maybe they were now going after him. She knew she had to find out what her father had kept from her before it was too late.

“Don’t do it.” She told herself as she saw her reflection in the glass window. But she had to find out.

Slowly, she exited her room, careful not to alert anyone. Why did it suddenly feel like she was a stranger in her own house, sneaking around like a thief?

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She looked left and right, wondering if she would bump into anyone. She must have an excuse if her father accidentally caught her putting her nose where it did not belong.

But what?

She would think of something, but now, she had to get close enough to the door to hear their conversation. Fortunately, there were no guards around the house. She was expecting someone guarding outside his office.

She tiptoed along the empty hallway, not wanting to alert anyone that might be close by. She just wanted to be sure that her father was in no danger. And whoever was in there was not putting him in harm’s way.

“Miss Haley.” Suddenly, she held to her heart as a familiar voice startled her, stopping her in her tracks.

“Stop!” Zeny appeared from nowhere and walked toward her. “You are not supposed to go there.” She warned her in a murmur, looking terrified. Their maid held her hand, tugging her as if telling her she needed to get out of there.

“No. I need to know what is going on.” Haley answered in a whisper. “I won’t make a sound.” She promised the older woman as she pulled her hand away from her.

“But you should not be here.” Zeny still insisted that they should leave.

“Either you help me, or we get caught together.” She finally told the other woman because she was not going anywhere until she got some answers.

The woman finally gave up and nodded her head. “Please, don’t stay too long.” The woman reminded her.

“Ssshhh!” She placed two fingers across her lips for the woman to shut her mouth. They would get caught if she kept talking.

Soon, she stood by the door while Zeny hid behind the corner where her father would not see her if he accidentally came out of the room. Then, she placed her ears closer to the door, trying to hear the conversation inside.

However, all she heard were muffled voices, not enough to understand a word they were saying. She moved closer, mindful not to make any unnecessary noise. She did not want the men inside to know she was there, listening.

Carefully, she had the side of her face leaning on the wooden surface. Her ears stuck to the door, trying to grasp the voices inside. Finally, she heard a few words.

“Then, it is a deal. You are finally going to endorse Michael as the next Governor.” She listened to a manly voice. She might have heard that voice before. But she still could not picture where.

Who was Michael? It seemed like they were forcing her father to endorse him in replacement for Gerald. Did they have something to do with what happened to Gerald? But they could just be asking for endorsement since Gerald was gone.

She was temporarily distracted when she looked at Zeny, who was signaling her to hurry up. But she did not have enough information yet. Nothing made sense to her if that was their big secret.

“Wait.” She mouthed, trying not to make a sound, but gestured it with her hands. Then, she returned to listening to the door. She knew as long as they were talking. She had time to listen.

“Of course, I am sure Michael would be a better Governor than Gerald.” Her father said, sounding satisfied.

Wait! That was not the voice of someone forced to do anything. It sounded more like her father had agreed with the other man. What was going on? Now, she was more confused than earlier.

“I am glad to hear that.” The voice of another man said. This one sounded younger than her father and the other man. “It was just a shame that Gerald had to die.”

What? Did she hear him right? Did Michael have something to do with Gerald’s death? Now, she needed to hear more. If they killed Gerald, she had to know why.

“Did he have to die? You know that he would have been perfect with my plans. He was about to marry my daughter and be the Governor. Then, I would have him by the balls.” That was her father speaking. She was sure of that. And it seemed that he also had something to do with this.

Oh my! She wanted to scream.

She could not believe that her father might have something to do with Gerald's death. She knew that her father could be heartless sometimes, but she had never imagined he could be a criminal.

#### Chapter 1108 Escape plan

She wanted to barge into their meeting, call the police, and have them all arrested, including her father. But she stopped. Suddenly, she feared for her unborn child.

What if they come after her? Her father alone was a powerful man. She had no doubt whoever those two were must be equally influential people. Without her father, she was nothing.

"You know I like Gerald. He was like a son to me. I had mentored him. But he never listened to me." Don answered her father. "He thought that because he was the Boss. He could do anything he liked."

"I understand what you mean." Her father responded. "It would have been hard to control a man like him."

She wanted to leave, having heard enough. She wanted the safety of her room to think, but the following words stopped her.

"We can still do what you want. Your daughter is beautiful. I will not mind marrying her." The younger voice interrupted them. "I think she will look good at my side when I become Governor." He added.

"That is a great proposition. What do you think, Alfred?" She heard the older man ask. That must be Don, she concluded.

No, Dad. Say no.

She mentally hoped her father would not agree to such a ridiculous idea. She would not marry a man she did not love. And she doubted that she would ever love any other man ever again. She believed her heart died with Gerald.

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Besides, they were all criminals. Why would she even consider complying with this insanity? Why would he marry someone who had the man she loved killed? Maybe he was the killer himself. The thought brought a chill through her body.

"Well..." Her father seemed to be thinking. "I think that is a great idea."

Damn! She could not believe it. Her father just sold her to this murderer. Now, she understood why Marcus never wanted anything to do with their father. She was a fool to believe that her father loved her.

"I think this would be a very lucrative and favorable partnership. With Gerald gone, I can take over his leadership in the organization. Michael can become the Governor, and you will be one powerful and rich man." Don announced merrily.

"I guessed we should drink to that," Michael said, equally sounding thrilled with the prospect of their horrendous plans.



She could imagine the guests and her father raising their glasses to that. Suddenly, it made her sick to think that her father had something to do with Gerald's death and to marry her to such an awful man and for what, more power and money?

And what was the man talking about when he mentioned organization? She did not remember Gerald heading some foundation or something like that. Although he had been active in his pro bono cases and charity events, he was just a benefactor.

"To the success of our plans." Her father announced as they probably drank to that. "Maybe both of you should join us for dinner tonight. So you can get to know my daughter well. I am sure that she might be home by now."

She heard her father offer, making her stand on alert. Now, she knew she had more than enough. She straightened and gradually stepped away from the door. Then, she tiptoed to the hallway where she came from, signaling for Zeny to follow.

Once inside the safety of her room, she finally breathed a sigh of relief. But she knew it would be short-lived if she did not think of a way out of this mess.

She knew she could not go to the police with her information without proof. She would only look like a fool, accusing her father and those two men of a criminal act, basing her case on what she heard.

Then, she would be putting her child in danger if she pursued this path. But she could not sit around and pretend she did not know what had happened. Now, what should she do?

"Are you ok, Ms. Haley?" She finally realized she was not alone in her room since Zeny followed her inside.

But she knew she could trust Zeny. She had taken care of her since she was a child and had been a friend of her mother. She did not have to fear her.

"Yeah! But I need to get out of here." She told her, but not what she heard in the room. "Would you help me pack?"

She believed that was the best recourse for her at the moment. She had to move out of her father's place, something she should have done a long time ago.

But where would she go? She had an apartment that she had never used. She could go there. But did she want to be found by her father, who wanted to marry her to that monster? That would be the first place her father would go if he looked for her.

"Did something happen in there?" Zeny surmised, looking at her concernedly.

"Nothing. I think it is time for me to be on my own." She told her, not wanting to involve her in the problem. The less Zeny knew, the safer she was from her father's wrath. "I just need you to promise me never to mention to anyone that I came down there to listen."

The woman nodded. "I promise."

"Go get my luggage. I will need a few things." She told her. She would figure out where she was going later. For now, she just needed a few things before she left.

They were barely halfway through packing when a knock came on her door. She could only guess who it was.

"I am sorry for disturbing you, Ms. Haley." The usual maid who brought her dinner stood outside her door. But she barely opened her door, so nobody would see what she was doing inside.

"Your father requested you join him for dinner in the dining room." The young girl informed her.

"Tell him that I will join him shortly." She replied, knowing that she could not let her father suspect anything. If she wanted to get out of there and away from him, she had to do this right. She could not act impulsively.

She guessed she had no choice but to endure a dinner with them. It would also allow her to get to know her enemies. This way, she could have a more concrete idea of her situation before executing her escape plan.

#### Chapter 1109 Trophy wife

She finished her packing first and instructed Zeny to keep it a secret. She did not want anybody else to learn about her plans. She planned to leave without her father knowing about it.

"Thanks, Zeny. I can take it from here. Remember, you will not breathe a word of this to anyone." She reminded her again as she left her room, giving her privacy to think about her options.

But where was she going where her father would never find her? She had to hide from him until she could guarantee their safety, hers and her baby's. But she could not think of one.

Her father had so many connections that hiding from him seemed impossible. Then he also had some of the best investigators who could effortlessly locate her whereabouts. One use of her phone, credit cards, and even taking money from her account would alert them of her location.

Oh my! She had to think this through before she decided to leave. Or else she would just be wasting her time. She would only end up back in her room, probably locked up until her wedding day.

"Think." She had to figure this out, but her time was ticking.

She was sure her father would think of something to force her to marry him. The great Alfred would even use her child against her if he would ever find out she was pregnant.

She could probably hide it for a month or two, but her condition would eventually show. Then, what? She could not stay here to figure out what her father would do to her and her child.

But she could not keep them waiting anymore. She had to show up at the dinner table, or her father would think something was wrong. She did not need him suspecting anything.

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"Hi, Dad!" She finally greeted him at the dining hall, where she could see the two guests were already eating with her father. They had their backs turned on her. She could only see a few portions of their faces as they slightly turned.

"Hello, sweetheart. Come on, join us for dinner." Her father beckoned her to step closer.

She could feel a weight on her feet as she forced herself to move forward. Her heart seemed heavy as she stared at the face she had loved all her life. How could he betray her in this way? How could he have something to do with the death of Gerald?

But she could not let him detect that she knew. So, she walked toward him despite her anger and fear. She finally looked at the men that had been his father's accomplices.

"Hello, I am sure that you remember my business associates." Her father pointed at the two men sitting on the opposite side of the table.

The younger man sat right next to her father, who was at the head, and the older one sat next to him. She smiled at them and nodded, acknowledging their presence before her father assisted her on her chair.

"Michael here is interested in expanding his company. He wished you to help him design the new building he intended to build." Her father said to her, introducing them as clients. But she knew better.

Then, as she looked at the face of the other man opposite her, she finally remembered who he was. Her father introduced them on the morning after Gerald's death. They were here at their house that morning.

Were they already celebrating his death at that time? She could feel a cold sweat spread through her body, but she controlled herself. She could not risk her baby's life despite wanting to stab the other man with her fork as he smiled at her.

"I am sure that I can recommend some of our best designers to cater to your specifications." She offered, not wanting to work with a man like him. Just the thought of him coming near her made her want to puke.

"I am sure they are good at what they do, but your father said you are the best. And I only want the best." Michael answered her, looking like he wanted more than that as his eyes studied her face and lowered down her body.

She could feel her skin crawling in disgust. The man was not terrible to look at, physically. On the contrary, he had a handsome face and a body to match, but knowing who he was had made a difference.

"Ok. Maybe set up an appointment with my assistant, and I will get back to you." She said, hoping to end the conversation. Besides, she had no intention of working for her father from now on, so she did not have to see him ever again.

All she needed was a clean getaway where her father would not notice her leave and would never find her until she was ready to reveal herself again.

"Then, I will set it up early in the morning." He said as a promise, looking at her again as if he intended to do more.

"Why are you not eating?" Her father looked at her untouched food. "Isn't that your favorite?" He asked as he studied her face. "And I also notice that you look pale."

"I am just tired from work." She reasoned. But she did not want to reiterate to her father that she had just lost Gerald. And he did not have to know about her baby.

"Maybe you need some time off work. A vacation, perhaps." Her father suggested, voicing what she intended to do. But it was a vacation where she was not coming back to him.

"I will try to consider that." Thinking that maybe it was the opportunity she was looking for, her chance to get away.

"I have a villa in the Canary Islands. I am sure Michael would be more than free to accompany you." Don offered, which her father seemed to approve.

Of course, it would not be easy for her to escape this horrible nightmare, but she would find a way. She was not giving up until she had her chance. But she was not waiting for tomorrow. That was for sure.

She would never allow her father to set her up with this man, marry him and become his trophy wife.

Chapter 1110 A friendly and peaceful visit

If this is a dream, please wake her up.

It was fast becoming a nightmare.

She stood by the door early that morning, answering the buzzing bell. She could only think of a few people who would be up this time. One was Sasha or Lourdes, coming to take Edison for a walk in the park nearby. And the other was Zach.

Although he did not say he was coming, she could not help but expect him to show up on her doorstep with flowers and chocolates. What could she do? She was a romantic at heart.

However, none of those people she mentioned were in front of her at that very moment. Instead, a person she did not want to see stood before her with flowers, chocolate, and a big box wrapped up with a bow.

"Ryan!" She called his name in her shock. But her reflex kicked in as she tried to shut the door in his face.

However, he was faster than her, stopping the door with his foot before she could completely shut it closed. Then, he pushed the door forward, tossing her aside and moving inside without much effort.

"What are you doing here?" She asked, looking at the man with apprehension, afraid that he might do something to her and her child. She still could remember what she did to him at the resort.

Was he here to exact his revenge against her?

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She hoped not, but that was like wishing for the stars to fall at her feet. It was impossible with a man like him. He was a vengeful man. Something she had learned too late.

"I came to visit the mother of my child." Ryan extended the flowers to her. "And to see my son." He looked beyond her as if spying if he could see her son around.

Quickly, she blocked the path to the other side of her house from his view. She never wanted him near her and especially her son. Edison did not need Ryan's toxicity in his life.

That was what he was, a poison that would destroy her and her child. His mere presence was already polluting the air they breathed. She did not want him in their lives now or ever.

"That is not happening. You are not welcome in my house or our lives." She told him as she stood her ground. "There is the door. Leave before I call the police."

She knew her rights. And this man was trespassing in her house. She would not let him mess with their lives, not now that she was happy and finally building a life with her son and, hopefully, with Zach.

"And you think you can throw me out just like that." Ryan stood threateningly before her, throwing the flowers and his gifts on the floor. "Where is my son? I want to see him." He again looked at her shoulder.

She could feel her body shaking in fear, but she still did not budge from her position. She would not let this man intimidate her. She would defend herself and her son from him.

"No. You have no son. You gave up your right when you signed those papers." She told him, reminding him of their agreement. "I kept my end of the bargain and kept my mouth shut. Now, it is your turn to leave and never come back."

She could also feel her anger rising at the audacity of her ex to expect that he still had a right to call Edison their son. He did not even know their son's name.

"I can turn over those papers with a snap of a finger. Those meant nothing. You were a slut back then. I can easily prove that you are still one now. And you are unfit to care for our son." He stood before her, looking down at her like she was nothing.

"And you know I can do it." This time, he arrogantly smiled at her, knowing he was finally getting to her.

"No, that is not true. You are the only man I slept with, no one else. You are the bastard who denied our son is yours." She shouted, feeling her heart about to burst out of her chest.

She knew his family had the power to do that. She might have gotten away the first time with a threat of exposure, but now that he was willing to acknowledge his son as his, what else could she hold against him?

His family had the power and the money, being the son of a powerful Senator. What could she do against them if he decided to get Edison from her?

"Let us not fight about the past." He suddenly held her by her arms. He was quick, and she lost her focus. "I did not come here just for my son. I also want you. If you marry me, then we can be a family."

No. No. No.

She kept shouting.

She did not want to marry him. She did not want to build a family with a despicable man like him. That would never happen.

“But you will because if you don’t...” But the words died away.

“Mommy...” A small voice interrupted her thoughts.

“I want water...” Her son said as his little fingers tugged on her shirt.

Then, she opened her eyes to see her son standing before her in the living room, with a curious expression on his adorable face.

She quickly scanned the living room, realizing that she might have fallen asleep. Then, she breathed a sigh of relief. It was not real. The call she received from Tabby, was that real too?

“Mommy...” Edison called again to her, trying to catch her attention.

“Yeah, water.” She finally acknowledged her son as she moved out of the sofa and walked to the kitchen to get him something to drink.

But her mind still replayed what she could remember of her dream. It might be a dream now, but it was a possibility. After what happened at the resort, it was not farfetched to conclude that Ryan must have hired those investigators to track her down.

Of course, she should prepare for whatever he had planned. She doubted he would come to her home with a friendly and peaceful visit.