

Royal Contract 991

Chapter 991: Life-changing

It had been a couple of days since she had moved to this place. They were still waiting for word from the other camp about their counteroffer. If her ex-boyfriend would accept her terms or offer something amiable, she could finally move on and start over again.

Until then, she had to wait and lie low where no one could recognize her. Adam had been a good friend, always accompanying her when he could. As he had promised, he introduced her to the trainer that taught him self-defense.

“Learning doesn’t happen in one blow.” The man in front of her muttered, looking at her pensively as she hit the punching bag using much force. He moved closer to her, stopping her from proceeding. “You will only hurt yourself.”

“I can handle it, Bo.” She reacted, but still, she raised her hands in surrender. She did come to him to learn.

Then, he asked her to step aside, showing her how she should do it properly without hurting herself. “You need to absorb the impact of the blow.” As he demonstrated the proper way to throw her punches, and then he stepped aside to let her try.

“Like this.” She had carefully watched him before she took her turn. It did feel different, but honestly, it still hurt her knuckles every time it hit the hard surface of the bag.

“That seems to be better, Megan,” Bo said, nodding in approval. He eyed her every movement, correcting her stance once in a while when she slipped out of pace.

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She had used one of her aliases while she pretended to be Adam’s distant cousin who was trying her luck in this city. It was a good cover for people who might snoop around her background. But she doubted anyone would suspect anything unless she gave them a reason.

Without her makeup, she was still beautiful but not the same as the one in the cameras. Without fixing her hair in a certain way and using a few disguises like hats, makeup and glasses, it would be hard to identify her as the actress they had seen on the big screen.

Some might think she had some similarities, but no one would believe that the actress was her, maybe even if she told them. Of course, why would the actress end up living in their neighborhood? That was just absurd.

“Maybe we can wrap this up. We will continue this another day.” Bo told her as he helped her remove the hand gloves he lent her. He said with a melancholy voice that it belonged to his daughter, who had moved away to another city with her husband.

“Do you miss them?” She asked, not snooping with his business but just wanting to make conversation. She felt comfortable around the man. He seemed to be a friendly man and a wonderful father to his only daughter.

“Yeah! But she and her family visit every opportunity they have.” He said that he was looking forward to seeing them this coming holiday.

She had forgotten about the holidays. She had been busy with her problems, and thinking about other things became a non-priority. She guessed she should change that.

Maybe she could visit her father this weekend and see how he was. David said that he had changed a lot over the years. It would be nice if she could celebrate the holiday season with her family for a change.

“I am sure she is excited to see you too, even your grandchildren.” She commented as he related to her that he already had two grandchildren, a girl, and a boy.

“Hey! Are you done here?” A familiar voice broke their conversation, making her turn her head to her left. “Sorry, but we have a few things we need to discuss, and your manager has not stopped calling me in the last ten minutes.”

“Yeah, just going to change, and then I am all yours.” Suddenly, she felt her heart quicken, realizing what she had said.

Since the first night he brought her dinner, he had acted like a friend to her but nothing more. He did not show any interest in her compared to the first few times they were together.

Maybe he had realized that she was not as alluring as the star when she dressed like a regular girl living across from him. Whatever attraction she had seen in him seemed to vanish as he acted professionally around her.

Anyway, he seemed not to mind what she said as he only smiled as he talked to Bo on the side. “Go ahead, but hurry up.” It was his only response.

“Ok.” She rushed to the small changing room to fix herself and changed from her sweaty shirt to a clean one. She would have opted for a quick shower, but he seemed in a hurry. As he said, Nora had been trying to get hold of her.

It could be urgent, or her manager was being paranoid, checking on her at every opportunity she had. She had not checked her phone since she put on her gloves, which was more than an hour ago.

She could already guess that Nora might have several messages and calls from her that she had not responded to, but her manager could wait for a few more minutes as she hurried to tie her hair before leaving the room to join the men.

“Ready?” Adam asked when she resurfaced at the main gym, but he was alone. Bo must have gone to the back to tend to things.

“Yeah, where to?” She asked, wondering what they would be discussing now. It could be about the case or something about what Nora wanted.

“In your apartment. Nora will be meeting us in ten minutes. She said she had something urgent to discuss with us.” Adam told her as he guided her to his car.

“Did she mention anything about it?” She knew Nora never liked wasting anybody’s time with trivial things. She would call and text for small matters, but for her to travel to her place.

It was an urgent situation that she could not ignore. It meant that something was up. It could be about her job or her personal life. But whatever it was, she could expect it to be life-changing.

Chapter 992: A bastard under her belt

She had never been drunk in her entire life since she had always been rational and never liked going to parties. Not true, her mind declared, reminding her of that one fateful night when she had a few drinks too many.

It was a mistake that she should never forget. But how could she regret that night when it had given her a son that she adored despite who his father was? She could hate the man that hurt her but never the result of that unfortunate incident.

Her ex-boyfriend was a coward when he turned his back on his responsibility, but she honestly loved him. Therefore, it hurt that he only took advantage of her in her moment of weakness and then disregarded her afterward like yesterday's thrash.

"Ria, Mr. Whitman requested that you should be present for the final signing of the contract. I think he was truly impressed with your proposal." Brenda informed her excitedly as her supervisor stood by her table, beaming with pride.

"That is great." She knew it was a big deal. She should be thrilled about it. It was not every day that a client would find her work satisfactory.

Working in the corporate world required that she should always be in her A-game. Or the next person beside her could suddenly take the position she wanted. Then, she would be back in the street, trying to make ends meet.

"Yes, Alex is happy about your performance. So, I hope you will keep this up." Brenda tapped her on the shoulders and then turned around to return to her work.

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"Wait," Ria called to her, having some questions about the contract signing. "Will Sir Alex be accompanying me in the meeting?" She wished to know so that she would know what to expect.

Her supervisor stopped before she exited the door and turned to her. "He would love to, but he had other matters to deal with, but he is not sending you alone. Zachary will accompany you on the trip." Brenda casually said.

She blinked her eyes but realized that they were not the problem. It was her ears. She believed she heard her boss say she was not going with their CEO to this meeting. Was something wrong with her ears? Suddenly, she hoped so.

After that night in her apartment, she had done all she could to avoid being alone with that man. She still felt terrible every time she remembered how she had behaved in his presence.

She was glad their boss had not assigned them to work together after that night with the client. She still felt mortified that she kissed him, remembering how she had surrendered herself so easily to him.

“Alex was impressed with your teamwork that he decided that you should both close this deal to the end.” Brenda clarified further.

“Zachary? There must be a mistake. I can’t go with him.” She suddenly realized from the look on her boss’s face that she heard her right. “And you mention a trip.”

“Is there a problem with Zach?” Brenda looked at her curiously as if she was studying her. “About the trip. Alona is still finalizing the details. You will know more about it later.”

“No, there is nothing wrong with Zach.” She suddenly realized that she was making a big splash of things. Nobody had to know what had happened with her and that man. But she had to play it cool. “I was just surprised.”

She had to be more careful of her emotions if she did not want to be the next gossip in this town. She remembered one secretary downstairs who had an affair with her married boss. But it went sour when the wife learned about it. Now, she had to resign because of the controversy.

What did she know about him? He might already be involved in a committed relationship. That was possible. Look at him. He was perfect. Or worse, he could be married with two sons and was playing her for a fool.

“Then, good,” Brenda announced with excitement. “You deserved to close this deal since you both worked hard on this.” She insisted.

Ria could not refute that since she could not have convinced the client without his help. She might have come up with the brilliant idea, but he had been very convincing and charming during the meeting.

They did work well as a team, but she blew it when she kissed him. But that was not entirely her fault. The alcohol had been the culprit. She had to blame something, not believing she was attracted to the man.

“Ok.” She could not think of anything to ask except to accept her fate and hoped she could get passed the awkwardness. The last thing she wanted was for them to sit across from each other in a meeting and could not even look each other in the eye.

“Now, don’t fret much about it. Just think of it as vacation with pay.” Then, Brenda was out of sight as she returned to her table.

She did not have any control over the matter. So, she could only plan for it and hope for the best. She could always ask Zach to forget all about it. Maybe it would not be such a big deal to him. Then, they could act professionally like before.

She remembered how his face turned when the door opened, revealing the young teenage girl carrying a toddler. Then, when she introduced Edison as her son. He almost lost all the color on his face.

Was that relief that nothing yet had happened to them that crossed his eyes? He could not excuse himself fast enough as he suddenly remembered a prior commitment, as he left like his feet were on fire.

Sadly, that scene was not new to her. She did try to date as men used to line up to seek her attention. However, those men also turned their heads like a boomerang when they realized she already had a child.

No man wanted a woman with a sad past and an unwanted child under the list of her accomplishment.

A bastard under her belt.

Chapter 993: New line of defense

She stared at the street that was starting to look familiar to her. A month ago, her life had been entirely different from this. After a year, what could she be looking forward to when all this was over?

Would she be happy living out of the limelight if it came to that?

She had to consider the end of her career if the case did not go her way. As they said, good things never last, but how she thought she would be acting until she retired in her old age.

“We are here,” Adam spoke in the middle of her trance. She did not even notice that the motor had stopped as she stared out the window but barely saw the view outside.

“Oh!” Serena mumbled in mild surprise as she quickly unbuckled herself and exited the door. Soon, Adam walked next to her as they entered their apartment building.

“Bo said that you are doing well with your training. That is good.” Adam said as they climbed the stairs as he attempted a conversation.

He noticed that she had been quiet the whole ride home. He wanted to ask what was bothering her, but he did not want to pry into her private affairs. He was happy that they were getting comfortable with each other. He did not want to rush things and ruin their friendship. Besides, as a client, she was off-limits to him. He could not take advantage of her vulnerability by making a move on her. That would be unethical and against his principle.

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“Yeah, he is a good teacher. No wonder you are great at defending yourself.” Serena replied as she finally attention to the present and stopped worrying about the past and the future.

After a few minutes, she was face to face with her manager, who looked like the world was about to collapse and fall into its destruction. That was an exaggeration, but Nora had this look that she carried a horrible omen.

As much as she wished that her manager was a good actress, Nora was not. She only had very few expressions seen on her face but was usually dominated by a frown, an angry look, and an occasional forced smile.

“Where have you been? I have been calling you.” Nora asked as she looked at her as if expecting an answer immediately. “Hello, Adam. Sorry for dragging you into this. But then again, I am not sorry.” Her manager said, exasperated with her.

“That is ok, and hi to you too, Nora,” Adam responded with a friendly smile, understanding her frustration. He also had clients that could drive him to the wall.

“I have been out,” Serena casually answered without feeling the need for urgency as she waited for the two to finish.

She moved towards the small kitchen, in the same room as the living room, only divided by a counter. Then she grabbed a water bottle from the fridge, needing something to refresh her body from the warm temperature outside.

“Do you like some water?” She offered, but both declined as they waited for her to finish.

If compared to her home or the hotel rooms she had been staying at, her apartment did not have an efficient heating and cooling system. Therefore, it might take a while before she could feel refreshed in her new home.

But that was ok with her. She was not complaining. She just needed time to adjust to this new environment. It was not that bad since she saved money with the cheap rent.

“You should still answer my calls.” Her manager reprimanded her with a high tone. She truly meant business, whatever the reason she sprung into her presence with such short notice.

“I am sorry, but what seems to be the problem.” She understood her manager for being pissed, but she was now curious and anxious at her news.

Was it good or bad? But the way Nora looked at her, it could only be not good.

“This is the problem,” Nora said as she pulled an envelope out of her bag and shoved it in her hands. “Look at it yourself.”

She stared at the thick brown envelope she held with her fingers and wondered what it was. It could not be a script or a contract since her manager was pissed. It might have nothing to do with a job.

But what was it?

She did not need to shake it to know that it was a pile of papers but what was on it. That was the question as she gently untangled the tie holding the closure and unsealed it.

“What is it?” She asked again, wishing her manager would spill it out instead of her uncovering it. It was unnerving, especially when she also turned to see Adam looking suspiciously at what she was holding.

But her manager did not say anything as she gestured for her to look at it. When she finally checked the file inside, she could not even blink her eyes. It was not good.

“What is the meaning of this?” She asked, both furious and puzzled by the pictures in her hands. Those were the pictures she had been waiting to appear on the net or in the tabloids.

First, it was an invasion of her privacy. Nobody had a right to take pictures of her in her home or somewhere she was temporarily residing. Second, why did her manager have these pictures?

“Somebody sent it to my office. I don’t know who, and my secretary also had no idea who left it on my table.” Nora said as she finally moved to sit on the small uncomfortable couch.

“Can I see it?” Adam moved swiftly at her side, taking the pictures from her slightly shaking fingers.

“Who?” She asked again, but more to herself. “Why?” That was another question. “Are they asking for some money for it?” She meant the paparazzi or something.

Many people resorted to blackmailing stars for pictures they had taken by accident, or else they would sell it in the tabloids or whoever was willing to pay for it.

“I don’t know. So far, no one has contacted me. And obviously, neither you.” Nora said as she touched her head.

It was part of her job to deal with this shit. But with the sensitivity of her talent’s situation, she had to ask Adam’s opinion on this matter. Besides, he was one of the stars in the pictures.

“But can you explain to me what happened in those pictures?” She had to know the entire story if she would be handling the cleanup of this possible mess waiting to happen.

And the legal advice if there was any implication of these pictures to her case. Those were compromising photos that could mean anything based on the interpretations.

It can either go on their way or to the other team. If Elliot got his hands on these, he might use them against Serena. That was if he was not the mastermind of sending those pictures to her.

“As I said to you the other day. He attacked me again at the hotel. Luckily, Adam came back and saved me from him.” Serena repeated her story but forgot to mention the bystander taking their picture at that time.

“You should have said something. Maybe I could have tracked that creep immediately and stopped this before it became a problem.” Nora liked to keep things neat and do damage control before it created havoc.

Now, she had to stand by and wait for the problem to blow up in their faces before she could do anything about it. As much as she did not want it that way, it seemed she had no choice.

Whoever sent those pictures had something in their mind. But whatever that was, they could only speculate at the moment. However, Nora could already expect the worse from past experiences.

“What do you think?” Nora turned to Adam, who had been silent since he looked at those pictures.

“It could be nothing, but it might become damaging in Serena’s case if used against us,” Adam responded, stating his opinion.

He could already imagine what Elliot and his team of cunning lawyers would do with it if he had his hands on these pieces of evidence. But he hoped that man never got the chance.

He had to get hold of that man that took them. “Will you excuse me while I make some calls?” He moved to the other side of the room for privacy, leaving the two women to talk about the situation.

Then, he hastily called his investigators to check on the lead. He was sure cameras spread around the hotel room. One or two might have caught the man who took those photos.

The last thing he needed was for Elliot to do the same and beat him from taking those photos from that creep. But if that happened, he had to find a way to work around this problem.

He knew sticking to one strategy would give him a weak case. He had to prepare for other eventualities and unknown surprises that the other team might spring on him.

He would always need a new line of defense to win her case.

Chapter 994: Forever to love and cherish

His eyes kept looking at the door as he waited for her to join him for dinner. He wanted to pick her up for their date. But she insisted on meeting him at the restaurant he had chosen for this special occasion.

If anyone was wondering, it was their anniversary. One would think that most men did not involve themselves much in such things. But he had been thinking about this day for weeks, planning this moment for days.

Admittedly, he was not remotely close to being like this a year ago, as he did not take his relationship with her seriously. But after realizing he loved her and could not live without her, he drastically changed his ways.

“Where are you?” He mumbled under his breath as his eyes covered every entrance and exit of the establishment, wanting a glimpse of her face as she walked toward him. But he failed to see her as another woman entered, but it was not her.

She was late, but that was understandable. Sometimes, a client could extend their appointments and make her run late. He had asked her to give up her career and be his wife, but she adamantly refused, not wanting to be branded as a gold digger.

Well, she did not come from money like him. But she was honest and hardworking. Not only that, she was kind and intelligent, and she loved him very much.

“Hey, man, fancy seeing you alone.” A business client stopped by his table and greeted him. Probably seeing him alone, she decided to drop by and chat.

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“As you can see, I am waiting for my date.” He admitted to the gorgeous woman who looked like she wished to chat some more.

But he made it clear that he had a romantic dinner plan with someone, showing her the stunning flowers he picked himself from her favorites. Everything was perfect, even the wine.

The only one missing was his date.

“Oh!” The woman appeared surprised. She must have thought it was her lucky day. But he was not taking bait from another woman because a particular girl already had his heart hooked, and he had no more intention to be free from her.

“That is one lucky woman.” She added as she finally realized she should be going. “It is nice to see you.” Then, she was on her way, leaving him alone again with his thoughts as he wondered what was taking her so long.

Then, his thoughts returned to the night that he knew that losing her was not an option anymore.

One night, she asked him. “Would you ever consider marriage? I know you don’t believe in it, but what if something forced your hand.”

She knew he loved her, but he could feel that she wanted to take the next step. Although, she tried to sugarcoat the question with what-ifs.

Of course, she was afraid of his rejection. After all, he had not proposed to her in their on-and-off relationship for years. Then, admittedly, he had been a womanizer during those times.

He was lucky that she loved him more than she hated him for all his sins. She always found it in her heart to forgive him eventually.

“I don’t know.” He remembered answering her. He still did not feel that commitment and marriage were the same. He always thought a ring should not be the sole symbol of their love.

At some point, he had vowed to stop looking at another woman. He finally decided to commit only to her. He even bought a boat and named it after her. It was the symbol of his love for her.

Then, he saw his friends jump into the wedding wagon with wide-open eyes and happily contented to spend the rest of their lives with one girl. It made him realize that he also wanted that.

He finally proposed. “Will you marry me and be my wife for the rest of our lives?” He saw how her eyes lit up. He knew he had just fulfilled her dream to be his wife.

She was the happiest woman that night. He also thought it was the start of everything great in their relationship. She accepted and agreed to wear his ring and spend the rest of her life with him.

However, days, weeks, and months passed, and she still refused to give him a date for the wedding. “You might have proposed and given me a ring, but you are not ready to commit to me yet.”

“But I am. I want you to be my wife.” He pressed on, not wanting her to believe he was not serious about her. “I am ready to commit to this. I have not been unfaithful to you if that is your worry.”

It seemed that his past had started to haunt him as she doubted his commitment. It was his fault that she was finding it hard to see that he was a changed man.

“I know you have not, but many things about you still have not changed. Until you realize what it is, I can’t marry you.” She adamantly said. And he knew there was no changing her mind.

“Why not just tell me, and I will change it?” He asked her, finding it hard to figure out what else he had to change about himself.

“I love you, but you need to discover that by yourself. Then, ask me again if you still wish to marry me.” She told him as she looked at the big rock on her finger.

“But I promise you that there is nothing in this world I will want more than to spend the rest of my life with you as your wife.” She moved closer to him and wrapped her arms around his shoulder as her lips sealed their fate.

Tonight, he believed he had figured out what she wanted from him all this time. He was about to tell her he was ready to commit to this marriage a hundred percent.

But where was she? He looked into his watch and wondered why she was taking this long. He grabbed his phone and was about to text her. But he noticed a text coming from her. Then, he noticed he had turned his phone muted during the meeting earlier.

I AM SORRY. SORRY. SORRY.

I AM LATE, BUT I AM ON MY WAY.

I LOVE YOU, AND I AM SORRY AGAIN.

He could not help but smile at her message. Well, there was no need to be alarmed. She was only running late again.

Then, his phone started ringing, expecting it to be her. He immediately answered it, wanting to hear her melodic voice. He did not mind if she was late tonight since he still had forever to love and cherish her.

Chapter 995: In or out

She watched her little boy play in the middle of her living room. She managed to go home early today. At least early enough compared to some nights that she had to stay late.

“Edison, how is your day?” Ria asked, but he ignored her, continuing to play with his toys. “Mine is great.” She answered her question for him.

At least she had not seen Zach at the office. Thankfully, she heard that Alex had asked him to run an errand for him. But Alona gave her the bad news. It was supposed to be good if only she did not have to go with him and spend time away from her son.

“Oh! I never thought it would involve traveling and staying for two days and three nights.” She remembered expressing her surprise at the news.

Honestly, she was on top of the world when she learned of the CEO’s decision to send her to close the deal. It meant he had learned to trust her commitment and capability to do her job.

But it also made her realize that she had not thought of her plans thoroughly. She had never considered facing this kind of situation before. Unfortunately, this was her reality, and she had to figure this one out soon.

“I know it will not be easy for you, especially with Edison, but if you want this job, you need to make sacrifices.” Alona sympathized with her, understanding her situation, but like what she said, it was part of her job description.

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If she could not do what her bosses asked of her, she had better quit now and forget about this job. Want it or not, it was part of her obligation to the company.

She would have jumped into this opportunity of a lifetime if only her circumstances had been different. She would have no qualms about it if she had no other commitment.

But it felt like she was facing several dilemmas that she did not want to deal with since it meant she had to make a decision.

A hard one.

“What do you think?” She asked Edison, who only looked at her with a smile on his adorable face.

Of course, he did not understand a word of what she said. But who else was she supposed to talk to when no one else was around to listen to her rants? It always had been just her and her son against the world.

Luckily, she had a wonderful couple downstairs and their great daughter to help her from time to time. Well, she could say that it was most of the time.

Now, she could only think of that lovely family to care for her son if she had to leave him for a few days. She knew she could not entrust her son with anyone else.

“But can I do it?” She asked the wind around her. Maybe they would listen and whisper an answer to her ears.

Could she leave her son to pursue her dream, even if it was for a few days? But how many times would she have to do this if she kept working for them? She doubted that it would be an isolated case.

She had seen her boss, Brenda, and Josey, fly from one place to another as they dealt with clients and problems for days. She knew that this was not a one-time deal. There would be more situations like this for her.

But could she pass up a chance for a good job? It was her dream, and she had worked hard to reach it. But what about her son? Did Edison deserve an absentee mother? Would he grow up with her always away at her job?

The bottom line question was, was this all worth it?

“I hunger.” Edison finally let go of his toys and ran toward her. He sat on her lap and put his palms on her cheeks as he sought her attention.

“Ok, my sweet boy. If you behave, I will give you one candy after dinner.” She had learned that giving small rewards helped him obey her instead of putting fear in him with the threat of punishment.

“Yehey!” The boy shouted cheerfully, hearing the word candy. At least, he was beginning to understand the most basic and usual things around them.

She mentally noted to buy Sasha and Lourdes, the girl’s mother, a gift for all their good deeds. She was not their family, but they had helped her through her tough times more than she could count. And they did not ask for much either in return.

But was she ready to leave the care of her child with another person? She knew she had neglected him more as her job became more complicated and demanding. She was missing out on his growing-up years.

Was it all worth it? That was her question again.

“Come on. I also have a surprise for you.” She guided her son to the kitchen and prepared his meal as he opened the gift she had bought the other day.

She called it the guilty gift. She thought of buying a gift even if there was no occasion because she felt guilty for all the late nights she had to spend at the office, an exchange for all her shortcomings to her son.

But as she watched her son, she could not help but wonder. Could she continue to live with the allowance she received from her ex as child support? That was if she stopped working and be with her son all day and night.

Could she live with that? Would her son want that? Would he be proud of her for accomplishing nothing in her life? Or would her son see her as a loser?

“Let me help you.” She said to Edison when he looked frustrated as he failed to open the box.

After he played with it for a few minutes, she finally placed the food before him. “Eat first before playing with this again. Then, you will have your candy.” She promised him.

He showed slight hesitation as he wanted the toy. But in a few minutes, he decided he wanted the candy too. Then, he happily ate without any more fuss.

Soon, her son was exhausted and fast asleep. She was tired too, but sleep seemed to evade her as she stared at the window beside her bed. She was on the upper floor. She had a good view of the night sky.

But her mind was far from appreciating its beauty as she debated what to do with her life. Was her career more important than her child’s welfare? But she believed she was doing this not only for herself but for her son too.

“Please, let me sleep.” She knew she needed it badly. She had to have a clear mind when she woke up the next day. And the energy to continue the job waiting for her at the office. That was if she was not quitting.

She had until tomorrow to decide whether she would do this because the team would leave with or without her the following day. It was either she was in or out.

Chapter 996: Final destination

She looked at her watch again on her wrist, tapping it as if it would stop it from ticking. But she knew there was nothing she could do now. She was not going to make it in time. Even if she beat all the red lights, she would still be late.

It was her fault that she had forgotten about their anniversary. For the first time, her fiance beat her to it. For sure, he would not let this one slide. He would milk this incident up to the last drop.

Still, she could not help but let a smile creep into her lips at the thought that he had prepared something special for them. She could not wait to see him and his surprise.

But at that moment, she had to focus on her job as her clients looked at her. They were expecting her to say something.

"I hope you like the place because I believe this is perfect for you." She finally said to the couple who had been listening to her attentively as she presented the last feature that was the main selling point of the place.

"Can you give us a minute to discuss this?" The woman smiled at her, assuring her that everything was fine. She did not mind since decisions like this needed both parties to decide.

She watched the two confer with each other, excusing themselves from her as they moved to the open space that led to the swimming pool. She could still see them from afar, observing their body language. But still, she gave them the privacy they needed.

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Nonetheless, she could more or less determine if the couple had any interest in purchasing the house or still having second thoughts. So far, she believed she might have a chance with this one as she saw them walk back to the room with a satisfied smile.

Once standing before her, her male client smiled at her and asked. "How fast can you draw up the paper works?" Of course, that was her cue to close the deal.

Several minutes later, she was saying goodbye to the lovely couple, wishing them the best of luck in their wedding. Then, she rushed down the steps toward her car, parked not far from the house.

She could not help but think of her wedding and the day that they would also choose the house that would fit perfectly for them. But for now, she was basking in her glory, another achievement under her belt.

She could not wait to share with her date the good news, but before that, she had to text him that she was running late. She did not want him to worry or think she had stood him up, not tonight.

I AM SORRY. SORRY. SORRY.

I AM LATE, BUT I AM ON MY WAY.

I LOVE YOU, AND I AM SORRY AGAIN.

She quickly pressed send and focused her eyes back on the road. She was lucky to meet such an incredible guy. He was far from perfect, but he was the man that she loved.

Truthfully, he had a long list of flaws that she almost gave up on him. However, he had managed to turn his life around, addressing those flaws and changing himself because he wished to be a better man for her.

"There is no need to rush." She internally chimed in her mind, knowing he would wait for her even if it took her hours to get there.

She checked her speedometer, not wanting to go fast. The last thing she needed was to see a blinking light following her behind because she had exceeded the speed limit.

“Not tonight.” She mumbled again as she firmly gripped the steering wheel. Nothing would stop her this time from getting to her destination.

Suddenly, she regretted that she had accepted this meeting with a client. She would have declined it if she had remembered this special day. But it was too late to cancel since the clients were already on the way.

She also contemplated ditching this meeting, but it would not look good on her record. Besides, her client was about to get married. She did not want to ruin their intent to find their dream house when she had picked the ideal place.

Selling houses or an estate was not just forcing people to buy a property. It was also an art and an act. She must present the land and the house as if it was the most beautiful thing they had ever seen.

Then she had to convince them that it was perfect and the only place they would want to build their family, grow old and eventually form memories and legacies.

Then, her phone suddenly rang as she was about to turn. Expecting it to be her date checking on her, she immediately answered without looking at the screen.

“Yes, darling. I am sorry...” But she stopped when the other voice did not resemble the person she expected to be on the other line. Instead, it was her boss inquiring about the client.

Of course, she immediately related the good news to her immediate boss, proudly telling him that she had made a great deal. She did work on commissions. The better the price, the larger her take-home pay would be.

“I know I can always count on you.” Her boss praised her, promising her that she had the promotion in the bag. She gradually stopped at the red light as she finished her report to her boss.

“I will hold your word on that.” She could not stop the butterflies that fluttered in her stomach. She had been waiting for this moment for the longest time. Now, they had more to celebrate as she excitedly ended the call.

She knew she could not wait to tell him the good news. It might not be a hundred-million-dollar contract deal that he was used to, but it was one of her top accounts, and she was proud of it.

Therefore, she grabbed her phone again, swiping and tapping on it. Then, she waited for the ring to buzz on the speaker, but sadly, it did not connect. Her phone died on her. She realized that she might have forgotten to charge it earlier.

“I guess my news will have to wait.” She mumbled as she giggled in her seat out of her excitement. She could not believe that everything was falling into place. Her dreams were finally coming true.

All the things she had done and had achieved, all her hard work was not just for her. It was also for her family, who had always depended on her. She knew her fiance did not understand the value of her family to her, but soon, she hoped that he would also learn to value his.

She firmly believed that family was a fundamental foundation of any relationship. Marriage was not just a union of two people but the merging of two families.

If he did not have good relations with his family, how could his family accept her into their fold? The same went with hers. However, he still had a few things to deal with before she could agree to take a plunge with him. There was still time to change things for the better.

“Now, what do you want?” She exasperatedly asked as she noticed a car in her rearview mirror, repeatedly honking behind her.

In front of her, she could see the stop light ahead, but it was still green. She knew she still could make it before it turned red. But it seemed that the other car behind her wanted her to speed up, probably in a hurry too.

However, she was not letting the other driver bully her on the road. She kept her speed and eyes focused on the road.

She could see that she was not far from the restaurant, just a few more blocks. Then, she would sit across from the man she planned to spend the rest of her life with someday. Then, they could have thousands of dinners together.

But as she passed the line, she noticed the green light had quickly turned red. “That was close.” She breathed a sigh of relief. It would not have been such a big deal if it had been another time. She would not be in such a hurry.

But tonight, she knew she could not wait a minute longer to see him. However, something seemed wrong as the honking stopped, but a screeching and metallic crushing sound echoed behind her.

Automatically, her gaze landed on the rearview mirror. But before she could process what was happening behind her, she felt her eyes shift from the road ahead to her side. Then, she was suddenly spinning.

She did not understand what was happening as everything around her spun out of control. Her world was swirling as her body flung in every direction.

“Help! Stopped!” But her screams appeared to fall on deaf ears. Then, she realized nobody else could help her except herself.

Therefore, she gripped the wheels tightly and finally pressed on the brakes as hard as her feet could take it.

But it felt it was no use until everything went still.

Was it over?

She could feel her heart beating wildly inside her chest. She believed that was a good sign as she breathed deeply, holding onto her chest. She must have survived with minor injuries as she felt her fingers and her toes.

But suddenly, she partially had to cover her eyes due to a blinding light coming from the rearview window.

But beyond the bright light, she saw it.

There it was, her final destination.

Chapter 997: Instinct or not

His smile slowly faded on his lips as the minutes turned to hours. He had been looking at his watch, phone, and the door nonstop as he waited for his date to arrive.

He could see the other patrons and the servers were curious about his date since he had been sitting at this table alone for a while. The manager might have asked him to leave if he had not been a good customer.

He had occupied a good table but hardly ordered anything except the expensive wine. He knew how many other customers would want his space.

“Sir, would you like something else?” That would be the third time or the fourth a server had asked him that question, but he said the same thing.

“I will order when I am ready.” He snapped at the boy, slightly irritated that they could not wait.

But he knew they were only doing their job. But he did not understand why his date had not yet arrived. He took his phone out again and checked for any messages.

But after that first text, he believed nothing else came from her. She did not call or text him again. He tried again to call her, but it still went to her voice mail. He had no way of contacting her aside from leaving her several messages and hoping she would respond soon enough.

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“Hello!” He finally decided to call someone else, hoping she might have any idea where his fiance went. He knew she met with a client, but where. Would it take her hours to drive from where she took them?

Besides, he was beginning to worry about her condition. It was not like her to be this late. Maybe a few minutes or a maximum of an hour, but not more than two hours without calling or texting him.

And now, he could not even reach her on her phone. He could sense that something might be wrong. Maybe she had a flat tire somewhere and needed help. Then, her phone might have died on her. Or maybe?

The last thought was not something he did not want to consider as he heard another voice on the line. “Hi, David!” His sister answered immediately. “Do you need anything?” She quickly asked, probably wondering why he was calling.

There was no quick fix to magically patch their differences, not with a few calls and meetings. Although both tried to open their hearts and minds, it might take a few more before they could say that they had once again bonded as brother and sister, not just because they shared the same blood.

“Serena, have you, by any chance, heard from Rosella?” He hesitantly asked. Lately, the two had been calling each other. Rosella insisted that they strengthened their ties through constant communication.

So far, he believed that they were fast becoming friends. It seemed that the two had many things they liked. They even planned to go on a vacation when the situation on his sister's end settled down.

"Rosella?" His sister asked as if thinking. "Yes, she called me this morning. Why?" She seemed to be puzzled. "Wait. Aren't you supposed to be together?"

He had told her about the dinner plan. He even asked her for tips on how he could surprise his fiancée. But it seemed his sister had no communication with Rosella tonight.

"Yeah! We are supposed to meet for dinner, but until now, she has been a no-show." He confided in his sister, something they had never done for a long time.

When was the last time he told his younger sister about a girl problem? It must be more than a decade ago. They did not talk much since she moved out and cut them out of her life to follow her dreams.

"Do you want me to find out what is wrong? She might have a valid reason for standing you up." Serena offered, probably thinking Rosella might have changed her mind about showing up. But he doubted that it was the reason.

Something in his gut feeling was not sitting well inside him. Suddenly, he sensed that the reason might be more complicated than that. But it was still something he did not want to consider.

"No, there is no need. I think I am just overthinking it." He stopped his sister from going to the trouble. "She did send a text that she was going to be late." He added, not wanting his sister to worry.

But he was getting concerned as he said goodbye to his sister and hung up the phone. He tried to call her phone again, one last time, hoping this time, she would answer. But the same thing happened. Her voicemail answered him.

"Can I have the bill?" At this point, he knew that he had to attempt to find her. The situation was not the same as the previous times.

She would not keep him waiting this long unless something happened. He just hoped her reason had something to do with her work and nothing else because the other options were unthinkable.

Soon, he walked out of the restaurant, moving toward his waiting car. But as he passed by the staff near the door, he heard something that had piqued his attention for an unknown reason.

"Have you seen the accident outside?" One of the uniformed security said to the woman on the receiving podium.

"What accident?" The woman asked, looking curious as she waited.

"It happened a bit earlier. One car tried to beat the red light and caused several vehicles to tangle in one big pile of mess." The man continued his story. "Until now, traffic is heavy outside."

Then the man turned to him. "Sir, I will avoid going in that direction." He suggested when he saw him and guided him to his car. "Traffic is still a mess."

He turned to his other side, looking at the roadblocks not far from where he stood. It seemed it was a massive accident based on the number of police cars and ambulance filling the street.

He suddenly walked in that direction, leaving his car and walking toward the accident scene. It could be that he wished to help since he had volunteered a lot on rescue missions. Or it could be something else.

Instinct or not, he found himself on the sideline, unable to believe what caught his interest.

Chapter 998: Stand on the subject matter

He had been sitting in the dark, trying to piece the puzzle that had plagued his mind. It had been hours since the accident happened, but he still had no clear idea of what truly transpired.

The police and the ambulance surrounded the scene. There was no way for him to know but to wait on the sideline until they revealed their accident report. But until now, he was clueless since the police had no conclusive findings, not officially.

“Don’t you plan to go home?” A sudden bright glare flooded the room as his friend switched the lights on.

He continued to walk further into the room, not waiting for his permission to join him. But that was his friend. He felt entitled to do what he pleased since he was his friend.

“No, not yet.” He answered without looking at him as he closed his eyes and pretended it was still dark in the room. He wanted peace to think. “What do you want, Mike?” He finally asked as he finally opened his eyes when it was clear to him that his friend was not going anywhere until he dealt with him.

“I think Don was the one who sabotaged the operation earlier,” Mike told him as he sat on the chair and crossed his leg. He wore his smug face, confidently showing he had figured out the entire incident this evening.

“What made you think that?” Initially, Don was also his first suspect. He knew the plans and the entire operation.

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The exchange he had organized was simple. If done flawlessly according to his instructions, it would have been a quick and easy exchange of goods and money.

But something fucked up along the way. Or rather, someone fucked him up and informed the police of the undergoing drug operation. He doubted that there was a mole in his organization since he had swept his team and cleaned his house.

He caught two more moles and disposed of them. They all pointed in the direction of his friend, Don. But it was too easy. It felt like it was a setup. Or Don might have made it feel that way.

After all, Don had been in this business since he was still in a diaper. He knew most of the ins and outs of this business at the back of his mind. He was his mentor, for fuck sake.

“Aside from the obvious that he had backstabbed you before, I think he might have some change of heart and want the throne for himself.” Mike speculated as he took a cigarette from his pocket and a lighter.

Then, he leaned on his chair as he lighted his cigar, inhaled deeply, and puffed a white cloud of smoke in front of him. But his eyes never left him as if he was studying him, reading what he was thinking.

“That is possible.” And the man had openly threatened to destroy him the last time they had met. But he could also think of several names that could fill the list.

But the older man also informed him he had not yet lost faith in him. He still wanted to see that he could recover from this situation. If that were the case, then why would he sabotage his mission?

It did not make sense that Don would try to ruin his reputation unless it was all a ploy to throw him off his game. Therefore, he was also considering him a suspect even if it was against his better judgment.

“But do you have any other suspects?” Mike asked as he continued to play with his cigar, creating circular shapes with the smoke coming from his mouth.

Of course, he did.

“There is the Fabio Family and Robert from the west side. Then, there is the Rosley Family.” He spoke in a quiet deep tone, especially the last name, as he released a deep sigh.

It seemed that he had been complacent in dealing with the Rosley Family. Probably partly because of his involvement with Haley. He never did a thorough background check on her and her family.

Recently, he learned through Mike’s connection and a thorough investigation that Alfred, Haley’s father, had deep ties with a rival underground organization in another part of the city. It was a big organization abroad, but it was still trying to break its market here in this country.

“So, you think Haley’s father might have something to do with this,” Mike stated as he stood up and crushed his dying cigar on the ashtray on his table. “It is also possible.” His friend nodded as if agreeing with him.

But he knew it was already at the top of his friend’s list of suspects. Mike did not want to point it out since he was still involved with Haley. And he did not want to consider that Haley had any part in this.

Unlike what Mike had suggested, at the time, he discovered the truth about Alfred Rosley. His friend believed that Haley had been a pawn of his father to use against him.

“I know what you are thinking.” Gerald quickly reacted. “If Alfred is involved in this, I doubt Haley had anything to do with it.” He still did not want to believe Haley knew anything about her father’s participation in the underground.

His father was not a primary leader in the other organization, but he was actively participating in their illegal activities. Based on the reports he received from their investigation, Alfred had aided many shipments of contrabands to the country, using his construction business.

But what he still did not understand in this grand scheme of things was his participation in it. If Alfred knew that he was the leader of their competition, why would he help him in his candidacy and want him to marry his daughter?

It just did not make sense to him yet.

“Why don’t you admit it to me? You love Haley. That is why you are protecting her like this.” Mike looked at him frustratedly, as if he was angry that he would not trust him with this information.

“No, as I said before.” He stared his friend in the eye. “I need her. But I don’t love her.” That remained his stand on the subject matter.

Chapter 999: Fight for every last breath

No! No! No!

It could not be happening.

It was the only thought that kept going through his mind as he drove like a madman on the street. But the more he needed to be fast enough, the more the traffic worsened and stopped him in his tracks.

He could see that he was still far from his destination, and time was of the essence. It was one of the moments in his life he knew he could never be late. Or, he might regret it for the rest of his life.

“Move!” He shouted at the top of his lungs at the other car before him as if the other driver could hear him. Then, he honked his horn hard, hoping that would make a difference.

Unfortunately, the traffic was far worse than he would like as he found himself stuck in the middle. The accident had probably created a chain effect, affecting the flow of the vehicle’s movement in other directions.

“I need to see her,” David repeated in a defeated tone as he slammed his hands on the steering wheel, unable to do but wait till the cars moved again.

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Finally, at the next corner, as if by some miracle, he was able to turn and discovered that the street was less congested than the main road. It was a longer route to the hospital, but at least he was moving as he stepped on the gas to speed the car as fast as it could go under the circumstances.

After almost half an hour, he pulled up at the hospital’s main entrance and jumped out of his car. The security tried to call his attention. “Sir, you can’t park your car at the front...” But he did not care. He threw his keys to the man and ran toward the main lobby.

He could care less about his car. His only priority at that moment was to find her. He needed confirmation that she was ok. That nothing serious happened to her. But was that even possible after seeing the condition of her car?

He knew right away when he saw the red car that it was hers. He remembered trying to replace that car, gifting her a new one on her last birthday.

“I don’t need it. I still have a functioning car.” She had insisted, declining adamantly to accept his surprise. No matter what he tried and said, he failed to convince her to take his gift.

Then, he immediately questioned one of the police if they had identified the driver of the pile of wreckage across from him.

“We can’t disclose any information...” The officer was not yet finished with his spiel when he interrupted him.

“I know the protocol, but I believe that is my fiancé’s car, Rosella Sheldon. I only need to know where they had taken her.” He calmly informed the police, even if his entire being seemed to be exploding internally in all directions.

The face of the man and what he said next confirmed his fear. “I am sorry, but they have taken her to the nearest hospital.” Then, the police officer gave him the details, but the officer could not give him any idea of her condition.

Now, he crossed the lobby, looking for their information desk. “I am looking for a victim of a car accident. Ms. Rosella Sheldon.” He called the attention of the woman behind the desk, who was busy looking at some monitor.

He could hear the panic in his voice, although he tried hard not to shout and stay calm. Still, he could feel his body shaking from fear, anxiety, and the thought that he might lose the one woman he loved.

“Can you wait for a second as I check?” The woman informed him as she saw her type her name. All he could think about during that moment was how wonderful she was.

He had always known that Rosella was a hardworking woman. She was the primary breadwinner of her family. Although her father and mother worked hard, it was never enough to provide for all their needs.

She still had three younger siblings she helped send to school. Then she was still paying the mortgage of the newly bought house she gifted her parents. He offered to buy it for her, but again she would not have it.

Thankfully, one of her sisters graduated this year and started working as a nurse in this hospital. She was now helping the family and her sister provide for their needs.

“Damn! I need to call her.” David suddenly remembered her. He could not help but wonder if she had heard the news about her sister. Or was she still clueless like him about her condition?

He grabbed his phone from his pocket and searched for her number. He knew Rosella saved it somewhere in his contacts, although he had never talked to her family that much.

“I am sorry, but I forgot to ask if you are a family member of the patient.” The woman spoke up as he waited for someone to answer his call.

“Hello, Roseann!” He ignored the woman at the counter, signaling to excuse him for a second as he talked to the woman on the other line. “This is David.”

“Hi, David.” He could hear the surprise in her tone, probably not expecting that he would call her. That was not unusual since he had never tried to call her before. “What can I do for you?”

It was clear to him that she had no idea of the accident, judging from the calmness of her voice. She appeared more surprised to hear from him than if she had heard the shocking news.

“Are you working at the hospital now? Can we meet? I am in the lobby. I will wait for you.” He offered to see her instead of breaking the news on the phone.

Besides, he needed to deal with the information first before confronting her fiancée's sister. Then, he ended the call agreeing to meet her at his current spot.

"I am his fiancée." He finally confronted the woman at the desk, trembling to hear what she had to say.

There were three possible scenarios he could come up with at that moment. One, his fiancée was in the emergency room, being treated for minor wounds. Two, she was undergoing surgery for the injuries she incurred. The worse scenario he could think of was something he still did not want to consider.

He wanted her to fight for every last breath.

Chapter 1000: Missed the chance

She gazed at herself at her reflection, staring at her long white gown as it smoothly flowed down the length of her body. She had pictured herself wearing this stunning wedding dress since she was a child.

Just like most girls, she was one of those who fantasized about becoming a princess. Then, one day, his prince would come, sweep her off her feet, protect her from all harm and save her.

But at some point in her life, she stopped believing in that dream. She woke up to the hard reality that even a prince could not save the day. She only had herself to depend on, and she had to stop waiting for this charming man.

"Are you ready?" Her friend asked as she put the final pin on her veil and placed the bouquet in her hand.

"Yes!" She whispered under her shaking breath as she looked at herself one last time in the mirror. The woman that never thought her dreams would eventually come true.

After all the hardship she had gone through in her childhood, then the sacrifices she made for her family, she was finally getting her chance at happiness.

She was finally doing something for herself, not for anyone, only for herself. Then, she felt someone pull her hands and drag her away from her room, laughing and cheering her on until she stood behind a large wooden door.

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She was nervous as her hands shook, and beads of tiny sweat trickled on her skin but not because she did not want to proceed with this ceremony.

On the contrary, it was the only thing she wanted. She could not wait to be married to the love of her life. The man who she never thought would ever come into her life.

"You are the most beautiful bride I have ever seen." Her mother said to her as she touched her cheeks.

"How many brides have you seen in your life?" She jokingly asked her mother, who only smiled at her question.

But honestly, she did feel like she was the luckiest woman in the world because he was marrying a wonderful man. He was not perfect, but he did try to be.

He might not be a prince, but he was, without a doubt, a charming man.

He took her on a roller coaster ride, bringing her high up the clouds but then dragging her back down to the ground. Safe to say, he came into her life, creating havoc on her path and changing her plans until he became a significant part of her life that she could not ignore.

Was it all worth the ride, the journey to reach this destination? Yes, she believed so as she finally saw the man on the other side of the room as the double doors finally opened, revealing the other side.

He stood firm and tall with that wide grin on his lips, a formidable stance, an impeccable suit, and eyes that told her he was ready for this. What more could she ask for from her future husband? He was perfect in every way, her knight in shining armor.

Then, she marched toward him along the very long aisle. It felt like she had been walking for miles as she pushed herself to be near him. But eventually, she stood beside him, staring up close into his eyes.

It was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen since it was full of love for her. But she knew her eyes also reflected his, as she felt her heart grow wild inside her chest.

Suddenly, she could not wait for the ceremony to be over. But, of course, all good things would come to those who patiently wait. Finally, they held each other's hands and stood side by side and before God, expressing the vows that would unite them for all eternity.

"I do." She heard his voice proudly telling everyone that he had accepted her as his wife.

She could see all their friends and family surrounding them, supporting this monumental moment in their life. It was the fulfillment of her dreams to marry the man she loved.

"I do." She whispered as she looked into his eyes. It was her turn to say her agreement to this union. Three letters that seemed so insignificant in the English alphabet but carried quite a weight when used on such an occasion.

Then, the way his face lit up, his smile that almost reached his ears, even his eyes were twinkling with the stars as they looked up to the vast night sky. It was the most beautiful wedding she had ever seen.

After their long journey together, they finally tied the knot.

She wanted to shout for joy as she heard everyone cheer for them. All that was left to do was to seal their union with their first kiss as husband and wife.

She turned to look at her husband, but he seemed to fade away. When she turned around, everyone was gone. The darkness seemed to replace everyone.

"What is going on? Where did they go?" She asked, but when she looked at him. He seemed to vanish along with everyone. One last bright light seemed to accompany her. But it did not last long as she saw and felt nothing.

"Oh! What a wonderful dream?" She thought as she smiled to herself. Maybe it was a sign that it was time for them to set a date. But first, she had to wake up.

Then, she wondered what time it was as she became suddenly aware of the movements around her. But something seemed to be wrong since she could not open her eyes.

And what were those unfamiliar noises as voices and whispers echoed in the air and reached her ears? Nothing seemed to make sense as she failed to understand her current situation. She sensed them near but also seemed so far.

Now, she knew something was wrong with her as she struggled to wake up and move but could not even feel anything. Her body would not respond to her command, as she appeared paralyzed from head to toe.

It would appear that she was having a nightmare this time. Then, she heard a very familiar voice.

She wanted to see him, so she forced her eyes open. To tell him everything about her dream, but something seemed to keep her captive, preventing her from doing anything.

At that instant, a flash of bright light passed through her eyes. Soon after, understanding seemed to register in her mind. At that point, she faced a horrible fact. She might not see him again in this lifetime.

She would regret the day she refused to marry him, not because she would never have a real fairytale wedding or wear his ring. It did not matter if she did not become his legal wife.

She would always mourn for her opportunity to wake up every morning by his side, to give him a family he dreamed with her, and the life of forever in each other's arms for as long as they should live as husband and wife.

She believed she had missed the chance.