

Chapter 22: A Confrontation

Antonio sipped at his coffee as he waited for Nora. She was late. He looked at the time again and wondered if she had decided to ghost him. Of course, he could not blame her for it, but he would definitely not think of her highly if she backed out of her promise to meet him just because of that.

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As he sat there, feeling out of sorts, he overheard someone from the other table complain to their partner, "I never make you wait! And yet you always do that. This shows how much you value me!" Hearing this, Antonio paused mid-sip. He had never had to wait for her as well, he realized in shock. He remembered that every time they had met up, she had always been waiting for him. Even before he had fallen for Sara, Nora had been the one who had always been early.

Just when he was about to call her, he saw her approaching and his breath caught in his throat. She looked as beautiful as a flower. She was wearing a dress again. This time it was in some tones of pink and mint green, but it hugged her form in a way that was too enticing. He felt his heart clench. Since their wedding day, he had seen her a total of four times. And out of that, she had forgone her usual jeans and T-shirts for a dress three times.

Why had he ever thought that she was not classically beautiful like Sara? He'd always thought of her looks as simple. She could be pretty and cute in a girl-next-door kind of way. But seeing her now, like this...

While he was lost in thought, she sat opposite him without a word. "Hi." he spoke inanely.

Nora raised her brow at the greeting and instead spoke directly, "I do not have the time for chit-chat, Antonio. Say what you want and be done."

"Why did you hire an actor to act as a priest at our wedding, Nora?" Antonio leaned forward. That was the one question that had been hammering at him repeatedly. The entire day of his wedding, he had been feeling guilty towards Nora and grateful to her because she had stepped aside for him and Sara to be together. His parents had never liked Sara, but they had adored Nora.

Because the wedding had become a spectacle, they had not objected to the marriage, but her mother had made it clear that she would never accept Sara as her daughter-in-law.

Even so, he had fought with them and even assured Sara that now that they were married, she would be able to win her over. With that, they spent together a blissful night together and consummated their marriage.

But the next day, they discovered that the marriage was never legal. Sara had been distraught, but he had driven her straight to the civil affairs bureau to marry her. However, his parents had also heard the news of the fake marriage and threatened to kill themselves if he really married Sara. And now, everything was a mess.

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Every day Sara was questioning him. And his parents, who had always left him to his devices since he turned fifteen, were keeping a close eye on him.

Instead of answering him, Nora instead questioned him, "Since when were you cheating on me, Antonio?"

Antonio was taken aback. He wanted to insist that Nora answer him but he could already see that she would not answer him unless he answered her so he said, "I did not mean to cheat on you, Nora. Everything started innocently at first... A little time after I proposed to you, Sara came to me for help. While you are weak in your studies, she is brilliant so I wondered why she would want to do that. Then she told me that she wanted to appear for the Scholastic Assessment a year in advance. She wanted to keep it a secret from you and her mother as a surprise."

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"So, I started to coach her. But because she was a year behind us and had only a few months to prepare, she needed more time with learning. It is why I cut off our time during the weekends."

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"I see. So, you spent an hour every day of the week coaching me and all weekends coaching her." Nora said succinctly.

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"Yes. I swear I was just helping her with studies, but I don't know when my feelings for her changed. I don't want you to blame her, Nora. I was the one who pursued her. When she realized her feelings, she tried to cut off our sessions, but she needed to study and she needed me to coach her. And then when I slipped and confessed to her, she succumbed. After all, she is still young."

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"Well, that is very noble of you," Nora remarked.

Missing the sarcasm in her voice, Antonio continued, "By the time the exams were done, we were both overwhelmed with guilt towards you. So we decided to break it off. I used working at my father's company as an excuse to get away from her. I hoped that the time away from her would help me rekindle my feelings for you.

And I had almost convinced myself that everything would be okay when our results came out. She stood second in the overall scores, Nora! I was first and she was second! I could not stop myself and returned early. Even then I told myself that I would simply spend time with her and then break things off. But I couldn't break up Nora. I simply couldn't."

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"Really? Then why did you not tell me? I made arrangements for our wedding. I was running around, managing my studies, looking at venues and caterers with your mother, trying bridal dresses, and foregoing my time on weekends to prepare for a wedding while you were having fun with my sister! Why not tell me in time and break up with me, Antonio? Did I not deserve that much respect. Or were you so in love with Sara that you forgot that I have feelings too!"

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