

Chapter 6: Guilt

Nora stood alone at the grand steps of the luxurious hotel, bathed in the warm glow of the chandeliers that lined the entrance. Thankfully, she had been able to slip away from the taunting show of sympathies to the sly enjoyment of her misery. As she waited for her ride, she couldn't help but shudder. How innocent and naive had she been to strive for 'love'?

"Let them party tonight and enjoy her misery," she thought, her resolve hardening. "They assume that tonight was the end of me, but they are unaware that tonight is just the beginning of a new me."

Inside the foyer, Antonio stared at Nora with guilt in his eyes. Even though he had chosen Sara as his life partner, Nora would always hold a special place in his heart. After all, she would forever remain his first love.

He wanted to apologize to her for humiliating her today. He'd never planned to abandon her at the altar. All night he had tried to escape everyone's attention for a chance to speak to her. He wanted to tell her that even though they were not in a relationship anymore, he would always remain her friend. Not for a moment did he doubt that she would not forgive him. He knew that Nora loved him deeply and was willing to do anything for those she cared about. So he believed she would be happy to accept his friendship and free him of the guilt.

3

As the cool breeze ruffled Nora's hair, she hugged herself, her simple dress not enough to protect her. Antonio caught her profile with that faint smile she had worn all evening and strengthened his resolve. He would speak to her right away.

Marching forward, he took off his suit jacket and draped it over her shoulders, a gesture he'd often done in the past because Nora had a habit of never bringing anything warm with her. Nora stiffened as she felt the familiar warmth of his jacket on her.

In the next instant, however, she quickly took off the jacket and pushed it towards him. "I don't need this. Thank you."

Antonio shook his head and caught Nora's hand, "Don't be stubborn. You'll catch a cold. Don't forget I know you. You have no tolerance for a drop in temperature."

But Nora stubbornly stepped back and shook her head, "You do not have the right anymore, Antonio."

Even though the words were softly spoken, Antonio felt his heartache at her tone, "Nora, we can still be friends. We are brother-in-law and sister-in-law now. So we are family."

3

"I am not your family, Antonio! And I never will be. Please go back inside. Your new wife must be waiting."

As Nora turned her back to him, Antonio caught her and pulled her to him, catching her in a hug. "Nora, please believe me, I really am sorry. If I could turn back time, I would never have hurt you like this. Forgive me, Nora, please. We are going to the university soon. We were going to do everything together! Please don't give that up. Let's remember our past friendship."

Nora struggled to get out of his embrace, but he simply refused to let go. Stilling, she looked at him with narrowed eyes and warned, "Antonio, if you have really treated me like a friend, then let me go this instant. Your closeness makes me nauseous."

Stepping back, Antonio let her out of his arms but held her shoulders, "Hugging me felt like coming home, Nora. That is what you used to say!"

2

"And now I do not have a home, Antonio. Please go away and be happy with the woman you have chosen. I do not need you or your alms of friendship."

This time, the man's eyes hardened, all softness disappearing from his tone as he completely stopped touching her and warned, "Do you really think you will be able to go through university on your own? I know how weak your concepts are, Nora. I am the one who has tutored you and helped you reach here. If you are going to be like this, then you can forget any help from me in the future."

4

"The only day you may get a chance to help me is if I am in a casket, Antonio."

Before either of them could utter any more bitter words, Sara emerged from the hotel. Seeing her sister and Antonio staring at each other, both angry, she quickly walked to Nora and held her arms, "Nora...thank you for being so selfless. If not for you, I never would have gained the happiness that I have today. Thank you for giving my Antonio to me."

1

While Antonio was moved by Sara's words and stared at her with admiration, he failed to notice Nora's slight flinch when Sara caught hold of her shoulders. Even as words of gratitude and happiness poured from her mouth, Sara's grip on Nora left marks on her skin, of that Nora was sure.

Nora winced at the pain in her arm and shoulders but kept her gaze steady as she finally looked at Sara without the love that she had always shown for her. Remembering everything that she had endured in the name of familial love, Nora pushed her sister away, causing Sara to stumble and fall into Antonio's arms. "Nora, how dare you!" Sara seethed as she was helped by Antonio, who was also looking at Nora's back askance. He had never thought that Nora would resort to violence.

But before anyone else could react, Nora had already stepped into the car that had stopped and driven away.

3

In their shock and anger, they failed to notice that the car was not some generic taxi but a limited edition Bugatti Divo that even the valet who brought it out was lusting over.