

## Benefits 121

### Chapter 121: The First Fight

"No absolutely not." Demetri growled.

Nora stopped talking, her spoon hanging mid-air as she stared at his sudden and totally unexpected outburst.

"What?"

"You are not going to use yourself as bait to get the perpetrator caught. I won't let you put yourself in danger."

Nora placed down her spoon gently and spoke, "Uhh... Demetri, I don't know if you know this but I am already in danger..."

"Yes, and my people are already looking for the culprits. So we do not have to take unnecessary risks. There is no need for you to go out and endanger yourself more...And that is final."

Nora looked down at her spoon and then at Demetri. This is what she had feared would happen. When they had entered the contract marriage, they had both been on equal ground. But due to the attacks on her, Demetri had taken over the charge of protecting her. And this had tilted the balance.

From her interaction with the Frosty Fours (the name that she had given to the other Frost brothers) she'd come to understand that he had a habit of becoming autocratic when it came to protecting someone.

Already, she was beholden to him, his actions to help her felt like a burden at times. Their marriage was not supposed to create more problems for him but it did. And that made her feel terrible. When their marriage ended, she wanted to leave without feeling indebted to him.

What she did not understand was why her mother was intent on killing her now. According to Grandpa William, if something happened to her before her twenty-first birthday then all the trust funds would go to different charities.

The only way for her mother to get her hands on the trust was to either break apart their marriage or prove that it was a sham. But she could think of no one else wanting to harm her. Antonio would not be bothered with her while Sara had already started to change for the better. And she had no other enemies as far as she was aware.

So, the only way to stop living in fear and pain was to finally put her mother behind bars once and for all.

Sighing, she refuted Demetri's words and spoke quietly but firmly, "I am going to the vacation house with the others, Demetri."

Demetri stared her down, his aura oppressive as he stared at her. Nora wanted to shiver at the way the temperature suddenly seemed to drop. However, she knew that she could not back down. She would never be able to stand up for herself if she gave in this time...But maybe she could explain...

So she did... hurriedly..." Demetri, look, we all know who is behind this. We just do not have evidence. If Lara learns that I am not in the city and am away from your protection, she will not be able to resist the opportunity. I've already spoken to the Police detective about this and he has agreed to send someone with me for my protection and to help catch the culprit."

Demetri's face showed no emotion other than disapproval even after she had finished her explanation. Nora looked down at her breakfast, wondering what else she could say to make him go back to his normal less cold self. She felt as if she had committed a misdemeanour and been instructed to receive her punishment from the principal.

Demetri's jaw clenched as Nora finished explaining, his eyes narrowing slightly. The silence that followed hung heavily in the air, broken only by the distant sounds of the city. Nora could practically feel the tension radiating from him.

"Absolutely not, Nora," Demetri finally spoke, his voice low and controlled. "I won't allow it. You're safer here with me."

Nora looked up at him, frustration building within her. "Demetri, I appreciate everything you're doing, but I can't just sit here and wait. I need to do something, too. I can't let fear control my life."

His response, this time, was a deep, almost guttural growl. He turned away from her, pacing a few steps toward the window, his hands clenched into fists at his sides.

"I won't allow it," he repeated, his voice colder than ever. It made her shiver, and she felt the fear in her bones.

Her reaction was not missed by Demetri as he turned away, moving towards the door, his body language rigid.

Nora's frustration flared into a spark of anger. "You won't allow it? Demetri, this isn't about permission."

He turned to face her once more, and there was a silent battle of wills in that gaze. Nora could almost feel the palpable force of his stubbornness.

"Stay here, Nora. That's an order," he stated, his voice firm and authoritative.

Nora bristled at that and snapped back, "I am not one of your subordinates! I am doing this Demetri. I cannot and will not rely on you forever!"

He didn't respond with words. Instead, he walked out of the house, closing the door behind him with a bang.

Nora sat there shocked at how things had spun out of control so quickly and could not help but wonder if this was their first fight...

The air in the room felt charged, and she couldn't shake the uncertainty that lingered. The conflict between her feelings and Demetri's need to protect had set the stage for a battle that neither of them had anticipated.

Unexpectedly, Nora could feel the tears in her eyes, as she watched the closed door. Why would Demetri do this? Did he not see that taking this step would be beneficial to him as well? He would not be forced to spend so much time and effort on protecting her. She did not want to be a burden to him.

Outside the house, Demetri's anger was palpable. He had no idea what Nora was thinking but he did not like the idea of her putting herself in danger. But what made him even more angry was his first reaction to her insisting on doing this. He had almost caught her in his arms and declared that he could not lose her.

## Chapter 122: Take Them Off

"Well, of course, he is angry. Imagine if I were to tell you that I want to perform ballet dance on a tight rope between two skyscrapers!"

Nora giggled amid the seriousness of the visual Isabella painted, and shook her head, "That is not the same, Isabella! You do not even know ballet!"

Isabella laughed at that but soon answered seriously, "And you do not know about all these games, Nora! You cannot get to me. In fact, even though as your best friend, I should be hating on him for making you worry and cry, I think I understand him. Whether it is wanting to dance on a tightrope or the plan you are proposing, it involves putting yourself in danger. That man has been protecting you, doing his best to keep you safe and instead, you want to put yourself in danger."

Nora leaned against the wall as she stared at the people passing by, sighing again, "I know that, Bella. And I understand. But he cannot put me in a fortress twenty-four-seven and protect me. Someday, the perpetrator will find a way to break into the defence. I cannot wait for that day!"

"I know baby. But just because you are worried that someone will shoot you, its not okay to go and stand in front of the gun."

Silence reigned as Nora absorbed the words. After Demetri left, Nora had been drowning in conflict of guilt and her own stubbornness. On the one hand, she wanted to go ahead with the plan and get done with all the waiting. On the other, she felt like an ungrateful wretch for fighting with the man over this.

Finally, she'd convinced herself that she was right and even told herself that Demetri was probably angry because he thought that she did not trust him. Finally, having convinced herself, she called Isabella so that the girl would concur with her thinking. This way, when Demetri returned, she would again try to talk to him calmly. She would assure him that she trusted that he could protect her and find the culprit but just that she did not wish to just wait passively. She wanted to actively participate in getting rid of that person.

But instead, her all-time supporter had decided to play devil's advocate today and was siding with Demetri!

As the silence continued, Isabelle sighed and explained, "Baby, you are not wrong in wanting to get rid of the threat. I cannot imagine how you are feeling at this time, the danger always hovering behind you. I am totally on your team. But, that husband of yours, though he may be opposing you, he is also in your team. We don't want you to risk yourself. We're just worried about you."

"Your plan is good, but it is indeed too hasty. The trip is in two days and you are going in blind. I know you are doing good with self-defense and the police will be there but there is always a what if..."

"I don't want him to keep protecting me, Bella. I want to be independent." Nora spoke slowly.

Isabella sighed through the phone, "Then be independent, baby but not at the expense of your safety."

"But I've trusted him all this while, haven't I? Can he not trust me? I know my mother. Once she knows that I am going on this trip, she will not let go of the opportunity. This is the best time to discover who is helping her and how."

"Don't convince me, babe. Convince that husband of yours. He is the one who walked out mid-fight."

Nora nodded, energized. Yes. She would talk to Demetri again! He had not even let her explain the entire plan and walked out! Maybe if she could show him that she would be taking precautions and how she would be meticulous, minimizing the danger, maybe he would trust her and not object her to taking this risk!

Even though she had told him that she did not need his permission, she knew in her heart that she did hope that he would agree. So, she would make this last-ditch effort to maybe convince him.

"You are right! I'll go right now and talk to him! He has to listen to me before he goes around banging doors childishly! Thanks Bella! I'll talk to you later! You sleep now!" With that, Nora disconnected the phone and marched towards the campus gate, ready to head straight to Demetri's office so as not to waste time. It was almost lunch hour anyway..."

On the other side of the phone, Isabella glanced at the clock and then sighed. Nora baby had indeed grown up. There was a time when she was always telling her to fight that woman and not be suppressed by her. But she had always been scared. A few months with Demon Frost had actually made her friend strong enough to do something like this.

Nora might not know this but having Demon Frost back you up was akin to having an entire army backing you up. But the question why was the army behind her? What did it gain from this?

Isabella sighed. She would need to hurry back and meet Demon Frost soon so that she could read the man's intentions.

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Nora had just left the university when she received a message from Demetri, "At home."

That caused her to raise her brows. Did the man already know that she was going to his office? Was that why he had asked her to come home? Changing directions, she turned her bicycle and took the way home, thinking about what she could say to convince him.

She could not have expected that the moment, she entered the door, she would be met with Demetri's hard gaze while he waited for her.

And she most certainly did not expect that he would order, "Take off your clothes."

When she froze in place the man actually narrowed his eyes and spoke sharply, "Take them off."

Chapter 123: This and That

As the words, 'take off your clothes' echoed in her head, Nora's eyes were as wide as saucers, ready to fall off from her head! In fact, if she were a cartoon, her eyes would already be hanging out with springs. The man left angrily in the morning and then suddenly he returned home in the afternoon, which was surprising, but the moment she entered the door he asked her to get rid of her clothes.

"Uhh... it is the afternoon...", she pointed out.

"I know." He answered.

Was he using some strategy to distract her? Nora shook her head in denial and crossed her arms in front of her as she said, " We cannot do this and that! We need to talk."

Unexpectedly, Demetri's lower lip kicked up as he heard her words, " This and that? Where is your mind, Nora, hmm?"

Nora gulped at his words. He seemed somewhat different. Was this the direct result of their fight in the morning?

"Uhhh... what is going on?", she asked meekly.

Demetri shook his head and sighed, " I am not going to ravish you...for now."

Nora giggled nervously, " That is quite an old word..."

Tired of her delaying tactics, Demetri quickly walked to her. Before she could even draw a breath, Demetri's fingers had already slid into the waistband of her jeans and pulled her towards him. In the next minute, her shirt had been unbuttoned and her jeans were around her knees, and she was left blinking.

Even though she'd been with Demetri and he'd seen everything, and the clothes she now wore were much like a bikini, she somehow felt... exposed and vulnerable to him. She had the sudden urge to cover herself from his gaze. But she need not have worried, he'd already turned away.

As she noticed what he was doing, she forgot her feeling of self-consciousness and looked into the black suitcase that he had just opened.

First, he picked up a hair brush and summoned her closer. Curious as to what was going on, she stood close to him, waiting for his next move. Her eyes widened when he did show her what it was. "There is a

hidden dagger in the handle of the hairbrush. Keep the brush in your bag at all times." As the black dagger glinted dangerously the light, Nora gulped softly.

He then threw the dagger aside and picked up something else...She had no idea what the black belt-like-looking thing was and continued to stare as Demetri went down on his knees. With his hand, he gently nudged her legs apart and wrapped the black belt around her thigh explaining, " This is a drop leg holster. It will fit a small gun that you can use against someone if they try to attack you. I'll teach you how to use the gun."

Next, he pulled out a cord and gently wrapped one around each of her upper arm. Nora frowned at the simple-looking cord wrapped around her arms with the small knot hanging and looked at him questioningly, " This is known as the monkey fist. It looks simple but the knot has a steel ball inside. Swing it at something or someone with enough force and they won't know what hit them.

Nora's eyes widened as he then placed a body chain around her, starting from around her neck to falling in a delicate pattern and crisscrossing over her body. As he wound a pretty chain around her, she could not help but wonder what this delicate thing could do.

"This body chain is the first weapon you should use in case you are under an attack. It is the most delicate looking but, in a struggle, this will be the most helpful to you.

It is equipped with a GPS system, pressure sensors and even a little powerhouse that sends out shockwaves to the person who is attempting to hold onto you, stunning them for a few moments. Other than this, the shoes have a push knife in the soles which can be extracted from the back, the cell phone cover has a tiny knife inside. It won't cause significant harm to the attacker but can delay them hopefully. This is the..."

Before Demetri could continue to explain the other weapons, Nora quickly threw herself at him, hugging him. Just this morning he had been against her plan to use her as bait. But now, he had actually brought an entire arsenal for her to carry around.

With a sigh, Demetri caught her in his arms hugging her back. All morning he had been hoping that she would change her mind but after this morning, he understood what she was going through. He understood her desire to shorten this torture of living in the dark waiting for the fall to come. So how could he stop her when he himself would have done something similar in such a position?

So, the next logical thing had been to help her carry out her plan. They would of course send multiple people around to protect her but even so he could not take a chance with her safety. So, he'd spent the entire morning consulting experts and getting as many weapons as possible so that she could carry them with her, on the off chance something unthinkable happened and the people slipped.

"Thank you for trusting me, Demetri." Demetri sighed and gently kissed her lips, "It wasn't about trust, Nora. I just wanted you to be safe. Now, I need to teach you how to fire a gun..."

Nora bit her lip and questioned, "But I don't know how to aim. I am very bad at it..."

"Then you will fire the gun from a close range. As long as it protects you, don't bother if the other person is killed or maimed. Understood? Remember if they are not dead or maimed, they will harm you. Do not hesitate."

As Nora nodded hesitantly, Demetri stepped back, his eyes taking in her from head to toe. He had made sure that she was covered with weapons all over. As he looked at the leather and chains wrapped around her, he sighed. His little kitten looked dangerous carrying all that... but she also looked so beautiful...

"Nora... come here..." Mesmerized by his expression, Nora walked closer to him and he gently started to take off all the weapons that he had attached to her, the change in atmosphere palpable. By the time, his hand gently caressed along the side of her thighs, as he unclipped the drop holster, Nora knew it was time for... this and that...

#### Chapter 124: The Holiday

The rhythmic hum of the bus served as a backdrop to the loud noise as the students slowly started to settle into the bus. The atmosphere was alive with loud laughter, ribbing among students and throwing of snacks at each other. Nora took in all of this with a glance before turning her attention to her novel. She was covered from head to toe with weapons and in no mood for this holiday.

She hoped and prayed that the risk she was taking this time would pay off. Even though she had already spotted the security that Demetri and the police had arranged for her, she found herself on the edge. The only way to calm herself was to immerse herself in the world of a book so that she would not be too worried about the danger to come.

Nestled in a corner against a window, she continued to read her book, when suddenly she felt a dip beside her. Turning her head to greet whoever was going to be her seatmate for the journey, Nora let out an "Oh..." as she realized that it was Sara who sat next to her.

Sara gave her a strained smile as she said, "I hope you don't mind."

Nora shook her head and turned away but not before she saw Antonio who had turned around in his seat and was now staring at them with a frown. Suddenly she wanted to say something to Sara, about keeping her away from whatever argument she'd had with Antonio. There were so many other empty seats around, but she simply kept her mouth shut. Maybe if she pretended to be invisible... She was happy when it worked and Sara also kept her mouth shut.

However, she should have known that her peace would be short-lived. They'd barely been on the road for thirty minutes when Sara almost moved onto her lap as she tried to read her book with her over her shoulder.

Lowering her book, Nora turned her head to look at her questioningly. Sara gave her a sheepish grin and fidgeted with her phone, "Actually there is nothing new or interesting on social media. And I thought the book must be really interesting that is why you were so engrossed..."

Nora frowned and glanced at Sara before slowly marking her page number and closing the book. "You want to talk..."

Sara gave her a surprised look which Nora interpreted as her wondering how she knew. Sighing, she pointed out, "You've been moving around on that seat as if there was an entire colony of ants under you."

"Oh..." Sara exclaimed.

"Sara, whatever it is you want to discuss, I am not the right person for advice. If you have problems with Antonio go and talk to him."

"But you were with him for so many years? You must know what he was thinking..."

"If I had known what he was thinking do you think I would have ended up being the one who was cheated on?"

Sara looked down at her hands after Nora's pointed question and sighed, "Fine, I concede that you have a point, but I do not have anyone to talk to. The other girls all want Antonio for themselves and if I tell someone that we are having trouble they will definitely take advantage to take Antonio from me. I cannot let that happen. Actually, we had not planned to come to this trip earlier and instead were planning to have a small getaway of our own. But suddenly Antonio started to insist that he wanted to go... and then we fought..."

When Sara trailed away after narrating her story, she looked expectantly at Nora who looked at her with an impersonal expression and asked, "Do you want some advice?"

Sara nodded, "Yes. There must be a way you would know how to talk to him after a fight. This is our first fight, please help me."

Nora sighed and turned back to her book before murmuring, "Then go and talk to him before other girls realize that he is sitting alone."

Sara looked at her consideringly, wondering if Nora was giving a piece of truthful advice or simply mocking her. Seeing that the girl was serious, she decided that maybe she could do it. Nodding her head decisively, Sara said, "You are right. I should go talk to him. Bye Nora."

Nora hummed in response to Sara's goodbye and kept her eyes glued to the pages of her book, however as she was left alone, she could help but feel the chill run up her spine. Antonio and Sara had added their names to this trip at the last minute.

She patted the chain around her neck to comfort herself. Could it be Antonio who had been behind all the attacks? She shuddered to think about this and quickly typed a message, "Antonio and Sara joined at the last minute."

The unease of this realization settled over her like a shroud. Her mother had always hated her so her wanting to kill her was something she had reconciled with. But why would Antonio do something like this? She watched covertly as Sara and Antonio interacted.

The scenery outside transformed, the city giving way to rolling hills and lush greenery. The group's excitement mounted, voices rising in anticipation of the weekend ahead while Nora remained focused. She would have to find a way to confront Antonio discreetly. If he was indeed the perpetrator, she would need to create an opportunity for him to attack her. Her future and the success of this plan depended on it.

Maybe she could use Sara to bring out Antonio's true intentions. For all his faults, he really seemed to dote on her. However, she could not tell Sara directly as the girl would never believe her over Antonio. She looked down at her mystery novel as another idea started to form in her head. She knew she was taking unnecessary risks but she was determined to get rid of the threat this time.

#### Chapter 125: The Holiday(2)

The crackling fire sent sparks dancing into the night sky, casting a warm glow over the group of students gathered along the edge of the lake. The air was thick with laughter and the scent of burning wood, as Nora found herself in the midst of the lively crowd, unexpectedly enjoying herself. She'd never felt this in her life. Even with the threat looming over her, Nora felt happy.

Amidst the sound of clinking bottles and joyous chatter, someone struck up a lively tune on an acoustic guitar. The beat resonated through the summer air, prompting a spontaneous eruption of dancing, she too swayed to the music, feeling the infectious rhythm as her classmates twirled and spun around her.

This is what being young was about, wasn't it? To be able to enjoy the little moments. Even though she was alone in this moment, she did not feel lonely. Smiling, she picked up her phone and clicked a picture, wanting to keep the memory.

Bringing her knees to her chest, she crossed her arms and laid down her head, feeling too much at peace. She watched as the effects of all the drinking started to take effect, resulting in the favorite game of every drunk student ever. Truth or Dare. Only, this version seemed to have changed to only Dare or Dare.

She watched in amusement as the Dares turned from mild to outrageous until someone was almost forced to take a dip in the cold lake. Nora shivered at the thought and thanked the fates that she had not participated in the games. Since the time they'd reached here yesterday, she had shied away from going near the lake, even though she had roamed the entire grounds of the house otherwise, hoping that the attacker would take the opportunity. But that lake seemed to give her an eerie feeling. It was why, even as everyone had enjoyed it during the day, she had stayed away.

Sara and Antonio had locked themselves in a room, appearing only to grab some food during the day and Nora did not know what to think of that. Was Antonio here to attack her or not?

With her thoughts returned to the threat, Nora could not help but sigh. Tomorrow would be their last day and night here so if something were to happen, it should happen between today and tomorrow.

Just then, someone nudged her shoulder and Nora opened her eyes to look at Sara. Think of the devils and they appeared. Sara gave her a radiant smile and spoke, "Nora, thank you for your advice! We've patched up. And I think this fight and later the talking has made us even closer. So thank you."

Nora shook her head and took a sip of her water, not even wanting to answer that. She turned back her gaze to see the boy shivering as he huddled in front of the fire, soaked from head to toe. Sara followed her gaze and exclaimed, "What are they doing? Ooohh. They are playing a game Dare! Nora, why are you not playing? Come on, we also have to play!"

Before Nora could refute her or claim that she was perfectly fine, thank you, she had been dragged amidst the ever-growing circle as Sara shouted, "We are also in."

Nora shook her head and wanted to backout but was roped into it with loud cheers and jeers. Shaking her head, she promised to play one round and sat down...

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Demetri sat in the large vanity car that he had been living in since yesterday and looked at the crowd below. Despite the fact that he could keep an eye on Nora and the many precautions he had taken, his gut continued to churn, warning him something bad was going to happen. And he hated this helpless feeling. It reminded him of the time when Erasmi had been taken to the hospital. Even then, he'd almost begged Erasmi to not go...

No. Demetri shook his head as if assuring himself. Unlike Erasmi, Nora was fully prepared. There had to be something that they were missing out on and that is what was causing him the stress.

Just then, his phone started to ring, and he realized that it was the vet's clinic where they were testing the Tibetan mastiff that had attacked Nora. Quickly, he answered and the excited voice on the other end stated, "Chairman! We have found the thing that makes the dog aggressive."

Demetri tightened his hold on the phone. Since they had not found anything on Nora's clothes that might have induced the dog to attack, the vet had been experimenting with different smells that might provoke the dog.

"What is it?"

"Sir, mothballs and vinegar! One of our volunteer staff ended up dropping a bottle of vinegar over herself before she came here. She was in a hurry and instead of changing her clothing, she simply let the vinegar dry. And she was wearing a sweater with mothballs! Our regular staff is careful about this because of course mothballs are toxic to most pets and vinegar in general irritates them. But she did not know, of course. When she went to feed the dogs, the Mastiff almost broke through the cage to attack her! She was so scared she ran away from here faster than a bullet train!"

Before the man could continue, however, Demetri cut it, "Nora's clothing had neither mothballs nor vinegar..."

This jolted the other man and he scratched his head in confusion- Of course they had already tested Madam's clothing and found that it did not seem to trigger the dog..."Maybe there was someone standing close to Madam and they had the smell of vinegar and mothballs? The dog could have been confused if the people standing were close enough..."

Demetri thanked the vet and rubbed his forehead, trying to think if he had seen someone wearing some old sweater that might have mothballs...

As the person's face flashed in front of his eyes, he cursed and quickly started to search for Nora on the screen while he dialled her number with his phone.

## Chapter 126: Taken Away?

Nora walked the dimly lit hallway and wondered why she was actually participating in the silly game. And what sort of a dare was to go to the end of the vacation home and grab an antique from there? As if she was afraid of ghosts? It was the living who were scarier.

These people really thought that she would be scared because of a few stories that they had heard about ghosts living in a corner of this house since coming here yesterday? As she walked, she wondered how they would react if she did not return and instead went to her own room. Would they have the courage to come and look for her? Or even better, she could put on some make-up and go out after some time, pretending to be her own ghost. That would definitely teach them a lesson.

As she the hallway darkened a bit more with each step, she suddenly felt a little whoosh of air, followed by something pinch her neck. Shaking her neck a bit to ease the discomfort, she continued to walk. With each step, a strange dizziness overcame her, and the world around her blurred. Panic set in as Nora struggled to maintain her balance. Realization struck like lightning—she had been drugged. The perpetrator had made their move finally!

Her limbs felt heavy, and her vision swayed as she flailed. It was difficult to do, but she managed to activate the GPS on the watch in her hand. However, the GPS on the body chain was at the back of her waist and therefore impossible to reach.

In the disoriented chaos, two shadowy figures emerged, swiftly guiding her towards a seemingly solid wall. As Nora's back pressed against it, an unexpected mechanical hum filled the air. To her astonishment, the wall shifted and seamlessly revealed a concealed door. Before she could gather her wits, the figures propelled her through the entrance, and the door closed with a soft thud behind them.

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Nora's eyes fluttered open, adjusting to the stark brightness of the unfamiliar surroundings. As she took in her surroundings, a surge of fear coursed through her veins. She'd expected to be taken to some different place after being kidnapped but she had not expected that they would keep her in a place like this!

Right in front of her was a human skeleton suspended in a transparent cylinder. There was another which seemed to have been taken apart and put together in a similar cylinder but horizontally. There were various liquids in containers all around.

Frantically, Nora tried to move, only to realize that she had been trussed up tighter than a turkey, with her hands tied tightly behind her back... just above the pressure sensor for the GPS. Her hands twitched and she slowly moved to her knees and backed up to sit and lean against a wall.

Once upright, she surveyed the room quietly. She had no idea where they had brought her or how long she had passed out, but she did not understand why they would bring her to someplace like this. How did her mother get her hands on someone's private laboratory? Could it be that everything had not been done by her mother and she had somehow attracted the attention of someone nefarious?

As she continued to look around, she could not help but frown. The walls in this place were identical offering no clues about the location of a door. With a heightened sense of awareness, she then scanned for cameras, her mind racing with possibilities.

Two cameras, cold and unfeeling, stared back at her from opposite corners of the room. Nora considered the implications. Was she being watched? Fear mixed with defiance as she set her unblinking gaze on the lenses. Gathering her strength, she decided to play the waiting game, feigning vulnerability while she strategized her next move.

Closing her eyes, she started to take inventory of the arsenal on her body. Her chain was still around her and she could feel the slight weight of the monkey fist knot that Demetri had insisted remained on her arm and she still had her shoes on with the hidden daggers. But all of this would be useless if she could not let the person who was responsible for this come to her.

So, she needed to be patient. As she thought of this, she realized that the watch on her hand was missing. So, there people were smart enough to recognize the GPS on it and get rid of it? Good.

And it was a good thing that Demetri was a step ahead of them. The man gave her multiple GPS locating devices and since her hands were tied behind her back, she conveniently pulled her hands closer to her body. She felt the slight heat on her lower body and relaxed. The pressure sensor had been activated along with the GPS.

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The police detective scratched his head as he spoke on the phone while standing next to the man whose aura was enough to make him crumble. While they had been alert to Miss Williams' security, before they could have even realized that Miss William's was missing the man had already activated his forces. They were now following Miss William's trail but still unable to find her location.

There was even a time when his people were almost on top of the location shown by the GPS but still unable to find her. And now, with each passing minute, the man was getting angrier.

"Mr Frost. Are you sure the GPS is not malfunctioning? You saw it for yourself. The GPS signal is continuously moving but we simply cannot see where Miss Williams' is. How is that possible? Should we get the dogs and start a different search. Everyone has already retired for the night so they will not be alerted."

When the man received no answer for this, he turned his head to see Demon Frost's eyes fixed on the red dot on the screen. The man seemed to be waiting for something. Just then... another red dot appeared on the screen. It was quite far away from the one they were chasing.

Demon Frost nodded and quickly spoke, "This is her current location. The kidnappers probably have manipulated the previous GPS."

However, as Demetri forwarded the location to his people, the detective leaned in closer to the screen and cursed, "Mr Frost, they have probably messed with this one also or thrown Miss Williams into the lake! The location here shows the middle of the lake!"

#### Chapter 127: The Escape Plan

Nora continued to keep her eyes closed and lean against the wall. Whoever the perpetrator was, they were probably keeping an eye on her through the cameras. Naturally, she would not give them satisfaction by showing her fear.

The room was cold and she could feel the temperature dropping, making her shiver. Her hands were bound so tightly that they had begun to lose feeling, making it difficult to maintain her focus. She continued to scan the room from under her eyelids, trying to get an idea of where the door could be.

She was careful to not look in the direction of the skeletons even as her eyes continuously went to them. Somehow, she had a feeling that these skeletons had been put here specifically for her. These hinted at a plot much more sinister than she could imagine...

Time crawled, and Nora heard the small sound of a door clicking. Her eyes snapped open and she turned her head in the direction of the sound.

The concealed door opened, revealing one of the shadowy figures from before. Their face was hidden behind a mask. Her eyes narrowed as she took in other details of the person. He was a man. Taller than the average height. This meant he could not be Antonio. And there was no one else tall enough in their classmates so this was some other person.

Whoever the person was, she would have to use him. "Who are you?" She asked without a hint of vulnerability.

The man turned a surprise gaze towards her but then immediately masked the surprise and looked at her curiously, "Are you not scared?"

Nora shrugged her shoulders, "Well, I am not too sure what I should be scared of? Why was I kidnapped and not directly killed. I mean you injected me with a drug but not with poison."

The man's eyes narrowed and he laughed loudly, "What a smart girl. Don't worry. I will definitely kill you. But I will take my time. You see, the person who wanted you kidnapped, wants to torture you first."

"So, you want to torture me? Hmm..." The man expected the girl to cower in fear as she heard his threat but instead, she simply made a contemplative sound and said nothing more. He observed her expressions and could not even find a hint of fright.

As he continued to observe her, suddenly a smile came across her face and she said, a hint of threat in her words, "That would be foolish, you know?"

This caught the man's interest and he walked closer to her, squatting in front of her to look at her carefully, "What would be foolish, little girl? Torturing you? Why? What can you do other than scream?"

Nora's smile widened even further and she did not answer the question as she said instead, "I hope the people you are in cahoots with are watching the live feed...What did you call me? Little girl? There is a big advantage to being a little girl, do you know that? It comes in handy?"

The man was even more puzzled by this and stared at Nora. Was the girl crazy or something? What was she even talking about? "What comes in handy?"

"Being a little girl of course. Because then people do not perceive you as a threat..."

As the man tried to understand what she said, Nora took this chance and quickly kicked up her leg, hitting the man's nose directly with her knee. As the man collapsed to the ground, clutching his bleeding nose, she lunged at him, using all her self defense training by pushing her shoulder into the man's mid rib, forcing him to lose his balance. And finally, when he was where she wanted him, face down on the floor, she pressed her knee onto the back of his neck, until the man was not able to breathe, and stared at the camera challengingly while the man who was supposed to torture her lay unconscious on the ground.

"See, if only, you'd not seen me as a simple little girl, this would not have happened..."

She then moved backwards, still on her knees and wiggled her shoulders, trying to send some blood to her hands which now felt numb.

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It was the middle of the night and most of the students had started to wind down for the night. The large ground had been abandoned when suddenly a loud sound broke through the silence of the night, "Attention, everyone! This is the police. We have reason to believe that a crime is taking place on the premises," bellowed the lead officer through a megaphone, sending shockwaves through the place.

The police moved swiftly, their boots crunching on the gravel paths as they fanned out across the large home. Doors were knocked upon, and the students were unceremoniously roused from their peaceful slumber. Confusion and fear spread like wildfire as everyone was abruptly awakened and dragged into the cool night air with barely something to cover themselves.

"What is going on?" A young man tried to speak but he was ignored, and the police continued to round up and throw everyone into the garden- guest or staff.

Soon, everyone was gathered there, and two buses were brought forward while an officer announced, "All of you are under arrest."

As everyone was shocked and tried to understand the situation, they were unceremoniously thrown into the bus. With the panic set in as everyone shouted and questioned, no one noticed that Sara and Antonio had not been pushed into the bus but away from the crowd while the house had been emptied.

Sara and Antonio exchanged an uneasy glance wondering why they had been brought here but each could only make wild guesses in their heart as they waited for the officers. However when the door opened again, and their eyes met that of the man standing in the doorway, the two almost shivered in fear. The man did not waste any time talking and directly walked towards the two people...

## Chapter 128: Vinegar

Demetri Frost's entrance cast a chill over the room. as if someone had simply set the temperature to a freezing point. His presence overshadowed the warmth of Sara and Antonio's embrace. His eyes, cold and penetrating, bore into them with an intensity that made the air around them thick with tension. Sara's grip on Antonio's hand tightened instinctively as they both faced him

"Where is Nora?" Demetri's voice was a low rumble, a subtle growl that hinted at a well-contained menace. His gaze flickered between Sara and Antonio, searching for any sign of weakness or guilt.

Sara felt as if the room was shrinking, the walls closing in as if to press the truth out of them. She gulped and tried to answer the man, "We don't know where she is, Mr Frost. We haven't seen her since she left in the middle of the game and messaged that she was giving up and retiring for the night.."

Antonio nodded in agreement, but the sweat forming on his forehead betrayed his unease.

Without uttering another word, Demetri took a measured step forward, his movements slow and deliberate. The rhythmic tapping of his shoes echoed through the room, each tap amplifying the growing anxiety within Sara and Antonio. He circled them like a predator assessing its prey, his gaze unrelenting.

Sara's resolve wavered and she stammered, "We're telling the truth, Mr. Frost. We don't know anything about Nora's whereabouts."

"So, you really expect me to believe that you do not know her whereabouts?"

Antonio, who could feel his back drenched in sweat, shivered and said, "I don't know who took her! I am clueless."

Antonio's eyes darted nervously, avoiding Demetri's gaze, while Sara's eyes pleaded with him to see reason. "Yes. We do not know. Maybe mom has made a move. She hates Nora..."

Demetri's lips curled into a cold, humorless smile, sending shivers down their spines. He stepped even closer, invading their personal space, his presence overwhelming. The room seemed to vibrate with an unspoken threat, and the couple's denials sounded increasingly feeble in the face of Demetri's threatening presence.

As he'd expected, Sara started to talk, to cast suspicion on the real culprit. "You should know that my mother has never been fond of Nora. They've had their disagreements, and my mom can be unpredictable. Maybe she's done something to Nora out of spite. You know how unstable she can be. She has done that in the past as well! Mr Frost, please, believe me, we have not done anything to Nora!"

Antonio also nodded quickly, "We are even planning to leave the country after this semester. I loved Nora. I could never harm her. I have no reason to. Sara has changed, too. She's been working on herself, trying to be a better person despite her family's issues. We know our mistakes and how they have affected our past and present. But we do not want to live like this. We want to live peacefully, with each other."

Sara nodded hurriedly and explained, "We even had a big fight regarding this. We were actually not planning to come to this vacation at all. But we came here so that we could enjoy and have some fun with the rest of the class before we left forever! We have already started applying to other universities. You can check that. Please don't waste your time on us and look for Nora."

Demetri cocked his head, his stern expression showing a hint of consideration, and seemed to be accepting their explanations. He studied their faces, weighing their words against what he knew.

After a prolonged moment, he stepped back, his piercing gaze relenting slightly. "I'll look into your claims. But if I find out you're lying, there will be consequences."

Once Demetir left the room, Antonio and Sara breathed a sigh of relief. They knew Demetri Frost was a dangerous man and if he suspected that they were responsible for bringing harm to Nora, they would not be spared.

They looked at each other and nodded. They were indeed planning to leave the country but not next semester. They were going to move away sooner. Just as relief started to settle in, the door swung open with a force that sent it banging against the wall. Before they could react, they were drenched in a viscous pungent liquid.

Antonio, bewildered, wiped his face, questioning the bizarre assault. In contrast, Sara paled, her eyes widening in recognition. The truth dawned on her, and she whispered, "Vinegar... My mother's signature punishment."

Antonio looked up to see Demetri standing there expressionlessly after throwing a bucketful of vinegar on them, "What is the meaning of this?"

But Antonio was ignored as the man turned his gaze to look at Sara, "This was your mother's signature punishment?"

Sara nodded and spoke carefully, "Yes. She used that often."

Demetri nodded and continued to stare at Sara carefully, "That day when Nora was attacked by the dog, you had met with your mother, didn't you?"

Sara nodded and thought of the argument that she'd had with her mother and explained the circumstances of how everything had happened.

After she explained everything, she exclaimed, "Do you think that my Mom was involved in the attack as well?"

Sara shivered as she thought how vicious her mother could be. Trembling, she thought of the ferocious dog and looked at the dangerous man with watery eyes, "I did not know. I asked the security people later and they said that the dog attacked because it was sick..."

Antonio patted Sara on the back and looked at Demetri pleadingly, " Please look for Nora. Miss Anderson is really dangerous and bordering on insane."

But instead of answering Antonio, Demetri leaned against the doorway and stared at the two of them, " If you two are done with your sub-par acting skills, I think you should take me to Nora. Where is she?"

"Mr Frost, we told you..."

However, instead of talking with them, Demetri moved aside. And as he did, a low growl echoed in the room...

#### Chapter 129: Sinister

Antonio's eyes widened in fear as they looked at the massive dog standing in the doorway. The dog looked more like a wolf and was currently baring his teeth at them, lips pulled back angrily. It pulled against the leash, wanting to attack and Antonio started to tremble in his seat.

However, it was Sara whose reaction was even worse. She pushed away from Antonio and from the stool she sat on, putting as much distance between them as possible. Her eyes frantic, she rubbed her arms and scratched at her clothes as if trying to get rid of them.

Demetri's eyes narrowed in satisfaction as he questioned, " I thought it was very brave of you to stand in the way of this dog to save Nora. How selfless. But what is this? You are cowering in a corner now? What if the dog's leash slips? It will attack Antonio. Aren't you going to save him?"

Instead of answering his question, Sara cried loudly while screaming, " I had not thought those things through! But now, please take the dog away. It is scary? What have we done? Please leave us. Let us go."

Antonio quickly stood in front of Sara and spoke, " Mr Frost, I don't know why you won't believe in our innocence but if you don't I am willing to stand here and let the dog attack me! Let Sara go..."

Demetri smiled and looked at Antonio, " Are you sure that the girl is innocent? Why do you think she is so scared of that dog? Hmm? It is the dog that attacked Nora... Miss Anderson, are you still not going to confess?"

"I'll tell you everything. I'll tell you everything. But, first please take the dog away. Please take it away."

Satisfied, Demetri nodded at the dog handler who quickly dragged the dog away and waited for the girl to talk, "I did not do it on purpose. Please believe me."

"Keep the explanations for later. First, you will give me her location and then you will confess to your deeds."

"I don't know her location..." Sara immediately spoke.

Demetri narrowed his eyes dangerously as he warned, "Miss Sara, I really don't care if you live or die. But if you insist on being torn into pieces by a dog and dying a slow death, you can be my guest. So, for the last time, where is Nora?"

While these two had been locked here, the police had already sent people into the lake to look for the location of the second GPS. But like the first one, it had come out empty. It had now been more than two hours since Nora had disappeared, and Demetri's patience was wearing thin. He had no inclination to follow the law anymore. The law would not bring Nora back if something happened to her.

Sara shivered and bowed her head, "I really don't know where she is. I was only supposed to make her unconscious and drag her into a hidden door. It is in the last corridor. You have to count at about 5 hands from the bottom and there is a lever that operates a hidden wall. I bribed a classmate and once she was injected to become unconscious, the two of us dragged her into the wall and left her there. I don't know what happened from there."

With the main information in his hand, Demetri quickly marched towards the corridor, leaving the two people behind. But this time, they were not under the illusion that they would have relief. Soon another man entered and placed a camera on the table. Using a single word, he ordered, "Confess."

Antonio, who had a bad feeling, looked at Sara with sad eyes and asked, "Were you involved in the dog incident?"

Sara nodded her head and shrank her neck. "I did not do it on purpose! I was coerced by my mother!"

The other man scoffed at this and said," Are you only going to confess about the dog? Miss Sara Anderson, I believe you should start from the beginning- with Max. Also, there is no point in saving face in front of this man and blaming your mother. You are just as evil if not more. By the end of your confession, this man is going to be questioning his own sense of judgement."

Closing her eyes, Sara accepted that the end was near. She had been so careful but still had been found out. If only Antonio had agreed to go away with her sooner, none of this would have happened. She hated her mother for what she made her do. But she also hated Nora who refused to suffer losses and instead caused her harm!

Her eyes red with hatred, she gave a laugh and said," So what? If he hates me then let him hate! But he needs to hate Nora more. Only then will I be satisfied. After all, I had to do everything because of her!"

"What did you do?" Antonio asked her slowly.

"I am the one who changed Max's medicine. Then I started talking to him about Nora so that he would slowly become obsessed with her. And then I instigated him into 'chasing' her. I reassured him that she was receptive of his advances. But I had to do it carefully. And then, when he started losing it, I started using the opposite approach. I begged him to stop. I told him that she was already married and with someone else."

"Everything was going perfectly when Demetri Frost appeared. Nora actually ran to him! I'd been so careful and now he was caught. That is when I decided to use him one last time. I wanted him to kidnap Nora and kill her before he committed suicide. But he killed himself, claiming that he could not kill the person he loved. My entire plan crumbled and I knew that someone would soon realize that Max was not alone in the entire set-up. So, I started pestering the police and misguided them, turning their gazes towards my mother who had always openly hated Nora..."

Chapter 130: You Want To Kill Me?

Nora continued to keep her eyes closed when she felt the door to the room open again, planning to use the same strategy she had previously used. However, her eyes widened when she noticed the direction of the door. It was on the opposite side from where the person who assaulted her had appeared.

And this time it really was her mother who entered the place. Even though she had known and expected this, seeing the woman who had meant the world to do this, made her heart break into a million pieces. Tears filled her eyes as she looked at her and spoke through her pain," It really is you."

Lara Anderson sighed and looked at the tall man who now lay motionless on the floor. "You've grown a lot, hmm? I saw what you did to him. Impressive."

Nora stared at the woman in front of her but said nothing. She couldn't have said anything even if she wanted to-her throat was all choked up.

Seeing her sitting there quietly, Lara smiled and came closer but stopped a bit further away from Nora, "I want to pat you on the face. Should I come closer or will you attack me too?"

A small, pained sound escaped Nora as she questioned, "Why? At least tell me why?"

"Of course, I will tell you. It is why I have kept you alive for now. You have served me well for so many years. You should understand the truth before you die."

Nora scoffed at that, "You can't kill me. I don't know what you want to achieve with all these stunts, but you most certainly cannot kill me or you won't be able to claim your money."

"Tsk ts. Do you really think I have been sitting twiddling my thumbs all these years, waiting for you or Sara to inherit? No. I have made my own arrangements. It's just that I wanted to keep them as the last option. But first, tell me Nora, how do you like this place? This room?"

Nora blinked at the sudden change in topic and frowned up at her mother. As she did, she slowly started to rub her numb wrists against the loop of her jeans. The edge of the loop had a thin blade for the very purpose of cutting off the rope if her hands were tied. She had previously not used that weapon to keep an element of surprise but now that her mother was here, she needed to free her hands and find a way out of here.

"What? You do not like this room? I thought it is quite good. Did you greet your father, here? He is the one in that box over there." As Lara said this, she pointed to the skeleton that hung in the glass box behind her while she moved to look down on the skeleton that lay horizontally.

Nora felt her world spin as she looked at the skeleton there. A strange darkness appeared in front of her eyes while her ears seemed to have lost all their hearing. What sort of a monster was Lara Anderson?

"Stop staring at him. Let me introduce you to someone else. You see this skeleton here? She is your older sister. You met her when you were a baby but then she died tragically one day...in an accident. Her lover made sure she was buried well but I thought she would be lonely so I brought her here to accompany her father... See what a good mother and wife I am? This place is so big. It's almost as if I've created an Egyptian pyramid for the entire family. So, what do you think? Do you want to be suspended next to your father or would you like to lay down next to your sister?"

Every grievance she had ever felt, every hurt that her mother had laid on her, Nora had been able to overlook, but standing here, looking into the woman's eyes who was rather enjoying this, Nora felt a hatred unlike she had ever felt before. Hatred and madness.

She could see the touch of insanity in her mother's eyes. And maybe it was inherited because she was sure that is someone would look at her right now, they would see the same madness in her. The thirst to kill this woman in front of her.

"I want to lay down next to you." Nora muttered and jumped to her feet as she raced towards Lara, determined to kill this woman. Her hands had already been freed from the rope and she could feel the rush of blood returning to her arms as she charged forward. But Nora had barely taken a few steps when the place was enveloped in an inky blackness and the lights had been snuffed out.

Nora stumbled and cursed, bringing her hands forward as her eyes adjusted to the darkness. Lara's laughter echoed through the room as she said, "You cannot kill me, Nora. You may have gained some physical training but you cannot kill. You do not have that kind of mental strength. You are a little weakling."

Nora stilled and tried to follow the direction of the echoing voice as the woman continued, "I know you think that you can escape here. But you are wrong. You see, this is not a simple room. I have specially designed this room. So, I suggest you stop trying to fight me and give up. Now, your father and sister, they died of an 'illness' and 'an accident' respectively so I think you should die differently. For you, I am thinking death by starvation. It is a good one, isn't it? Better than the one Sara had thought for you," Death by mauling from an animal. It was too crass so good thing you were saved..."

"What? Are you so shocked that you cannot say anything? Come on, open your mouth and beg for my mercy. You can do it. I might just allow you to escape!"