

Benefits 141

Chapter 141: A Friend Or Foe

Erasmi Frost lay still on the sterile, white hospital bed, his gaze fixed on the ceiling as if it held the answers to a decade of silence. The hum of medical equipment and the faint echoes of distant footsteps were the only sounds that permeated the otherwise silent room. His body, once full of vitality, seemed like a mere shell of its former self. The soft beep of the heart monitor provided a steady rhythm while a lone window in the corner of the room, allowed a sliver of daylight to pierce through the thick curtains, casting a feeble glow on the linoleum floor. It had been the same each day for the past many years.

Today, however, something was different. Erasmi's eyes, which were usually clouded with years of desolation, flickered with a glimmer of consciousness. It was as though a dormant ember had sparked to life within him. Many memories seemed to dance in his mind, the wild abandoned laughter of a young woman being at the forefront.

Erasmi took a deep breath as if savouring the air he had long neglected. The silence hung heavy with anticipation in the air. His gaze moved slowly, taking in his surroundings, pausing on the picture that lay beside his bed, of all of the brothers standing around their grandfather. His eyes narrowed and his fingers clenched.

Summoning strength that had long lain dormant, Erasmi's trembling hand reached for the bed railing. For the first time, he felt the need to move, to see the world that he had long left behind. The cold metal provided an anchor as he slowly manoeuvred his body into a sitting position. A wave of dizziness swept over him, but he clung to the edge of the bed, steadyng himself.

"Get up, Erasmi," a whisper echoed in his mind, a haunting reminder of a time when voices other than his own resonated within these walls. "Erasmi, you've been here long enough. Won't you come to me now?"

Summoning every ounce of strength, Erasmi shifted his weight, attempting to move his legs over the edge of the bed. The sudden movement caused him to tire easily and he almost fell back. But he refused to give up.

The muscles, unused for years, protested like rusty gears finally set in motion. A tremor coursed through Erasmi's frame, but determination glinted in his eyes.

The room seemed to hold its breath as Erasmi's feet made contact with the cold floor. The stark silence amplified the echoes of his own heartbeat, the only sound that accompanied his solitary endeavour.

In that moment, Erasmi Frost defied the boundaries of his self-imposed exile, alone but resolute. He was about to stand up and take his first step when the door opened and a figure rushed in, "Mr Frost!" The nurse almost screamed startling him and making him pause.

Erasmi turned his head and glared at the nurse, startling her. She had long been used to this patient laying there, not saying anything. Feeling his sudden glare almost gave her a scare as she quickly bowed, "I am so sorry, Mr Frost. I was just startled. Let me call the doctors and the physio therapists. I will be right back. We'll inform CEO Frost as well..."

"Stop." Erasmi rasped, his voice scratchy from not being used for so long

The nurse paused in her steps and looked at the man questioningly. She realised that she should first make sure that he was comfortable... "I'm so sorry. Do you need something, Mr. Frost? A sip of water..."

Erasmi slowly shook his head, pausing to organize his thoughts, "Don't. Tell. Anyone. Yet..."

The nurse paused at that. She wanted to question the patient, but dared not. Previously, two nurses had been blacklisted because they had disturbed the patient. If she dared to argue with him and cause the man some harm, she might be next. Nodding her head, she quickly agreed, trying to find a way to hurry out of the room... "Then I will call the doctors. I will also inform them of your wishes.

Erasmi nodded and as the nurse backed away from the room, he slowly slumped back into the bed, his strength depleted. In his hand, however, was the picture that he had taken from the side table. He stared at the picture for a long time before his fingers tightened around the frame, the edges digging into his palm.

His gaze remained fixed on the photograph, the faces frozen in a moment of familial bliss. Yet, instead of warmth, a storm brewed in his chest. The memories that had sparked to life now fueled a fire of resentment and unresolved grievances.

As he lay there, the room felt smaller, the walls closing in on him. The whispers in his mind grew louder, the voice of the past urging him to reclaim what he believed was rightfully his. His eyes bore into the image, the chatter of his brothers echoing in his ears like a cruel taunt.

At that moment, it wasn't weakness that trembled through his limbs but a seething anger.

With a sudden burst of frustration, Erasmi's arm swung out, the picture frame propelled through the air. It collided with the opposite wall, the glass shattering into a cascade of shards. The sound reverberated through the sterile room, a stark contrast to the usual silence.

A mixture of emotions flashed across Erasmi's face—anger, sorrow, and a hint of satisfaction.

As the nurse returned with a team of medical professionals, Erasmi lay reclined on the bed, his countenance now an impersonal mask. The nurse, with a cautious demeanour, approached him, her eyes flitting between the broken glass and the man's expression. ""Are you alright?"

The man slowly nodded his head and was soon surrounded by the ecstatic doctors...

It was only the shattered photograph that lay as evidence of a prelude to a Chapter where Erasmi Frost would rise from the ashes of his own despair.

Whether this return would prove to be a blessing or a curse to his brothers only time would tell.

Chapter 142: Slave For A Day

"Who are you looking for?"

Nora, whose eyes had bee scanning the crowd, looked to her side at Demetri's question before answering absently, "Fodder."

Demetri raised an eyebrow at that, without saying further. Even though Nora did not see his expression, she could already sense the action and explained herself, " You are the exceptionally strong, handsome, rich male lead while I am merely a trophy wife, so to show how exceptional I am and to shine, I need a backdrop. Someone to make a fool of themselves so that I can shine against them as the backdrop."

Demetri: "o"

Demetri had no words to say to her line of thinking, but he could not help but be amused, "How are you going to find this... fodder?"

"Oh. They will find me. See, this is why I asked the others about your dark history. Haven't you rejected a few strong females in the past when they approached you? Now, they will not let go of the opportunity to attack me and create trouble... Thus, becoming cannon fodder."

When Demetri said nothing, Nora turned her head to look at him and she looked down at him to see his reaction. "What?"

"Have you been reading too many novels again?"

Nora rolled her eyes at him and grinned, "Hey! You want to bet? I can already feel a few hot stares coming my way."

"Fine. Bet. What are the stakes?"

Nora thought carefully before she turned her head and spoke, "The loser accedes to the winner's wishes for a day. I think I can already spot a few contenders for the role..."

"You have a bet."

He'd barely made the bet when a few men approached Demetri, wishing to discuss business. Even though they complimented Demetri for having a beautiful wife, it was clear that they did not treat her well, almost sidelining her from the entire conversation.

Just then, a woman was seen walking by as the businessmen mentioned, "That's CEO Victoria. I think she would have a good idea about the current trends in the market... Let me invite her..."

As the businessmen quickly tried to invite the beautiful woman to join the conversation, Nora leaned in close and whispered, "Here comes the fodder."

Demetri shook his head and frowned, "I don't..."

Before he could continue, however, a beautiful woman joined the conversation. CEO Victoria was a red-headed and fiery-tempered woman, known for having founded her own investment banking firm after separating from her family's old money.

As the discussion progressed, however, it was clear that Nora was indeed being looked down upon by the others and Victoria Ann was also one of those people who seemed to think that he would let them bully his wife. Unable to take the blatant disrespect anymore, Demetri turned to Nora and sought her take on the ongoing discussion. Nora turned to him as he acknowledged, albeit indirectly that she did attract cannon fodder, she widened her eyes and spoke softly, "I actually don't agree with CEO Ann and Director Blu's opinions."

The man almost scoffed while the woman looked at Nora with narrowed eyes, however, she said nothing assessing the situation carefully. But Director Blu it seemed was intent on becoming the first cannon fodder as he said, "Mrs. Frost, you are young, so, of course, I can understand why you might be drawn to high-risk ventures. It's quite common for your generation to think that way, with no experience...You youngsters are all about disrupting the status quo. But let's not forget that there's a reason for tradition and established practices. They've stood the test of time."

Nora smiled and sipped the glass of wine in her hand, but the subtle tension in the air seemed to increase as she finally answered, "Director Blu, if everyone insisted on not changing traditions, we would all still be writing letters or even sending scrolls..."

"That is an exception, not the rule, Mrs Frost."

"But exceptions are what become rules. A few years ago, the sheer set up required to make Electronic Vehicles was said to make it impossible to manufacture on a large scale. And yet now, the market is getting flooded with EVs and they are disrupting the automotive industry...And of course, I mean, you can ask my husband about the profits he is making with that one, after all, he is one of the first investors..."

Director Blu quietly shut his mouth and excused himself when he realized that he had underestimated the girl, but CEO Ann looked at the girl with a careful gaze complimenting her, "I should have known that the Demon would not fall for only a beautiful face and body. So, you do have some brains to keep him interested. Mrs. Frost, if you ever find yourself in need of work, you can come to me."

As the woman walked away, Nora shook her head and whispered, "She's too kind with her insults. She actually told me that you will get tired of me soon and that I am not successful enough but coated that as a compliment! Totally cool. Why did you not accept her proposal when she asked you out?"

Demetri shook his head as he looked down at her, "How did you discover that? I am sure that I did not mention this in the report."

"I have my sources, of course." Nora grinned up at him.

"Miss Nora, you are quite a big gossip. So, you've been gossiping about me, huh?"

"Of course. I need to know where I am going to be attacked from. There is already Arabelle who is as sane as Sara, and there is CEO Ann who is as peace-loving as a black mamba..."

"And yet, I am sure, you can hold your own. Of course, I can. I do have your support and now I also have you as a slave for a day..."

Demon grinned at that and bowed his head, "Yes, princess. I am at your service."

Chapter 143: The Last Ten Years

Lucien Frost stood in front of Erasmi's room, wondering if he was doing the right thing or not. He wanted to see and talk to Erasmi but did not know if Demetri would have an objection to it. After all, he had kept Erasmi hidden from them for all this while... But when he had mentioned wanting to meet Erasmi just now, the nurse had simply led him here. Didn't it mean that he wasn't at least forbidden from coming here? Of course, he knew that his brother might not even recognize him but he re did want to talk to him.

With a perfunctory knock, he entered the room stared at the frail man in front of him and sat on the chair gingerly, "Uhh.. Hi, Erasmi."

Of course, he paused and then cursed himself for pausing. It wasn't as if the man could reply.

With a deep breath, he continued again, "I am Lucien.. I mean Lucy. I just thought I'd come back and re-introduce myself to you. I... uh... I want to tell you that I am really happy to see you like this..."

"I mean... I don't mean like this in this state! I meant to see you alive..." He quickly corrected himself embarrassedly.

"Is it okay, if I hold your hand? Gabe said that you are able to clench your fingers and give reactions..."

Slowly and carefully, Lucien took the man's cold and bony hand in his and continued, "I hope you won't mind if I come here regularly. I mean I know that Demon used to come here every week, but I doubt he would have said much about himself."

Lucien paused in wonder as he felt the hand in his palm flinch and he looked up in wonder. Erasmi still had his eyes closed but maybe he could hear what he was telling him..." Do you want to listen to Demon? You must be wondering why he is called Demon now...It's been so long since we have been calling him that, it even feels off to call him Demetri..."

"He got the name after you were in the accident... I think he felt really alone when you ended up like this. There was a lot of pressure on him and the company... there were too many things happening that Grandfather was unable to take care of. Anyway, he was akin to a Demon at the time as he almost slashed everything that stood in his way. Do you know, recently we had been discussing how he had changed after he lost you. Demetri has married Nora, you know. She is a bit like you, I think. I think she shares the same ironic sense of humor that you and Demon do..."

Whenever the man paused, he would feel Erasmi's fingers flinch so he talked about everything that happened over the years. Everything that Demetri had done to everything he knew about Nora.

Lucien, who had gone to see his brother in the morning, left the room after a few hours after promising to visit him again. However, as the door closed behind him, he failed to notice that Erasmi's eyes had already opened and were now staring at the ceiling coldly.

A little while later, the evening nurse quietly entered the room, followed by the physical therapist, who helped the man, start to stand up by himself with support. As the nurse was about to leave, Erasmi's raspy voice spoke, "I need newspapers."

The nurse paused in surprise as she looked at the man warily. Maybe it was that he had been almost dead for so many years or that the look in his eyes was somehow scarier than his previously blank gaze, she felt uneasy with this man. She even thought that it would have been better if the man had remained in his previous unresponsive state. She nodded and politely answered, "Of course, sir. I will go and get it now."

But before she could have gone further, Erasmi spoke again, "I want newspapers from the last ten years."

The nurse looked at the man warily and spoke, "I'm afraid we don't have old newspapers here. But you can catch up on the news using a smartphone. It's much faster and more convenient."

"What is a smart phone?"

The nurse realized that the man had no idea about these things and felt a surge of pity. It made her realize that this man had been out of touch with reality for over a decade. With a sigh, she took out her phone and showed it to him, teaching him gently how to use the phone.

Surprisingly the man was quick to learn and she could only sigh in wonder. This man had been lying in bed for a decade and still managed to recover finally. She should have known that the man would be smart. Feeling guilty for her previous thoughts, she offered, "You can borrow my phone. I am here for the next few hours and really don't need it. If you want to ask something, you can ring the bell."

Erasmi nodded his thanks and watched the woman walk out of the room. As she did, he slowly opened the search page, and typed in "Demetri Frost."

Casually, he started reading from the oldest article in the newspaper, reading through his twin's many achievements and awards.

Hours later, when his eyes and hands were too tired to even move, a new article was updated on the trending search about Demetri Frost's wife.

Carefully, he opened the page and looked through the information shared on it, noting that she was still a student. Someone had even shared her contact details. Even though, the page seemed to disappear almost immediately, Erasmi had already memorized the details.

Next he searched "Erasmi Frost" but the page came up blank. With a dark frown, he clenched his hands and quietly turned off the phone trying to think of his next plan of action. Demetri had already erased all traces of him from the world...And he needed to find a way to return not just to the living but also to his rightful place...

Chapter 144: Slave For The Day

Looking at the grin on Nora's face, Demetri wondered if he should fear for his life or his sanity. He'd totally lost all his intelligence when he had agreed to be her slave for the day in that bet. Or rather, all his brain cells had shifted to a different part of his body at the time, making him think that he would definitely win.

He'd barely gotten over his brothers setting up his 'horned' image as their screen savers and snickering up at him and now he'd already set himself up once more.

With a resigned sigh, he shook his head and commented, "I can't believe I let you trick me into this ridiculous bet."

"Hey! I did not do any tricking! You cannot accuse me baselessly! And to think I was going to make it easy for you."

Demetri shrugged and waited for her to continue, knowing that no matter what she claimed, her mind was definitely going to conjure up something that would make his life difficult.

And he was right, he knew when her face showed her determined expression and she said, "I want to learn how to drive."

Demetri almost spit the coffee out as he stared at her. "No. I am not teaching you. I will, however, hire a teacher."

Nora pouted and crossed her arms in front of her, "Hey! It was not my fault that the previous teacher was a wuss."

Demetri sighed. It was not as simple as that. As part of her self-defence training, she had been initially supposed to learn how to drive. However, after a couple of classes, she had insisted that she was more comfortable riding her bicycle than driving and insisted that she did not want to learn. He had agreed but not before probing for the real cause.

It seemed Nora was a real magnet for traffic cones... the driver had actually told him that he would need insurance if he needed to continue training her.

Demetri made up his mind to refuse her, only for her to give him 'the look' that made him forget how to say no. Sighing, he acknowledged, "Fine. We can try to begin today..."

And that is how, Demetri found himself in the car with Nora in the driver's seat. "Why can't we use an automatic instead of a manual one?"

"Because you need to know both." Demetri answered her calmly. He noticed the way she settled into the car and adjusted the seat and the rearview mirror, nodding approvingly. Maybe the instructor had indeed been overreacting.

Barely had the thought crossed his mind when she almost pulled off the mirror making Demetri wince. Maybe it was too early to declare the driver as incompetent.

A little while later, Demetri gulped the water bottle in his hand and thought that Nora had judged him well. If it was not for his promise to spend the day as her slave, he would never have stayed after the first time Nora tried to drive.

And she seemed to have some personal grudge against the hand brake so that she was always trying to pull it out, making the car jerk every time.

Having finished her water, Nora looked up at him with shining eyes and spoke, "See, I made good use of you as a slave, didn't I? And it wasn't that bad."

"Of course, it wasn't," Demetri lied with a smile, vowing that he was going to get an F1 racer to teach her to drive, the moment they were out of here. He was a patient man, but he had almost been forced to scream that she needed to keep driving straight and not get on the pavement."

"Alright then, I know that I need to learn a lot but I was at least able to drive in a straight line today, thanks to you. So, we can go to our next thing now, slave."

"Next thing?"

"Hmm. The day is not yet over, so I am still your master for the day. And you have to follow me."

Demetri grimaced but followed the girl with a shake of his head. The silly girl did not know that he would follow her anywhere without losing any bet. Rolling his eyes internally at his own sappiness, Demetri followed her with a cold face, showing none of his real feelings on his face.

Next, the stood at the base of a small hill and Demetri shook his head. They were going up a trail for night hiking?

"And why are we doing this?"

"For fun of course. I want to hike and I don't know anyone I can go with...Are you unwilling?"

Demetri shook his head, " Of course not. I think it would be nice. And this hill has some beautiful flowers that bloom at night..."

"Really?" Nora asked the question with interest, pleased with herself. She'd known that Demetri would definitely know about the plants here and that is why she had planned this trip.

As they climbed up in silence, Demetri pausing to show her the beautiful moonflower and the ethereal Cereus, she could only look at him with shining eyes. He was totally a contradiction. Who would have thought that a ferocious businessman like him would be such a nerd at heart.

As they sat down near a particularly mesmerizing fragrant Cereus plant, she could not help but ask, "How did you get into this hobby? I mean, I cannot imagine you as a young boy taking care of plants..."

"Well, that is because you did not know the young me. I wanted to be a botanist when I grew up. I was always pestering the gardener to tell me about things. It all started with a bet when my brother challenged me that I could not keep a plant alive..."

Nora heard the short story of how Demetri had actually gotten into a bet with his brother just to show him that he could keep a plant, and ended up falling in love with everything green. And then proceeded to scare his brothers by using carnivorous plants to scare them...

Giggling at the way he narrated the story, Nora asked how Ian had felt when he realized that he had challenged the wrong brother... when the mood suddenly changed. Demetri quietened down and looked away while Nora felt at a loss. What... had just happened?

Chapter 145: Arabelle

Arabelle paced the door of her room as she waited for Gabe to arrive. Tonight, she was going to make things clear with him. He'd been fooling her all these days! Whenever she asked him to schedule a double date with Demon and that girl, he kept claiming that the girl was sick and delaying the date, instead taking her to different places under the guise of showing people that they were totally in love.

Though she had to agree that the tide had indeed turned in her favour when everyone had started talking about how Demetri had probably married a random girl to save face when he had realized that his fiance loved his younger brother. However, she was not happy with the fact that despite everything, she had been unable to see Demetri for over a month!

She'd been consoling herself that she would use this opportunity to make them part ways but their yesterday's appearance had caught her by surprise. If she'd known that Demon was going to be there for the annual celebration, she definitely would have gone instead of excusing herself with a headache.

She did not know why, but she had a feeling that it had something to do with Gabe. He had somehow purposely made her believe that Demetri would not be coming there. But her memory seemed to be blurry...

Just then, the door to her suite opened and Gabe stepped in. She was about to blast him off for being too cunning and calculating when she paused. He looked tired. Pausing, she wondered if maybe she should let him catch a breath...

While she stood there confused, Gabe smiled as he came to her and leaned down to peck her forehead. She blinked up at him while he smiled down at her. And that smile reminded her of Demetri!

"Demetri!"

Gabe froze as he heard her call and looked at Arabelle sharply. His hands paused in the action of pouring himself some water before he took a deep breath to calm himself and replied, "I am Gabe, sweetheart."

Arabelle frowned at the comment and snapped, "Of course, I know you are Gabe! When I said Demetri's name I meant that you said we could go on a double date with Demetri and that... I mean Nora. But you have been telling me that Demetri does not have the time these days and other excuses. But Demetri was there yesterday at the annual ball. And you did not take me."

Gabe turned to Arabelle and sipped his water slowly, "I did invite you. I told you that you would enjoy the celebration. But you refused. And Demetri is the CEO, of course, he would be present at the celebration. If you'd asked me that I would have told you."

"Oh." Arabelle paused as she realized that she had not asked Gabe but simply assumed and looked at him doubtfully, "Then can you arrange a double date now? I would like to get to know Nora more. I did tell you that my previous impression on her was not that good and I want to take some time to change that. Can you please do that Gabe? I fear if I try to approach Demetri to arrange this, with my history, he might refuse me no matter what I say."

Gabe casually walked around the room, long used to spending his evenings with Arabelle and turned on the speaker, ordering the AI to play some instrumental music that he'd added to the playlist.

Arabelle clenched her hands, resisting the urge to shake him to get an answer to her question while Gabe looked at her, "You know I won't refuse you anything, Arabelle. Come dance with me."

Taking hold of her clenched hands, Gabe slowly brought them around his neck and pulled her close to him, " I've already arranged a date night with Demon. Don't worry."

Arabelle smiled widely at that and her resistance to dancing with Gabe seemed to melt away, even as she leaned close to him.

"Arabelle, you have to remember your promise. You will not try to create trouble with Demetri and Nora."

Arabelle leaned away from Gabe and narrowed her eyes at him, " You don't have to remind me, Gabe. I am not a little child. I remember my promise very well."

Gabe nodded at that and sighed as she leaned close to him, her hands going around his waist.

He knew she was trying to distract him and felt his heart ache at the game he had begun and the ending it would lead to.

Arabelle leaned against his strong chest and heard the heart that beat for her. This was perfect. This is what she and Demetri would be like. And when they were together, she would lean against him just like this, she promised herself. Soon that day would come.

As she remained lost in her own thoughts, she failed to realize the slight prick of a needle being injected into her. Soon, she had fallen unconscious against Gabe.

With a sigh, Gabe threw away the needle and picked up Arabelle in his arms. Gently he kissed her forehead, whispering an apology to her, before marched towards the door.

Being careful not to be seen, he carefully placed her into his car and drove away.

This is what he had been doing for the past few days with no one realising his actions. However, this time, Gabe was noticed by a person who quickly took out his cell phone and reported, " Ma'am. Miss Arabelle is with Gabe Frost and something does not seem right."

The man paused waiting for the other person to say something before he straightened his feet and nodded smartly, " Yes ma'am. I will be very careful. No one will know that I am following them."

Quickly, the man followed the couple in his car, keeping a safe distance. However, as the man turned the signal, the car had already disappeared, leaving him perplexed.

Chapter 146: Discovering The Past:Bonus Chapter

Nora and William Doughby stared at each other across the large table, in a stalemate.

Nora was intent on questioning the man while he wanted to avoid it at all costs.

Finally, William Doughby sighed and looked away muttering, "I should have known that man would be a bad influence on you. You are actually picking up his skills."

Nora blinked at the unexpected comment. This was not what she had expected.

"What do you mean, Grandpa William?", she asked perplexedly.

"Well, in the past when you came to me, you were very demure and barely asked any questions. And then with the Antonio case, you were hurt and gaining a bit of strength. But now, with that Demon's influence, you are actually growing wings and getting stronger. While I am happy for you, I suddenly miss the young girl who was taking her baby steps."

Before Nora could say more, the old man however continued, " But I know that those odd hesitant steps were made with difficulty and how badly I failed in protecting you so I have no right to wish for you to go back. I am proud of how strong you are becoming, even though that means, you will soon not be looking up at me but see me for all my flaws."

Nora blinked at this and wondered what to say. She'd only questioned Grandpa William about her sister but he seemed to be intent on talking about her...

"Grandpa William..."

"Wait, child, let me speak. Nora, your elder sister was named, Nellie. She was conceived before your mother's marriage and was about ten years older than you. Your mother refused to keep her to herself because she wanted freedom so she was brought up by your grandparents who raised her like a daughter instead of a granddaughter. By the time you were born, Nellie already took your mother as her sister and your father as a brother-in-law. When your grandparents died, Nellie was sent to the boarding school."

Now, if your father had been alive, they would have definitely placed both your sisters in his care, but he'd already passed away and they were too old to take responsibility for protecting you and... the point is, the reason you never knew about your older sister was because you never met her. And after knowing everything, she'd never had any interest in meeting Lara and also you... Don't blame her though Nora, you were nothing but a stranger to her..."

"It is why I never thought to tell you about her. And then later, she passed away in an accident... your mother refused to bury her so her boyfriend's family contacted me and we buried her. I swear, I never imagined that Lara had gone so crazy that she would dig their graves and do something like that..."

"So, the other sister mentioned in my grandparents' will was not Sara but... Nellie?"

"Yes. In fact she was supposed to get everything and take care of you. It is why the marriage stipulation was added so that Nellie would marry at the soonest and get your custody... When Nellie died, your mother convinced some judge to add Sara as a de facto, claiming that since the inheritance was always meant to be divided between two sisters and your grandparents were unable to change their will before their passing to acknowledge Sara so the judge let her be added."

Nora looked down at her hands as she heard Grandpa William sum up everything for her. All her questions had been answered. The existence of an entire human being had been erased from the world because of her mother. "Do you have a picture of her?"

She asked slowly. Grandpa William hesitated before sighing, "Nora, she is already gone. Why would you want to open this can of worms? She is already gone..."

"I'd just like to know what she looked like... If I'd known earlier, I would have definitely visited her grave, but now... Can I at least look at her picture?"

William Doughby sighed and shook his head, "I don't have any pictures of her, Nora. I was away from here when Nellie was growing up so I did not know her much. All her pictures were with your grandparents and Lara took possession of their belongings after they passed away. I do have a picture that was given to me by someone else..."

Grandpa William sighed and showed her a picture of the young woman in question. Nora looked at the picture and felt the world almost crumbling around her. She should have known. Or at least she should have guessed. She had, after all seen the lady in the picture earlier with... Demetri...

"Grandpa William, how do you know Demetri Frost?"

Grandpa William looked away at that before looking back at her, "I think it would be better if you were to ask Demetri that question..."

Without a word, Nora left the old man's office with as many questions as she had come with. And just as many answers. Every time she thought she understood that man, she was forced to see another layer making her see that every assumption she ever made was wrong.

Her heart seemed to ache strangely. When she had seen the picture in the past, she had been uneasy but she had convinced herself that it was because the woman in the picture looked too much like her. But even then, she had slowly understood that this was probably the reason Demetri had chosen her to be his contract bride. But now, another layer was peeled off... Demetri had been Nellie's boyfriend.

Unknowingly, tears filled her eyes. She'd started to believe that Demetri and her had become friends. That he trusted her. But he continued to keep such a big secret from her. Even when she told him that she had a sister, he had not shown any reaction, never telling her that he did not just know her sister but was her lover.

It was a joke. Suddenly everything felt like a joke. She was not lovable. She already knew and accepted that. But was she also destined to never have any friends and always be betrayed? But was it betrayal? Or had Demetri simply hidden the truth. And if she asked him, would he continue to hide it or would he trust her as a friend and tell her the truth.

Chapter 147: Memories

Nora stood in front of the tall building of Frost Industries with hesitating feet. She did not want to go inside but she wanted to go inside. She needed answers. Like echoes of her many nightmares, she could

hear the voices of Lara Anderson and many others in school, telling her repeatedly, "Do you think he was nice to you because you are likeable? He was only showing courtesy to your sister."

"She likes me, Nora. She wants to be my best friend. It is why I told her to be nice to you and she was pretending all along. She never wanted to be your friend."

"These chocolates are not for you. They are for your sister. She was feeling bad so she asked me to give a box to you as well. Don't misunderstand. I do not like you."

Even though all these instances in the past, had been orchestrated by Sara and Lara in the past, Nora had failed to realize how deep these things had hurt her. The favored person in each of those memories was Sara but it did not feel like that now.

She had never doubted that they had a shared camaraderie because he liked her as she was. But now, had he been kind to her because of his love for her sister? Elijah Frost had believed that she would see the picture and break up with Demetri. Possibly the man had known that the woman in the picture was her sister. While she was the foolish one to not have had even that much of information.

Suddenly, she wanted an answer. She wanted Demetri to tell her that he was her friend and confidante because of her and not because of her a sister she did not even know.

Taking a fortifying breath, she walked into the large office building and confidently to the Reception, ready to ask to meet Demetri. However, before she could ask, she saw a man walking towards her hurriedly. She moved sideways, wondering if he was in some sort of a hurry but the man stopped in front of her and bowed quickly, "Mrs. Frost. Sir is expecting you."

It was only as the man spoke that Nora realized this was the man she had previously seen in Demetri's office. His assistant..." Assistant Ma. Thank you."

As she followed the man, she wondered how Demetri knew that she would come here. Could it be that Grandpa William had called and warned Demetri? But knowing Grandpa, he would never do that.

As she followed the man, she tried to control the anger, sadness, confusion and betrayal swirling inside her. She needed to hear his side of the story as well. He had to have known from the very beginning her

identity and yet he kept his secret. She could have overlooked everything if they had continued to remain strangers up until now. But they had become close allies and friends.

How could he not tell her everything even after she had told him what transpired in that place under the lake? How could he have sat there, with no emotions on his face when she told him that the woman he had loved, her body had been treated like that? How could he have not told her then? Why did he keep such a crucial detail hidden? Did he think that she would never find out?

She looked down at the bags of food she had bought on the way here, her excuse for visiting him out of the blue? Would he also be able to see through her excuse? Did he pity her and take care of her due to her sister? According to Grandpa William, her sister would have fought for her custody once she had inherited the money. That would have meant that she would have consulted her boyfriend about that... and Demetri would have agreed...

Assistant Ma opened the door to his office and gestured for her to step in, "The CEO is in a meeting. He will be here shortly."

Nora nodded and the man left the office, closing the door behind him. She looked around curiously. The previous time she had been here, she had been too shaken to take in any of the surroundings. As she sat on the couch, she noticed the wall of green plants on the opposite side and sighed. He really did love his plants.

Her gaze scanned the many different plants before moving to his desk. There, as she looked at the desk which held an array of papers, she could not help but stare at the small potted plant on the desk. It was the one that she had sent to Demetri... to thank him. That made her pause and reconsider herself. Was she simply manifesting things that did not exist?

So what if the person in the picture was her biological sister? She had not doubted herself when she had seen that picture. So why was she feeling all this now. Her mind seemed to be trying to make her see something while she tried to think of a way to convince herself that Demetri really did not treat her well because of her sister.

Just as she continued to sit there and stare at the plant, the door to the office was opened and Demetri walked in, looking as handsome as ever.

Her heart skipped a beat when he smiled at her and walked in her direction before an insidious whisper sounded in her head, 'Smiled at you? Or your face that resembles his dead girlfriend?'

Nora couldn't hide the turmoil in her eyes, and she could only stare as he walked to her and bent down to kiss her. Concern furrowed his brow as he gently pulled away and asked, "Is everything okay, Nora?"

She hesitated for a moment, her heart pounding in her chest. "Demetri, Grandpa told me everything..." It did not matter how many times she had practiced everything in her head, the words that were torturing her, simply tumbled out of her mouth...

Chapter 148: The Misunderstanding

"Grandpa has told me everything." As the words seemed to almost echo in the room, Nora looked up at Demetri and Demetri stared back at her, the silence charged with tension.

Carefully, Demetri straightened and stepped away from her. He looked down at the bags that were tightly clenched in her hands and slowly took them from her hands. Instead of saying anything or even trying to explain himself, Demetri turned and started to spread out the food on the table.

Seeing his calm expression and his unshaken silence, Nora could not help but frown, "Are you not going to say anything? Grandpa William has told me about Nellie! How can you be calm after knowing that I know the truth? Are you not going to even explain yourself?"

Demetri looked up from the food on the table and carefully plated the food, handing her the sandwich as he nodded, "You can ask anything you want to know, Nora."

Nora looked up at him, stumped. Did he really have to be so calm all the time? Why could he not simply explain everything instead of telling her to question him. Where was she supposed to begin?"

"Did you really know Nellie? You met Grandpa William because of her?"

Demetri sat opposite Nora feeling perplexed himself. Shouldn't she be asking him what had happened to Nellie? Why did he not tell her, etc.

But instead, he simply gave her the answer to her question, "Yes."

Nora bit her lip as she considered his direct answer and looked at the sandwich in her hand, "Is that why you married me and have been kind to me? Because of Nellie?"

Demetri took a bite of the sandwich that she had brought and cocked his head, staring at Nora quietly. Taking his own time, he answered, "No."

Nora blinked up at that, waiting for him to explain. She had already braced herself for an affirmative answer and this shocked her for a moment.

"What do you mean 'no'?" She asked hesitantly.

"I did not marry you because of Nellie and my actions toward you have nothing to do with her."

"Oh."

Nora paused and looked at him consideringly, at a loss on how to go further. The truth was that she had expected him to answer with a yes. She had not for a moment doubted that he would simply agree that he had been nice to her all this time because he was in love with Nellie...

"Eat your sandwich, Nora." She heard him say calmly and she simply followed his quiet command. However, the sandwich tasted like dust to her as she tried to come to terms with everything.

"I need to know everything, Demetri. Do you still love Nellie?"

Demetri paused and looked up at her when he heard the question. It seemed the old man had really not told her everything... "The man that loved Nellie? Yes, he still loves her."

Nora frowned at the answer. Why not answer her directly? What kind of an answer was this...

But before she could question him, he asked her, "Why don't you ask me how she died, Nora? I am not sure that William Doughby has told you anything about that."

"She died in an accident, didn't she?" Nora asked with confusion.

But Demetri shook his head and answered, "That is what I thought all this while as well. That her death was the result of an accident. After all, she'd been in an argument before everything happened, so she had probably been agitated. But after I saw how vicious Lara Anderson has been to you, I was forced to re-investigate the past."

No one could have said that Nora was not clever. It was only a few words and she instantly understood his words and whispered the question, "You mean it was murder?"

"For now, that is what it seems like."

"Oh." Nora silently continued to eat the sandwich in her hand, while Demetri stared at her. The girl was in shock.

Putting aside the sandwich in his hand, he stood up and walked to her. Gently, he cupped her face and tilted her chin, looking into her hazy eyes. "Stand up." As she did what he said, he nudged her aside, sat down on the couch and pulled her into his lap.

She resisted for a moment, something she had not done in the past but soon settled as he firmly held her waist. Taking her in his arms, he gently tucked her head under his chin and rubbed her back, "I never told you about Nellie because I wanted you to not be hurt. In the short time that we have known each other, I have seen you dealing with so many things, suffer so much and yet stay strong, I hoped to protect you a little longer from the pain, kitten."

"There are still many things that you do not know..." Nora looked up at him, wanting to know more, but he simply shook his head, "There are still things you do not know. But with time, you will know everything. Until then, I only ask one thing of you, Nora. Trust me. You are important to me."

"Because of Nellie?"

"No. Because of you. Your sister has nothing to do with how I feel about you."

"But you loved her..."

"The past is the past, Nora. Nellie is already gone. Don't let the ghost of the past make you doubt the present."

Nora sighed and leaned against him, unsure if she did trust him or not. But she did not argue as she closed her eyes and tried to calm herself.

On the other hand, Demetri closed his own eyes and wondered how he was so reluctant to tell her the truth. But of course, he knew the reason why he was fooling himself. He did not want her to know that the fight before the accident had happened between him and Erasmi had been because of Nellie. The girl was not someone who deserved to be put on a pedestal.

Chapter 149: Brewing Storm

As Nora and Demetri sat in each others arms, the silence calm around them, a knock interrupted the quite time. It reminded her that she was in his office and not at home. Straightening, she blinked up at him and tried to get off his lap, "I should leave."

Demetri's fingers tightened on her waist for a moment before he shook his head, "We need to have lunch. I've already asked Ma to arrange for it."

"How did you know I was going to be coming here?"

Demetri smiled and gently tapped her nose as he said, "Its because I know everything."

Nora rolled her eyes at that and was about to reply when someone cleared their throat, "Ahem ahem"

Startled, her head turned to see Gabe leaning against the door and tried to jump off Demetri's lap but the man continued to hold her while Gabe stood there with a smile on his face. Demon, on the other hand, sported a scowl as he said, "You can excuse yourself, Gabe. Really, I don't think I asked you to enter. Go."

"I don't want to." Gabe smirked and walked in directly as he looked at Nora and winked, "I actually came to discuss something with you. But now that Nora is here, I want to sit and talk to my sister-in-law. From what I can see you are the furniture so you can keep quiet and excuse yourself."

Nora almost laughed at that and nodded along, "You are right. He is just furniture."

Before Demetri could say anything to protest this, Assistant Ma walked in followed by an array of people carrying steaming dishes.

As Assistant Ma and his team set up the lunch, the atmosphere in Demetri's office was a curious blend of anticipation and tension. Demetri reluctantly released his hold on Nora, allowing her to stand while he sent a look Gabe's way.

He knew of course why Gabe was here and why he did not want him to be. Demetri's jaw tightened as he saw Gabe's undeterred gaze and sighed in his heart. "Are you really going to mooch off my food and ruin my date with my wife?" Demetri pointed out.

Gabe, ever the shameless one, shrugged and agreed, "Of course. These are the best dishes from the Italian place down the road. I love their dishes. It is fate that I have come here today. And there is so much to eat. It is my moral duty to help you both finish it all."

"Stealing my food won't put me in a mood to agree to your proposal." Demetri pointed out as he served some risotto to Nora.

"Nothing is going to put you in the mood to agree with what I want. I am going to have to twist your arm, to get you to agree. So, I might as well enjoy the food while I plan my next step."

Gabe cast a pointed look towards Demon while Nora, who had just been offered some entertainment along with the food, watched in rapt attention. It seemed that there was something brewing between Gabe and Demetri and she had unknowingly gained front tickets to the show.

Demetri sighed; his displeasure evident. "Gabe, not now. Can't we just have a peaceful meal?"

"Of course you can. But there is no time like the present. And with all involved parties present... I think it would be easier to discuss..."

Demetri's hands clenched," Nora is not involved.", he bit out.

Nora blinked at her name suddenly being dragged in and quickly took a bite of her pasta. If Gabe wanted to discuss business with Demetri, then she could simply leave faster...

"I can leave if you need to discuss something important...", she offered.

Gabe shook his head and turned to Nora, ignoring his brother for now," It's nothing really. I don't know why he is insisting on making it such a big secret. I'll catch him later. Let's talk about you, Nora."

"About me? Umm, sure...What's there to talk about?"

Gabe leaned back on the couch and stared at Nora intently," How are you holding up with everything? I mean whatever happened in the past few days, you must have been hurt physically and emotionally."

Nora paused mid-bite as she looked from Demetri who was not glaring daggers at Gabe. If the man's eyes could shoot laser beams, she was sure Gabe would have been full of holes by now. And yet, she felt that Gabe was not just questioning her casually. There seemed to be something deeper in the question.

"I am doing alright, I guess. I have not yet assimilated to all the facts but I am slowly accepting everything."

Gabe nodded thoughtfully," You've been really calm through all this. It is amazing. Any other person would have had a break down by now. But you've held remarkably well."

Nora nodded at the words, unsure what it was that Gabe was trying to tell her. But whatever that was, every word coming out of Gabe's mouth seemed to be making Demetri angrier.

Suddenly, Nora had a premonition. She needed to leave this place if she wanted to survive. Things had escalated quite suddenly..."

Putting down her folk, she quickly dabbed her lips and scooted forward, standing up hurriedly, "I think it is time I leave. I have some homework to do..."

Gabe stood up as well, offering, "I'll escort you out. We can catch up some more on the way."

Nora's eyes widened and she looked from Gabe to Demetri to Gabe again. The guy had actually frozen the entire atmosphere and now wanted to come out with her, obstructing her own escape?

"It's alright. I'll go by myself." With a quick wave at Gabe and Demetri, Nora hurried towards the exit, intent on making her getaway.

However before she could have made the final escape, Demetri called her name, "Nora, wait."

She paused and turned around to look at him questioningly, while he beckoned her with a quirk of his finger.

Chapter 150: The Argument

Nora walked to him hesitantly while Demetri stood up. As she reached him, he quickly caught her chin between his fingers and gently kissed her lips. Her eyes widened as she quickly kissed him back and stepped away while he complained, "You'd forgotten to kiss me."

Smiling and feeling shy at the same time, she quickly rolled her eyes to him and waved a goodbye to him and Gabe, who continued to stand there.

The door had barely closed behind her when the atmosphere in the office changed from cold to freezing. Gabe and Demetri stared at each other, each refusing to back down.

For what seemed an eternity, the battle of wills continued until Gabe was forced to look away, "Please Demon. This is the only way."

However, Demetri shook his head unequivocally and answered, "No."

"Why not? My plan is fool proof. Nora has already proven that she can stay calm under threats. And if we were to follow my plan, it would mean killing two birds with one stone. Can you at least consider it."

"I cannot consider it, Gabe. I won't. You THINK your plan is foolproof but sitting where I am, I can already point out a few glaring flaws in your theory."

"Then tell me those flaws and I will work on making the plan better. It is what we do. Help me Demon. Help me help you. I will make sure that Arabelle will never come into your life again."

"I have other ways of getting rid of Arabella without the high stakes and high price that you are asking me to pay."

Gabe clenched his jaw at Demetri's casual threat and spoke, "If you take that route, you will still have to pay the price."

Demetri rubbed a hand over his face as he stared at his brother, "Can you not think of another way? Does it have to be like this?"

"I did not even know it would be like that, Demon. You know it. After all, it was actually Nora's words which showed me the light. Please consider everything, Demon. I know Nora is your happiness and I would never do anything to jeopardize it."

"But Arabelle is not your happiness. She is your ruin, Gabe. I have held off all this while only because I wanted you to see for yourself how black she was from the inside. She cannot be saved from her own madness, Gabe."

"And I cannot be saved from my own madness, Demetri. I'm long past the time about caring what Arabelle is like. I just want to keep her happy. And if that means going to these lengths, then I am willing."

"But I am not. Gabe, I've already lost Erasmi to the sickness that is 'love'. I am not willing to part with another brother. Not when I can save you."

"Demon, it is already too late. Tell me if it had been Nora instead of Arabelle and you in my place, would you have let her ruin herself when you could save her?"

Gabe's question was only met with silence and Gabe smiled, even though the smile showed no signs of joy, as he said, "It is the Frost Curse, brother. It's in our blood. We fall once and we fall hard. You cannot save me, Demon, just like you couldn't have saved Erasmi. The only difference is that now you know the feeling."

Leaving Demon quiet, Gabe stood up and started to leave the office as he said the parting words, "You can help me save whatever ruins I can or you can sit back and watch me destroy myself. The choice is yours. I know it is not a great choice but there you have it."

Gabe walked out of Demetri's office with a clenched jaw as he took determined strides towards his own office. He needed to find a way to convince Demetri to agree. Like he'd said, he would still do what he needed to do but he would prefer to have Demetri standing on his side.

As he reached the office, however, he was shocked to see the person standing there. Stopping mid-step, he raised an eyebrow and questioned, "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you, of course."

Gabe inhaled slowly and offered, "You should not be here. If Demon knows about this, he will not be happy."

"Hmm, I know. But, still, here I am. Now, are you going to keep me standing here or are we waiting for Demetri to come and take me out?"

Looking away, Gabe sighed, walking forward, "Come on in, Nora."

Nora walked in slowly behind Gabe, looking around curiously. Gabe's office was comparatively smaller than Demetri's but also almost the opposite. While Demetri's office was sparse with only plain furniture and a wall of plants on one side, Demetri's was welcoming and a bit laid back.

"You did not leave, Nora? Did you need me for something?" Gabe gestured her towards a chair with a smile on his face, looking much different than the fuming man who had just walked down.

Nora sat down casually and returned his stare as she said, "I was thinking you needed me for something. So here I am."

Gabe looked up at Nora in surprise, not having expected that. The astuteness of the statement reminded him that Nora was not a simple girl. Despite being young, she had already experienced much so it was natural that she would be sensitive to such things. But confiding her would be equivalent to betraying Demetri and he wasn't about to fall to such levels... yet.

And so he pasted a fake smile on his face and shook his head, "I think you misconstrued the atmosphere just now. I was just wheedling Demetri about a merger. It's nothing. You can rest assured. But thank you for offering to help me."

Expecting her to leave, Gabe pulled out a random file from his desk and quickly started to read. He breathed a sigh of relief when she stood up and was about to bid her goodbye when he realized that she had not walked towards the door but towards the shelf. "Nora..."