

Benefits 201

Chapter 201: A Friend

"Which is the fiercest flower in the garden?" Dora asked the gardener who paused in the middle of pruning and looked up at the little girl with exasperation, "I do not know."

"Gaia? Are you really a gardener? How can you not know the fiercest flower? It is Tiger lily of course. You are so silly. Wait, I'll give you another chance, What did the soil say during the rain?"

Gaia scratched his head and shook it, "I do not know."

Dora put her palm to her forehead and looked at her friend with disappointment, "She said that if this continues then I will become mud."

"Oh." the man said before picking up the large shears and continuing his task. Dora frowned and looked at the man. She wanted him to talk but he never did. She came here every day to talk to him but he only ever talked to the plants and the trees. Dora did not like it. Crossing her arms, she stared at him and complained, "Gaia. Why are you always so serious? The plants are all dying in this garden because of you. At least you should laugh at my joke."

"But your joke is not funny." Gaia pointed out to the young girl, breaking her little heart.

Her lower lip pushed out in a pout and she said, "It is because you do not know what is funny. Of course, my jokes are funny. If you think not, then why don't you try to tell me a joke?"

Gaia paused in the middle of pruning and looked at the little girl thoughtfully and asked, "What is the tree's favourite dinosaur?"

"I don't know." Dora spoke with a frowning face.

Gaia smiled and tapped her nose, "It's a Tree-Rex."

A moment later, the little girl giggled and complained, "That is not fair. You made me laugh but I cannot make you laugh."

"Only my kitten can make me laugh. I laugh when she is with me." Gaia spoke casually continuing with his task.

"Ooo! But I've never seen you play with her as well. And where is she today?"

"She's got an upset stomach. So I left her at home. Why are you always coming here?"

Dora's eyes widened in surprise. "An upset stomach? Is she eating too many treats?"

Gaia gave the girl a droll look. Dora was the one stuffing her with treats and then asking that question.

Dora blushed prettily as she felt his accusing gaze and defended herself, "I like to play with her so of course I have to reward her so that she would play with me. It is what I have to do with my friends."

Gaia paused in his work once more before frowning, "You pay other children to play with you?"

Dora nodded as if it was the most natural thing in the world while Gaia frowned, "Dora, if they are playing with you for money then they are not your friends. You should only play with those who want to play with you."

"But no one plays with me. They all say I am too annoying.", the girl whined before perking up, "Well, Kitten plays with me. Do you think she will play with me even if I don't give her too many treats? I've got a new sister, you know, she plays with me as well!"

Gais stilled, before placing down the shears and wiping his hands, "Of course a baby sister will play with you."

Isidora giggled and said, "No no! She is not a baby! She is old! But she came to the palace only a few months ago. She is my cousin. She is really beautiful. I thought she would be as bad as Evangeline who

always treats me like I am an insect. But she was really nice. Even when she was injured, she would play 'I spy' with me."

"Is that so? That sounds like a good sister. Then why do you not play with her."

Dora frowned and answered, " My grandmother does not like her. She makes her angry, but I suppose grandmother makes Eleanora angry too. Eleanora does not like to follow orders and Grandmother keeps issuing them. I think I am going to grow up and be like Eleanora! But grandmother thinks that she is a bad influence so she has banned me from going there."

"Eleanora? That is a pretty name." Gaia remarked and Dora nodded in agreement. "It is actually better than being called Isidora."

Gaia smiled and nodded, " I think Isidora is a pretty name as well."

Dora blushed when she realized that she had blurted out her full name and pouted, " Don't call me that ever! Or I will..."

"What will a little gnome-like you do?" Gaia mocked the girl before changing the topic, " Miss Dora, I have an idea. Why don't you take my Kitten to meet your sister? If you are caught, you can say that you were playing with her and she raced there."

Dora's eyes lit up like little stars as she jumped up and down excitedly, " That is an amazing idea! I am sure that my sister will also like it! She is not allowed to leave her palace and always complains of being alone! She will love Kitten and she will like me even more if I take her there. You are the best Gaia! I'll even take some paintings I made for my sister to her. Don't forget to bring Kitten here tomorrow!"

As the young girl happily skipped away, Gaia turned back his head and continued to prune the other bushes and trellis' creating a beautiful garden. His conscious prickled at him for a moment, but he soon shrugged it away. He would try his best to not let innocent people be hurt but he too had been left with no choice. With every step, he was closer to his goal and that was the most important thing.

His kindness had been used against him and now it was time to use the enemy's weakness against them.

Chapter 202: Complaints

"I never thought I'd see the day a royal from my family parade around in those... utterly atrocious ensembles! And the way she back answers about how she is a non-royal! She is a princess with no manners, I dare say! And she even had the audacity to reprimand my own personal maid! How dare she!"

Alexander Sterling listened quietly as his mother continued to complain, his eyes closed in concentration.

Since the man had not said anything, she continued to speak, "She's becoming quite the challenge, you know. Back answers, rebellious arguments. It is getting out of hand now! You need to do something! Why do you insist on bring her here, I don't know. So what if those people in the court want to consider her? You are the one who has been handling the matters all these years when your father was sick. And now they want a girl to decide..."

"Mother!" Alexander Sterling intruded sharply as his mother would have continued to speak, "Please mind your words. Even walls have ears. She is a daughter of our family. Of course, she has the right to participate in this."

Queen Rosalind closed her mouth even as she continued to fume. She knew of course that she needed to maintain her silence but that girl was too much trouble. There was also the threat of her 'husband' hanging over their heads.

"Has that man stopped looking for her yet?"

Alexander Sterling grimaced and shook his head, "No. And I am starting to think he won't stop looking. Already his search has brought him to Estana. Our people have already received an application for permission to open a few luxury hotels and resorts. And those proposals are really good. If those people realise that I am not cooperating with such lucrative offers..."

Queen Rosalind could feel her head aching as she heard her son's words. All her life, she had ruled Estana like a mother would do their children. But when her husband passed away without a formal declaration, she had been left to the mercy of those old ministers! How could she have not known that they would dig out such a clause from ancient history and stop her ascension to the throne, rendering her Queen in name only.

If it had not been for her Alexander, she would have been forced into exile! No, she was not willing to be exiled from here. "Alexander? Eleanora is too much a threat. Can you not deal with her faster?"

"I am already dealing with her as fast as I can. And you do not need to worry. I heard that she has behaved well with Augustus. He is known to be loved by the ladies. I am sure he will win her heart soon. And then we can marry her off. Once she is married... Augustus will handle everything."

Queen Rosalind nodded her head and stood up to leave the room before pausing, "You need to be careful, Alexander."

Alexander Sterling nodded sharply at his mother, watching her walk away before turning to look out of the window. Even though Queen Rosalind was his mother and he loved her, he did not like her. She was too greedy.

Her greed had been reined in during his father's reign but right now, she thought that she could reveal her true self in front of him, letting him see her ruthlessness and ambition.

But she had forgotten he had been raised to put his country first, above all others. And so, he needed to be careful that any step of his would not bring disaster upon Estana.

Soon, his trusted aide Robert returned with a file in his hand, "Sir, this is the list of people Miss Nora was close to before..."

Alexander threw a sharp glance at the man who stopped and quietly handed the file.

Lara Anderson and Sara Anderson's deception had already cost him a lot and as he had discovered their behavior towards his real niece, he had been so angry that he could have burnt them again.

"There were not many people actually."

"We don't need many people. We need only one who would be able to help us."

Alexander looked through the two people's profile as he wondered if it would really work. According to the psychologist who had been talking to Nora, the girl was finding it hard to believe that she had a regular life before this. In order to help her connect, they needed someone to from her old life.

"If I may, Sir, Miss Isabella Ruffalo was Nora's best friend. Maybe we can bring her here..."

Alexander scoffed. "Foolish! Isabella was her best friend. Do you not think that she would be suspicious of our motives? Especially when she had been with Nora just before the accident. We need someone who knows her well from the previous time but would have his own reasons to help us in our ruse. Or someone who would benefit from lying for us."

With a sigh, he stopped and showed two pictures to the man, "Contact these two. Offer money to the second one. To the first one, offer to help him recover his father's business."

Robert nodded and took back the file, ready to move forward but as he read the man's profile, he could not help but frown. "Sir, this man is Miss Nora's ex-fiance. If he triggers some memory..."

"She jilted him before the wedding and married someone else. So of course he would hold not much value in her heart. We need someone who has been close to her but also not someone who would help her regain her memory. Bring these two. Also, warn the man that he better not try to play us or we can just as well ruin his father's business."

As Robert left to carry out his instructions, Alexander couldn't shake the feeling that his plan held both promise and peril. He simply needed to be cautious as the stakes were not higher than ever.

Chapter 203: A Date

"Kitten, come here. Let me teach you. Mmm. Just like this..."

Eleanora woke abruptly, her body still tingling from the vivid dream that had interrupted her sleep. Frustration welled within her – a mixture of desire and confusion. Dam* it! She needed to see this man. His voice had been torturing her forever now, haunting her sleeping hours as well as waking ones. Last night she had hoped a little that it would that Calendar man, her alleged fiancé but there was no way that man could even produce such an erotic voice.

Eleanora sat up in bed and looked outside the window. It was still dark outside. Laying back down, she stared at the ceiling, wondering what to do next.. Every time she had a dream like this, it would wake her up. Sometimes, it made her agitated, sometimes it scared her and sometimes like tonight, it left her gasping for more.

Even without the tattoo on her, it seemed her subconscious knew that there was someone else she wanted in her life. Since her new family insisted that she had no one other than Augustus, then it was probably someone from her past. Maybe she had loved someone and had her heart broken. Or these new uppity Royal family had made her break up with that person. She had to go back from where she came and look for that person, if she needed any kind of closure.

Just as she continued to lay there, the door to her room suddenly started to open slowly breaking her out of her reverie. Who could be coming here in the middle of the night? On alert, her fingers clenched. Dam* it! She needed something to defend herself. Hurriedly, her eyes spotted the small candle stand on her right. At least there was something good about this ancient decoration.

In a second, Eleanora grabbed the stick and lay back on the bed. Because the person entering had been cautious, they were too slow to realize her movements.

Eleanora curled her fingers around the cold metal, ready to defend herself. However, the person who entered her room was... Lily. Why was her maid coming to her room so early in the morning?

She watched as the girl continued to look around and walk towards her stealthily. As Lily continued her silent approach, Eleanora's mind raced to comprehend the maid's intentions.

As the girl walked around the bed, she suddenly felt a trickle of suspicion. Could it be that Lily was planning to check her hand? Her hand tightened its grip on the stick. She'd started to trust Lily a bit but now...

Slowly, she pretended to jerk awake. As she did, she let out a small scream, clutching the blanket to herself tightly, with her left hand not even more secure under the blanket. Lily jerked back at the sudden movement and screamed and stared at Eleanora.

Eleanora sat up in bed and frowned, "Lily! What are you doing here at this ungodly hour? You scared me to death!"

Lily, caught off guard, stammered an explanation, "Princess, I came to make sure you were comfortable. The air conditioning gets really cold and you kick aside the blankets in your sleep..."

"Lily, I appreciate your concern, but you should have just let me sleep," Eleanora said, a hint of irritation in her voice.

Lily, flustered by Eleanora's sudden awakening, stammered, "I... I didn't mean to startle you, Princess. I just wanted to ensure you were comfortable." Her eyes darted nervously around the room, avoiding direct eye contact with Eleanora.

Eleanora nodded and jerked her head in the door's direction, "Leave now. And Lily, next time, you will not enter my room if I am asleep. Am I clear?"

The girl bobbed her head quickly and left the room. Even as the door closed behind her, Eleanora found it difficult to relax. Carefully, she uncurled her fingers from around the stick and brought out her hand from under the blanket. It was paler than the rest of her body but held no disfigurement that what she had led others to believe.

Her eyes traced the fading tattoo around her left ring finger. "Mr Husband"

The dreams, the tattoo above her left breast and this one, were all a reminder that everything was not what it seemed.

She thought back to the time when she had first woken up in the hospital. Her uncle, aunt and grandmother had all been present but she had failed to recognize a single person. They'd told her that she had been in an accident but the only thing injured had been her hand. So why then had her memory been affected? Because of the trauma?

And then not once had her new family tried to help her think of the past, insisting that what was forgotten should remain that and that she should move forward. But something just did not sit right with her. To add to that, she remembered the nurse's terrified face when she had come to see her alone in the room.

"If you ever want to remember your past, don't let anyone see your left hand."

At the time, she had been confused about this. She'd continued to listen to everything they'd told her but when it had been time to cut the gauze, she'd done it herself. And been shocked to see the tattoo.

Everything had been a lie. She had a husband that her family never mentioned. From then on, she'd made it a point to not show this hand to anyone, claiming that it was too disfigured, and she did not wish to show it to anyone.

When she'd casually questioned them next time, wondering if she had a special friend or boyfriend, her aunt had claimed that she'd been too busy in her studies to have that.

Eleanora had hoped her memory would return and she would have all the answers soon, but her memory seemed to be showing no signs of recovering. There were always odd instances that she would come to, but other than that, everything continued to remain blank. And she just could not take it anymore. She needed to plan her escape quietly and return to the country where she had grown up and look for clues.

Chapter 204: A Gift For You

"Princess, Your fiancé has sent a gift for you!" Lily came into the dining room almost jumping on her feet. Seeing her exuberant stride, no one would have believed that she could sneak into her room in the middle of the night.

Eleanor looked up from eating her cereal and raised her eyebrows in amusement. Lily was more excited than she was. "What is it?"

"I don't know! It was the Prince's assistant who brought this. He said the prince wants to take you out for another date and would like to thank you for last night. This is his token of gratitude."

Eleanora looked at the small, elongated box in Lily's hand and almost dropped her spoon. The box in front of her was golden but when she looked up, she felt a sense of déjà vu. In that, the box had been dark... a bookmark. There was a bookmark inside the box.

Lily quickly placed the box in front of Eleanor and then continued to stand there looking at her eagerly, "Princess, please open it and see! I've never seen anyone receive a gift from a Prince. Please open it."

With a sense of detachment, Eleanora opened it and frowned as she looked at the diamond-studded necklace inside. The calendar man only knew how to spend money on flashy things.

Her non-existent excitement went unnoticed by the maid as she squealed, "Princess, this is so beautiful. You are so lucky to have Prince Augustus dote on you. I've heard that there are so many women out there ready to throw themselves at him and yet here he is, wooing his fiance. Any other man would not even bother since the two of you are as good as engaged. But he goes above and beyond, taking you out and sending you these incredible gifts..."

Eleanora picked up the diamonds and studied them carelessly agreeing with Lily, "You are right. I am indeed lucky to have the Prince trying to woo me with such originality. He knows how to spend his family's fortune."

Eleanora's fortune slipped over Lily's head as the girl agreed happily, "I knew it! I knew when you went out with him, you would definitely change your opinion and forgive him! See, tell me princess, you do like Prince Augustus, don't you? He is so dreamy..."

Ignoring her maid's talking, Eleanora snapped the box closed and passed it to the girl, "Take it back to the Prince and tell him that I appreciate his effort. It's truly a one-of-a-kind piece, just like the countless others I'm sure he's given to his admirers."

Lily, still oblivious to the underlying sarcasm, beamed with excitement. "Of course, Princess! I'll let him know how much you love it. But why must we return it?"

"Because I don't want it, Lily. Where would I wear it? I don't go out anywhere. Do you think it will suit me if I wear it for breakfast every morning. And I dare not keep it in this house. I won't be able to sleep fearing that I will be robbed blind. I quite like being the pauper princess you know."

"Oh! You want him to keep it safe for you." Lily nodded in understanding and then quickly asked, "Princess, what about the next date? He says he wants to take you away for the day. He is taking you to the main city for shopping and looking around! You've been complaining for so many months about how you are not allowed to leave. Did you tell Prince Augustus that? He is so thoughtful. You complained and he listened and immediately found a way to solve your problem."

Eleanor shook her head. Lily was more suitable to write a romance novel. She could take a single sentence and convert it into an entire love story with all the romance! Sigh. That Calendar would have listened to her if he'd taken a moment to stop talking about himself and given her a chance to speak. By the end of the night, she'd been sure her ears would fall off and she was certain of one thing! She did not like men who talked too much! She preferred the silent type!

She opened her mouth to refuse categorically, sure that Lily would put some kind of a spin on it, imagining her playing hard to get. But she was really doing this to preserve her sanity. However, at the end moment, the important words filtered through her head. He was going to take her to the city?

Her eyes glittered. That might give her a chance to escape. If she somehow found a way to give these people a miss and left this country, she might be able to find things about her past. But she would have to be careful. And then another though occurred to her. If she was allowed to explore the city with Augustus, then she might be allowed to leave the country too in the future.

And that would make it even easier to slip away. All she needed to do was pretend to be happy with Prince Augustus. She had no idea why she felt so cautious and paranoid about things but she did. And whether it had anything to do with her past or not, she would find out.

"Tell him he can take me out tomorrow. However, he must not be too flashy."

Lily squealed with delight and jumped with a clap, "Ohh! This is so nice. Princess, please remember your loyal maid when you get married to Prince Augustus! You can even take me as part of your dowry. I am going to witness the royal romance of the century! I am so excited. I'll go right away and do it."

Once outside, Lily quickly passed the message and the things to the assistant who had arrived. And then using this chance she slipped out into the garden and made a phone call, "The princess seems receptive to Prince Augustus. She liked his gift and even readily agreed to go out on a date with him, Your Highness."

Chapter 205: Memories

Lucien: We've found a clue. Conference room

With that cryptic message, Lucien quickly grabbed his laptop and raced up the stairs towards the conference room. Finally, after months of searching for Nora, he'd finally received a substantial lead.

He'd barely reached the door when Ian and Seb reached right behind him. Shoving him aside, Ian entered the door with Seb behind him leaving him standing at the door.

"You guys are older than me. You need to stop being so petty. Do you think the room is going to give you the info? I have it. So what was the point in coming in first."

Ian shrugged his shoulders insolently while Seb warned, "Someone has learnt to talk back, hmm? Don't forget you are the youngest..."

Lucien rolled his eyes and walked in with a shrug. Just then Erasmi walked in followed by Gabe.

Looking at their brother who resembled a zombie, Ian tsked in sympathy and hugged the man, "She's not doing well?"

Gabe sighed, his shoulders slumped in defeat, and clapped Ian back, "Hmm. Doesn't have much time."

"Then why are you here? You need to be with her." Seb clucked in sympathy.

"Actually, I was just about to leave to return when I saw Lucy's message," Gabe answered slowly.

Soon, the boys took the place and Lucien immediately passed on the details, "Two people have suddenly been invited for a personal chat with a Royal aide from Estania. The meetings are all secretive and have been disguised as if they won a sudden vacation for a few days."

"So. How can you be sure this has something to do with Nora?"

The first person to have won this so-called grand award is Antonio, Nora's ex-fiance. And the second person is this woman."

As Lucien showed the picture of the second person, the four brothers leaned forward carefully before casting a doubtful look. "Her? Are you sure? She would be a very distant connection to Nora."

"I am sure."

"This could also be a coincidence." Seb pointed out.

"It could have been if it was only one. But the vacation they have won? It is to Veridia."

"Veridia? This is Estania's close neighbour and ally, isn't it?" Erasmi asked, his eyes narrowed in thinking.

Gabe narrowed his eyes and asked slowly, "Lucy? Can we trust this woman?"

"I don't know Gabe. But for now, I've already arranged for people to tail the two of them."

Gabe nodded and stood up, "Good. You've grown up. At least we now know that we've been on the right track. Hopefully finding Nora will bring back Demon too. Seb, have you been able to find a way to get into Estania?"

Seb shook his head, "No. They seem to be intent on avoiding our company. In fact, the moment we showed interest, they seem to have changed their policy of getting foreign investment and closed their doors to everyone outside. So, all our attempts at collaboration have been failing."

"There might be a way that one of us can get into Estania," Gabe murmured slowly. "But..."

Gabe stared intently at Lucien while the other cluelessly stared back.

Erasmi, Seb and Ian looked between the two with a frown before fixing their gaze on their youngest brother.

Lucien met their gazes and frowned, "Why are all of you staring at me like this?"

Lucien looked at Seb expectantly who shrugged his shoulders and pointed to Gabe, "It's because he is staring at you."

The other nodded at that as well so Lucien had no choice but to turn to Gabe, "What?"

Gabe sighed and took out his phone, scrolling through the pictures, "This."

As Gabe's phone was placed in the middle of the table, all four of the others leaned forward in their seats, eager to see.

Erasmi frowned as he tried to see the relevance of the picture and so did Ian, unaware what it was they were looking for. Similarly, just as Seb was about to give up and ask Gabe, his eyes noticed the figure in the middle and he gasped, "Holy cakes! What is this?"

Gabe met his brother's gaze while Lucien tried to think of a way to escape the conference room. How did they find this? He'd never revealed this thing...

Before he could do anything, Gabe spoke up, "It's from about two years ago."

Seb turned to Lucien and shook his head, "You dog! What is this? Do you have some kind of a split personality? I mean you are the most boring man ever, all staid and upstanding but why do you look like a bad boy here? And when did you get your lip pierced?" Seb focused on Lucien's lower lip trying to see if his brother had a piercing that he had not noticed.

At this time, Erasmi and Ian finally spotted what the other two had been looking at.

Instead of looking at Lucien, Ian turned to Gabe, "Dam*! You had such an explosive material and you kept it from us? How could you? I mean this is..."

Lucien shook his head and tried to speak, "Gabe, this is an old picture like you said. So, how is this relevant here?"

Gabe shook his head and glared at his brother, "Do you have eyes? Do you not see the woman in the picture next to you who is almost sitting in your lap? Who is she?"

Lucien gave a blank look, trying to think back, "I don't know. We were just having a good time, all of us. I was probably too drunk..."

Gabe shook his head and spoke, "Lucy? I don't know what to do with you. Let me remind you. This girl is actually very arrogant and cold. That night, some of the other women wanted to bully her and planned to throw her into the pool and you saved her from becoming a laughingstock. It is why she is so close to you in here. She was with you all evening."

As Gabe said this, the evening returned to Lucien slowly. He had indeed saved her but he had not paid much attention to her. At the time, he'd been worrying about securing his position here in the company while Demon had made his life a living hell, and that was the only party he had gone to let his hair down...

Seeing that his brother was still clueless, Gabe spoke, "That girl is Princess Evangeline of the Royal Family Of Estania and if our investigations our correct, she is ...Nora's cousin."

Chapter 206: Lucien's Dark Past

Lucien sighed typed furiously on his phone, "It is simply unethical! I know we need to find about Nora but doing something like this is wrong! I cannot make her fall in love with me and then betray her. I am not a j*rk!"

Seb: "Who said you can make her fall in love with you? Lucy, did you drink early in the morning? You are no cupid who can make her fall for you with an arrow."

Ian: "Uh huh. Seb, according to Lucy's recently discovered sordid past, he may be a cupid but his arrow is of another L word not the love word."

Seb: HAHAHAHAHAHAH.. Nah! I am pretty sure Lucy has been firing the love arrows, only for them to lose their way somewhere due to his lousy aim."

Ian: "How do you know his aim is lousy?"

Seb: "I used to take him to the bathroom when we were young..."

Ian: "Ewwww. Thats TMI, Seb!"

Lucien shook his head at this. His brothers really had no boundaries or limits. Just as he was about to put away his phone, Ian continued.

Ian: "On a serious note, she is the only one who can facilitate your entry into Estania, Lucy. You know we are desperate. At least just get close enough to get confirmation about Nora. That is it. We don't want to hurt any innocent people in this."

Erasmi: "You don't have to make her fall in love, Lucy. And yet, using her is indeed unethical, but you know we have already exhausted all options."

Lucien sighed and switched off his phone as his flight was announced. When he'd shared the information about the secret meeting with the Estanian Royal Aide, he had not expected that he would find himself on an airplane to 'coincidentally' meet Princess Evangeline. Even the thought of going close to her to extract information made him feel like scum.

But he also knew the others were right. They'd had to stop looking for Demetri for fear of letting the enemy know that he too had been harmed and was missing.

He could not help but think back to the note they had received all those months ago, "Your brother is safe but injured. If you want to keep him safe and not alert his enemies, then call off the search."

Of course, they'd toned down the search for Demetri after this, hoping that he would be able to contact them. But that had not yet happened. It had been a painstaking effort for them to even find the connection between Nora and Estania and about the return of their princess Eleanora.

They'd already tried all means to establish some form of communication to find Nora but all their efforts had been rebutted.

He did not hold much hope for this princess to even remember him, let alone recognize him. How was he then supposed to get really close to her. He rubbed his head and thought back to the time when the entire incident had happened.

He'd been desperate to move out of his brother's shadows. Every where he went there had been comparisons and so he'd decided to go but not as Lucien Frost. Only his roommate from college who had organized the party had been aware of his identity.

However, he'd hated the party even more. He'd dressed up differently for it so as not to be recognized. He just had not expected that his 'bad boy' dressing would make girls throw themselves at him so much that he would have to go and hide in the shadows.

That was when he had heard the whispers. "Evana", that is what they had called her. Discussing how she looked down her nose on everyone and refused to drink.

He'd shaken his head at that. So what if someone did not want to drink and remained silent, hoping those people would just escape. However, they had not expected that those girls would actually plan to push her into the pool to humiliate her. By the time, he'd paid attention and realized what they'd been discussing, those girls had already moved away so he had no idea who the perpetrator was and who the victim.

And that is how he had found himself strategically positioned beside the pool, ready to jump in if needed.

Unexpectedly, those women had chosen a spot close to him to surround her, as they spoke, " Do you think you are all that just because you hold a title?"

"You are nothing without your father's money and your family name, Evana."

He'd not seen the girl's expression but only had an impression of her back as she had continued to stand there straight, letting the other girls talk trash.

He watched as they'd closed in on her but she had not been intimidated at all and had simply held her place. But then those girls had pushed her, two from both sides and she'd lost her balance.

Lucien knew that he would not have reacted the way he had if the girl had been scared but her strength had made him feel protective and he'd pulled her into his arms.

Dam* it! He'd forgotten all about that! That kiss had been... Because of the lip ring that he had been wearing that night, he'd been more sensitive...Of course, the moment she had tentatively kissed him back, he'd pulled away, taking her away from there. They'd been together the whole evening.

And they would have spent the night together if her security had not come in and taken her away. Sigh! People from the past should stay in the past. Discarding his jacket in the flight, he pulled out the bomber jacket and leather pants.

Soon, he grabbed the hair dryer messing up his hair. He looked at the lip ring in front of him but soon decided against it. That piercing was gone and he wasn't going to get that again!

And that was how Lucy boarded the flight as a straightlaced accountant but alighted as a cold and dangerous biker...

Chapter 207: Kitten

Isidora cradled the small dog in her arms, casting furtive glances around to ensure no prying eyes caught sight of her. Today, she had a crucial mission – a visit to her sister was imperative for her own sanity! For one thing, she was bored out of her mind from sitting at home and had nothing to do. Her teachers taught her things that she already knew, her mama kept sending teachers to teach her dance and etiquettes.

The only thing that she had mildly found to pass her time had been peppering questions to Gaia about the plants he was tending in the main garden or playing with Kitten. But now she needed to bring Kitten to bribe her sister into taking her out with her. The only problem was that she had no idea if she liked dogs or not.

Isidora looked at the cute little pup in her arms and then shook her head. How can someone not like Kitten? Now she just needed to take this bundle of cuteness to Eleanora before anyone discovered that she'd skipped the class again.

She did not understand why everyone in the palace insisted on hiding things from her.

First, they kept Eleanora hidden, and now that she was seeing Prince Augustus, they did not want her to know that as well. Isidora pouted. Well, they might want to keep the business away from this princess,

but they would not been able to keep the princess away from business. She was already an expert at gathering information.

Finally, deciding that the coast was clear, Isidora made a run for the small mansion, straight like an arrow as she burst through the doors calling out to her sister, "Noraaaaaaaaaa."

Unfortunately for Isidora, before Eleanora could even look up from her breakfast, Lily spotted the little girl and squeaked, "Princess Isidora, it is unbecoming of a princess to scream like a common fishwife."

Before Isidora could say anything, she heard Eleanora's sing-song voice calling to her loudly, 'Yes, Doraaaaaaaaaa."

The maid cast a scandalized look at the princess while Dora threw her a smug glance and raced towards her sister, quickly climbing into her lap, eager to show off. "Nora! See my new friend. I specially brought her here to meet you. This is Kitten."

Eleanora's eyes twinkled as she looked at the cute pup and she gently patted his head, "I think I need to get my eyes tested! I could swear that this cute little thing is a puppy but you are calling it a kitten..."

Dora giggled and pushed the little pup to Nora who caught it carefully as the little thing continued to sniff her and said, "I told Gaia the same thing! But he insists that the pup is like a kitten. So he has named her that."

"Who is this Gaia? He has quite a sense of humor!"

"He is the Head Gardener in the Royal Offices. Kitten belongs to him. He inherited the position from the old gardener who retired a few weeks ago. Also, he has totally changed the looks of Grandma's garden! Earlier it was only boring rose shrubs but now there are so many new and pretty flowers. He is working on Evangeline's garden next. I told Gaia that he should work here first. Evana does not care for these things but you like plants. He said that if you want him, you can always summon him."

Eleanora laughed at that and quickly picked up a piece of tart and stuffed it into the little girl's mouth, "You sound like an advertisement for this gardener! Did he bribe you?"

"What bribe? He is just really good." As Isidora chewed on the biscuit, she said, " See, he loves his Kitten but he even let me bring her here because I told him that I wanted her to play with you. See, he trusted me when no one else does."

As she complained, the dog had already jumped off their arms and was now exploring the new surroundings curiously, while wagging his tail in continuous excitement.

Eleanora looked at the cute pup as she spoke the name Kitten slowly. The dog was really cute. Finally, the dog found a small spot with the sunlight shining in and slumped down, stretching its tiny legs and closing its eyes. The dog had definitely made itself comfortable and looked as if it would not move. Eleanora shook her head, 'The gardener might be right in giving this dog a cat name...'

While Eleanora continued to watch the cute dog, Isidora had not forgotten her mission. Finishing the food that had been placed in front of her, she cast an accusing gaze Eleanora's way, " You are going out."

Eleanora blinked and turned her attention away from the dog to her little sister who was staring at her as if she had broken her heart.

Frowning, she nodded her head," Umm, Prince Augustus is taking me to explore the city today."

"Are you really going to marry him? Is it true that he is your fiance? I don't like him, you know."

Eleanora glanced at Dora in surprise. The little girl was always well-informed...

"Why do you not like him?"

Dora made a face and said," I heard him talking to my friend once. Do you know what he said,' that children are meant to be seen not to be heard so we should always keep out mouths shut when in public.' He is the one who needs to keep his mouth shut but he cannot because he likes the sound of his own voice."

Eleanora laughed at Dora's reason for disliking the princess as well as her astuteness in pointing out the man's faults so easily. She was quite perceptive for a little girl.

While Eleanora laughed, Isidora quickly added, "I don't really like him. But if you're going out with him, I want to come too. And Kitten wants to explore the city! I can endure his presence for your sake! And I promise that our presence will save you from his voice."

Eleanora laughed and was almost tempted to take Isidora up on the offer. However, she remembered her motive to look for ways to escape Estania and she could not take Isidora with her when she went scouring for information. Unfortunately for her, Isidora was more determined than her.

Chapter 208: Demon Frost

With glittering eyes he watched as his wife appeared on the screen in front of him, smiling as she looked down into the camera. Of course he knew that she was not looking into the camera but rather at the dog that Dora had taken to her, however, he could not help himself.

With a quick movement, he paused the video, his thirsty eyes taking in her face. Today was the first time he was seeing her since that fateful night. Seeing her like this, her smile even more restrained than it used to be made his heart ache. She'd never been too plump to begin with but now she seemed to have lost more weight. What kind of karma had she accumulated in the past that all her blood relatives seemed to be against her.

His back ached as he hunched over the screen, unable to take his eyes off her vulnerable face. As he stared at the frozen image on the screen, he couldn't help but feel a pang of helplessness. He needed to work on helping her get back her memory or else... the plans that the Queen had, would put her in even more danger.

Switching back to the live screen, Demetri closed his eyes and heard the words carefully. So the rumors about Prince Augustus were indeed true. He smirked when Dora insisted that she would go with them and Nora tried to refuse...

Did his little kitten want to spend time with that Prince? With a smirk on his face, he moved back in his seat and listened to the little girl criticize the Prince freely while Nora agreed. At least she had not lost her judgement along with her memories. And for now, he did not need to worry about Nora going out with the preening man. Dora would not let go so easily.

He'd finally had confirmation that his Kitten was indeed here and seemed to have lost her memories. Now the first thing he needed to do was establish contact with Nora and probe her memories. What had exactly happened that her memories had vanished?

As far as he knew, she had received no injury from those people who had brought her here. But between the time she had been separated from him to coming here, something had transpired to make her like this.

Prince Augustus made a face as he watched his date lift up the little sleeping princess from the car and carefully carry her into the room. He'd planned a beautiful day of picnic and shopping to woo her, hoping to end the day with Nora in his bed.

But it had been ruined by that little girl and her messy dog. The Queen insisted that he needed to marry Eleanora at the soonest but then she sent those two demons to torture him! All day long, he'd felt like he'd ended up doing babysitting instead of a date.

And that dog! Even the dog seemed to have some sort of princess complex, insisting that she be carried all the time. Each time he succeeded in having that kid distracted and tried to slip closer to Eleanora, the dog would butt in. If they had been back home, he would have had the little pup beheaded about a hundred times by now.

The dog seemed to sense his emotions and growled at him. Narrowing his eyes in anger, he lifted his leg to kick the thing when suddenly the dog ran away from him. He cursed under his breath but the next moment he almost fell back as a person walked out of the shadows.

Since it was already dark, Augustus was unable to see who had emerged from the shadows. The figure stepped into the dim light, revealing a tall, imposing and somewhat malevolent silhouette. A low chuckle echoed through the air, sending shivers down Augustus's spine.

"Tsk tsk, Prince Augustus. What would people say if they knew that their beloved prince was about to take out his anger on a little puppy," the mysterious figure sneered.

Augustus squinted, trying to make out the details of the person before him.

"And who might you be?" Augustus demanded; his irritation evident in his voice.

The man chuckled again, the sound carrying an air of arrogance. "No need for formalities. I am called Demon."

Augustus frowned, trying to remember where he had heard this name. However, what he did not show was that the man's aura had successfully intimidated him.

Augustus stepped back, even as he tried to threaten bravely, "A demon? Do you think that such a name will be able to save you? Do you know where you are trespassing? I am going to call the security right away..."

"Who are you talking to?", Eleanora's sudden voice from behind him made Augustus jump up in fear as he whirled around.

With his hands clenched, Augustus stared at Eleanora and was terrified. She'd just come out of the mansion and the light shining from behind her made her look like a ghost. His heart palpitating, he wondered if he had entered some kind of an alternate reality and stepped backwards. "I was talking to that man. The one beside that dog."

Nora looked to where the prince had pointed and frowned, "What man?"

"Are you short-sighted? This man..." He trailed off in horror as he realized that while the dog was still there but the man wasn't. Muttering curses under his breath, he quickly jumped into his car and ordered the driver to get the hell away.

Eleanor shook her head at the weird prince's behaviour and called out, "Come, Kitten. Lets go in. You've had an exciting day as well."

The dog quickly walked towards her, as if well used to her commands. She had barely taken a few steps when a voice called out, "Kitten..."

Eleanor instinctively answered with a, " Hmm?" before freezing in her place. A shiver raced down her spine as she spun around looking for the person behind the voice, her heart beating fast.

Chapter 209: Puzzled

Eleanor stood there for a moment, trying to shake off the strange feeling that had enveloped her. The voice had stirred something deep within her, a familiarity that danced at the edge of her consciousness. She glanced around, but could not see anyone...

It was then that she noticed a man standing near the edge of the gates, shrouded in darkness. She squinted into the darkness, trying to make out his features. As curiosity overpowered her, Eleanor took a tentative step forward, while the man remained still while shadows clung to him making it impossible for her to see his face.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?", she asked tentatively, trying to figure out the identity of this unknown man

"I apologize if I startled you, Princess. I came here for my Kitten."

"Your kitten?" she asked in confusion, her mind a jumble since it seemed to be entranced by his voice.

Was he calling her a kitten? And why did that name sound so familiar coming from him.

The man called out again, and this time the dog at her feet raced towards the man. She watched as he offered her a treat while the dog wagged her tail and then with a bow towards her, walked out of there.

Only after he was gone, did Eleanora move. The man must have been the gardener that Dora had been Dora talking about. And he had not been calling her a kitten but summoning his dog. Shaking her head at her own stupidity, Eleanora turned to go inside. Her frustration over not being able to find an escape route had probably skewed her imagination.

She could not help but look over her shoulder as she realized that she had not even thanked the man for letting them take his dog out today. That little thing had saved her from the Calendar man who had hands like an octopus always trying to cop a feel!

If it had not been for Kitten, she would probably ended up beating the prince to a pulp. Maybe she should go now and express his gratitude. She might even be able to tell him to give her the dog permanently so that she would have an ever-present chaperone.

Turning on her heel, she walked in the direction that the man had gone in but soon, she'd lost him as he had disappeared into the shadows. She had no idea where to find him.

She bit her lip in disappointment and trudged back to the house, tired from the day. Tomorrow, she would start anew, looking for ways to escape this high-end prison. And she would ask Dora, to take her to the gardener man as well.

Demetri watched as Nora walked back into the house, his hands clenched on his sides. It had taken all his strength to stop himself from marching forward and pulling her into his arms. The way she had instinctively answered to his call, had almost undone him.

Once she was gone, he slowly walked back towards the small room that was now his house. Soon, they would be together.

Just as he reached his own house, another person blocked his way, "Where did you go?"

Demetri stopped and stared at the person, seeing no reason to answer the question.

"Dam* it! Demetri Frost we had a deal! I would bring you in here, so that you can keep an eye to take Nora from here at the right moment. Are you planning to betray me? I am warning you if Eleanora leaves here before..."

"Her name is Nora," Demetri cut off the person who was talking and then proceeded to ignore the man and walked into his house.

The man followed Demetri inside with a scowl on his face, "Nora or Eleanora, does not make a difference. I am warning you Demetri, if you..."

"Don't try to threaten me. The only reason I am even co-operating with you and have not taken my wife away is because you saved my life. You and I both know that taking her out from here would be a child's play to me."

The man stared at Demetri who poured himself a glass of water and scowled. He knew of course. After all, when Demetri had recovered and discovered where Nora was, the man had single-handedly neutralized their guards and he would have taken Nora away successfully if he had not intervened and told him about her memory loss.

"Then are you promising that you won't take her away and will not approach her?"

"No." Demetri casually placed the glass of water on the side, staring back at the man who was trying to assert control over him.

The man scowled, unimpressed by Demetri's nonchalant demeanor. "You're playing a dangerous game, Demon."

"Agreements change. I won't let anyone dictate what I can and cannot do when it comes to Nora."

The tension in the room crackled as the two men faced off, each unwilling to yield. The man took a step forward, his voice a low growl. "You may think you're in control, but it would take me only a moment to make you disappear from this place and unable to ever step a foot here again."

Demetri's gaze held the man's unflinchingly as he answered, "I am not a pawn in your game that you can use and discard. I have only one agenda- Nora. On the other hand, your agenda is meaningless unless I continue to cooperate..."

The man stared at Demetri while Demetri stared back before finally giving up, "You really are a formidable man. Look, all I ask is that you be patient. This time is crucial."

"I have been patient, but my patience has its limits. I will not interfere with whatever your plan as long as it does not threaten my Nora. In return, you will not try to stop me from being with her."

"And how are you going to be close to her? She is a princess while you are a mere gardener..."

"That's my problem, isn't it? Just stay out of my way and I'll stay out of yours."

The man cast one last look at Demetri, before leaving, but as he left, he could not shake the feeling that Demetro Frost might spell more trouble than he had anticipated...

Chapter 210: Bad Mood

Nora woke up with a cloud of irritation hanging over her head, as she banged the doors of the wardrobe. If someone could read auras, they would only be able to see her surrounded by blackness. The disconcerting images still flashed vividly in her mind—the mysterious man, the way he seemed to loom over her as he possessively whispered words of possession in her ears.

Dam* it! She was sick and tired of the dreams and the way they made her feel. Pulling out a random dress, she walked out and dressed haphazardly. Today, she needed to throw a tantrum so that she would be able to go out and explore the city. But even as she thought of escaping repeatedly, she felt a blank. Because she had no idea where she would go.

She had some money since she was generously given an allowance to run her 'household' every month. But what she needed to do to navigate in the normal world were her memories. As she stood in front of the mirror and hesitated, a voice echoed in her mind, "You can do it, kitten."

She stilled. The gardener! The voice that had been torturing her dreams was too much like the gardener who had come yesterday.

That realization made her frown. No. She was pretty sure that she had never met that person in the past. Maybe it was because he was the last person she had met before she fell asleep so she was confusing his voice with the one in her dreams...

Since she had no idea what she would do once she was out in the city, she decided that she would work on solving this mystery for now and the immediate problem of the octopus-like Calendar man.

Luckily for her, the solution to both her problems was one person at this moment. The gardener. According to Dora, she had to go to the Queen's gardens and there find the path that led to the trellis and the maze.

As she walked into the gardens, she looked around in amazement at the beautiful lush green bushes and the colourful flowers. Following Dora's instructions, Nora navigated the twisting paths and realized that while everything was beautiful, it also seemed to have some sort of a calming effect.

However, that effect was soon broken by something or rather someone, whom she spotted in the distance. Somehow, she knew that the person she had been looking for was this one. She stopped a little distance away, captivated by the scene.

He was engrossed in his work, the rhythmic sound of digging filling the air. The sunlight played on his shirtless back, revealing a physique that held an unexpected allure. She stood rooted to the ground as she watched his muscles move rhythmically. The play of muscles beneath his skin, the sheen of sweat glistening in the sunlight—she couldn't help but marvel at the unexpected beauty of the scene.

Her eyes traced the perfect back. Even marred with two rather ugly scars, it was perfection incarnate. In fact those seemed to add to the beauty of him. She felt the need to trace the scars, wondering what it was that had caused them.

It was only as she almost lifted her hand to do what her mind wanted her to that her senses returned! Gosh! What was wrong with her? She'd almost gone forward and molested a strange man! A man she had not even seen the face of!

Shaking her head at her own foolishness, she told herself that the man was probably ugly from the front so she should not worry. As her thoughts got the better of her, she snorted, alerting the man to her presence.

His head whipped around and as their eyes met, Nora's breath caught in her throat. The shock on her face deepened as she gazed at him, captivated by the intensity in his eyes. He seemed to have known where to find her as their eyes met the moment he turned. Unable to look away, she stared into his eyes, while the world seemed to fade away.

Eleanora felt a strange pull, as if some unspoken understanding passed between them. She couldn't shake the feeling that she knew this man deeply. Even as her mind struggled to cope with this, she felt the world spin around her, slowly turning black.

Before she could fall to the ground, a pair of strong arms caught her, quickly picking her up. Slowly, Demetri gathered her in his arms and carefully laid her down on a bench under the shade, wiping the sweat off her face.

Shaking his head, he dipped the napkin in a bucket of water and gently wiped her face as he murmured, "You sure know how to dent a man's ego, kitten. The first time we met, you argued with me and then fainted. And today, you've fainted again. If I didn't know better, I would think that something was wrong with me. You haven't been sleeping well again, have you? Don't worry, I'm here now for you."

Slowly, Nora stirred, her consciousness returning. As she opened her eyes, she was met with the man's dark gaze fixed on her. She blinked in confusion at the man before she felt the embarrassment colour her face! Thank God, she hadn't had a nosebleed due to the man's beauty! At least she could blame the fainting spell on the summer heat.

The man stepped back as he looked at her curiously, "Princess? Are you alright?"

Eleanora sat up slowly and nodded her head. She was alright other than the embarrassment...

"Do you need something?"

Eleanora stared into the man's deep eyes and blurted out, "Yes. I need you."

The man raised an eyebrow at that and her she flushed and tried to explain herself, "I don't mean I need you. That came out wrong. I mean I need to talk to you. I came here for you. That sounds wrong too. I meant..."

The man laughed at her confusion and Eleanora almost forgot what she wanted to say... again.