

Benefits 311

Chapter 311: The Maid Of Honour

'A construction shop had taken up residence in her head' was the first thought that came to her mind when she finally started to wake up. Opening her eyes, she squinted against the harsh sunlight and tried to move, only to realise that she could not move.

Panic set in and her eyes snapped open. Turning her head away from the sunlight, Isabella looked down at her body and widened her eyes. She was tied up in a snug blanket, wrapped tighter than a caterpillar in a cocoon.

Where was she and why was she wrapped up like this? Isabella attempted to piece together the events of the previous night, even as her head threatened to burst and tried to reassure herself that she had been with Nora so she must be safe. Maybe she was in Nora's house... though she remembered insisting that she could go back and find her way herself. Had she really been abandoned by her best girl?

Summoning her courage, she tried to wriggle free of the blanket and called out, " Hello? Is anyone around? The room however remained silent, worrying her even more."

Just as she was about to scream her lungs out, a familiar face walked into her room with a brisk knock.

"Ahh. Sleeping beauty is finally awake."

Her eyes widened as a familiar face walked in. Ian Frost.

"Where am I? Is this Nora's house?"

Ian walked in and casually walked in, slowly pulling at the edge of the tight blanket, watching as she wriggled to get out. Since she was now sober, he did not have to restrain himself.

Soon, the blanket slipped down and he momentarily appreciated her breasts jiggle as she tried to get her hands out.

"What the heck? Why did you tie me up?"

"What tie you up? I tucked your drunk a** safely in a blanket."

"You wrapped me up like a burrito." Isabella snapped back before finally sitting up and wincing as the headache that she had momentarily forgotten appeared with even more intensity.

"Ah, a friendly headache? Serves you right Miss Ruffalo for drinking so much yesterday. There... I've kept the hangover medicine on the bed."

Isabella shot him a gratified look before quickly swallowing the medicine with a glass of water, while giving Ian a better view of her skirt-clad butt*.

Ian cleared his throat, "Uhh, you can come out when you are ready to move. Anything you might need is in the I have breakfast ready."

Isabella turned her head to look at Ian and nodded, while the man swiftly closed the door behind him. Finally, when she was alone again, she sat back and looked around. So, she was in Ian Frost's home. The Frost Playboy. Interesting. This must be the guest bedroom. It was quite nice...

As she stepped out of the room, she could not help but grimace at the clothing that she had been forced to wear. The man even had disposable underwear for his night guests. Looking around, she followed her nose to the kitchen which was around the corner and watched the man flipping bacon while the table had been set with mouthwatering food.

Ahh! A Pro. A man who knew how to make a hearty breakfast after a night of working out. With a grimace, she walked in and complained immediately, "I'm very disappointed you know."

Ian looked up at her and felt his breath catch. The girl looked like a fresh little flower ready to be plucked in the dress that he had left her.

"Disappointed? Why? Did you need something?" Ian asked her, carefully turning his gaze back to the bacon and not the pluckable flower.

"Well, I spend the night in the most famous playboy's house and instead of waking up without clothes, I wake up with more clothes."

Ian paused and whipped his head around to see her pop a piece of toast in her mouth as she winked at him.

Carefully, Ian plated the bacon and carried it to the table while Isabella grinned and mentally patted herself. She had successfully flirted and made the famous playboy shy. What she had not expected was that she'd celebrated her victory too soon.

The man casually came to her side and placed the plate of crispy fried bacon on the table before casually placing his hand on her waist, "Well, beautiful Bella, I would have definitely loved to get you out of those clothes, but you were too drunk. However, it's not too late now and you are also sober... the day is young..."

Isabella tried to step back away from the man as she stared at him with wide eyes but she stumbled into the chair, putting her at more disadvantage as she stared up at him. She watched as his mouth kicked up and he leaned even closer and whispered, "You're too inexperienced in this game, beauty."

His proximity and the low whisper in her ear sent a shiver down her spine. With wide eyes, she managed a nervous smile but quickly averted her gaze toward the enticing spread of breakfast.

Quickly she started to eat as he stepped back and sat opposite her with a smile. Occasionally, she stole glances at him only to find him staring at her each time. Nervous, her appetite almost disappeared and she slowly only pushed the food around in her plate."

"If the food is not to your liking, I can arrange something that you would like better. The bedroom is not far..."

Shaking her head, she quickly mumbled something about the food tasting good before stuffing it into her mouth.

"Well, thank you for the breakfast. It was delicious. And thank you for... last night. I'll get out of your hair and grab a cab home."

Ian playfully smirked at her as he leaned back, his gaze fixed on her, "Who said you can leave? You are in my house, beauty. You enter with your choice but you leave with mine."

Isabella stared at the man with eyes so wide, they threatened to fall out of her head, causing Ian to laugh as he stood up, "Relax. I'll drop you home. You won't find a cab here."

"It's okay. I can manage." she squeaked out but the man was already standing and grabbing the car keys.

Chapter 312: Poor Kid

Erasmí drove through the quiet streets as the sun came up. Fatigue etched across his face as his eyes seemed to be getting heavy with each passing moment. As he looked up at the name of the small town that he had just entered and stopped outside a small rustic cafe, he could not help but frown. So close. He was now so close.

Furtively, he glanced at the many pictures that lay face down on the passenger seat. His hand edged towards the pictures before he forcefully shook his head. Now was not the time. He was already quite late. He needed to grab a cup of coffee and drive to the nearest hotel before he would consider his next step.

Surprisingly, as he entered the cafe, it turned out to be different from the quiet outside with people bustling about. It was not overcrowded but it wasn't too empty either. His entrance earned him quick looks from the locals while his travel-weary appearance made them discard the reason for his presence, assuming he was a passing traveller.

Tiredly, he found a table in a secluded corner and made his way there, ordering black coffee to chase away his tiredness.

As he waited for the coffee, he leaned back his head tiredly, thinking of the daunting task that lay ahead of him. His determination had brought him here to this place while every fibre of his being urged him to run away like a coward.

"Here is your coffee, young man." Erasmi looked up at the older waitress who had just placed the coffee on his table and murmured a thank you before turning his attention to the coffee. Surprisingly, the older woman did not move away after placing the coffee and continued to stand there, staring at him.

Erasmi tried to avoid the gaze, hoping the woman would get the hint and go away but instead the woman ignored the cues he was sending out and asked directly, "Are you from around here? Have you come here earlier?"

"No." Erasmi answered shortly and rudely, hoping that at least this would discourage the woman into leaving but instead the waitress crossed her arms in front of her and stared at him even more intently, "But your face looks familiar and I have never forgotten a face. Maybe you visited here as a kid?"

Erasmi stilled before giving a quick shake his head, "I've never been here and won't be here for long. Now, I'd like to drink my coffee in peace."

The woman finally took the hint and muttered, "Geez. Some people can be really grumpy without their dose of caffeine." and walked away.

Erasmi glared at the woman's receding back for a moment, before turning to his coffee. The first sip was refreshing and he quickly appreciated the unexpectedly perfect coffee.

Finally feeling a bit more refreshed, his eyes scanned the room, looking around curiously. He would need to ask someone for a local place to stay for a few days. If he'd been using his head instead of the tiredness, he could have asked the chatty waitress but if he tried to initiate a conversation now, she would be proven right about his grumpiness.

He tried to get her attention a few times, pretending to want to order food but was ignored steadily making him grimace. Uhh. He'd not gotten off to a good start in this place.

Just as he was about to bury his pride and go and ask, he heard someone talking behind him, which caught his attention.

"They threatened to expel Caius?, 1, a woman asked, glee in her voice.

"You should have seen that bi*ch's face yesterday when the principal outright told her that if the boy got into any more mischief, they might even send him to the juvenile prison," another man continued to tell, a bit of gloating in his voice.

Quietly, Erasmi sipped his almost empty cup, pretending to not pay attention even as he strained to hear what these people had to say.

As expected the woman asked excitedly, "You should have made a video. That woman thinks she is above the rest of us. This will show her. In fact, make sure that he does go to the juvenile prison. You are the only one who can instigate that kid. I'd like to see that bi*ch running around from pillar to post, trying to save that boy."

Suddenly, a loud squeal was heard and Erasmi whipped around to see that the woman there was now drenched in water with the waitress standing there with a jug of water in her hand.

"How dare you sit here in my cafe and say something so evil! You are a mother too. How can you wish for something so painful on another mother. That poor child is a good boy. But he has been suffering so much the last few months! And instead of showing him sympathy, you are planning to make his life even more difficult. Get out of my cafe right now!"

"How dare you!" The malicious woman screamed, picked up the decorative piece from the table and raised her hand to hit the older woman.

But before she could make her move, Erasmi swiftly intervened. With a calm yet firm demeanour, he intercepted the enraged woman, disarming her before she could harm the woman. The piece clattered to the floor, its fragments spread on the ground.

As the woman turned to glare at him, his authoritative voice cut through the air, "Enough. Step back, miss or else you will regret it."

The drenched woman sent a scathing glance at everyone before marching out, promising to exact her revenge while the man with her also quickly slinked away. The older woman turned to Erasmi with a surprised gaze. She had not expected the rude stranger to be the one to stand up for her and she quickly thanked the person, "Thank you, young man."

Erasmi nodded in acknowledgement and made to step out when the older lady stopped him, "You're hurt."

Chapter 313: Hurt

Erasmi looked in surprise at his hand and realized that he had indeed received a cut on the back of his hand when he'd stopped that woman from attacking the older woman.

"It's alright. I'll take care of it."

"No, it's not alright. You were hurt while protecting me. If I let you go injured, then I don't deserve to be called the big Mama in this town! Come with me." Without giving him another chance to refuse, the woman gestured for him to follow her and walked away.

Pausing, Erasmi stopped and followed the woman. It seemed he had just absolved himself from the blacklist she'd placed him in for being rude. The woman led him to a small office cluttered with stacks of papers and scattered bills.

"Move those papers and I'll get the first aid box."

Erasmi carefully picked up a pile of papers and set them on the table before taking a seat.

"Let's have a look at that cut," she said as she returned, motioning for Erasmi to extend his hand. He complied and she began cleaning the wound with a gentle touch. "Not everyone would step in like that."

"Why did no one else step in?" Erasmi asked curiously. "You seemed friendly with everyone."

"Hmph. You are passing through so you were not too scared but they have to live here. We are a very small town with barely any population. The woman you stopped is the mayor's wife. She is also the richest in town and known to hold a grudge. She's made life difficult for anyone who dares to go against her."

"In this day and age?" Erasmi asked with shock.

The older woman glanced at Erasmi in surprise and looked carefully, "Well this is interesting. Are you new to this world as well? You are surprisingly innocent for a man who looks in his thirties. Age and day don't matter to bullies. They find a way to harm the innocent."

"Let's take the boy that lady was bad-mouthing. The kid is barely twelve years but that woman won't stop troubling him, even bribing his teachers to torture him. All because his mother opposed her plans to convert this place into some kind of industrial hub which would have ruined us all."

"Why does the mother not stop her then?"

"The poor woman had been doing that. She has no one. Her husband passed away when the child was little and she has been managing all alone since then with no family to help her out. And now she has fallen ill and the child's life has become unbearable. No one dares to help the family of two openly though everyone is trying their best to lend help. But the mother and son are proud people... Look at me, I've become too old and I'm talking about these things. Thank you for your help. Take a seat outside and I'll bring you a muffin. I make the best Apple crumble muffins here."

Erasmi hesitated, ready to refuse her when suddenly a man came rushing in, breathlessly, "Big mama. The visitor who saved you..."

"What happened, Jack?"

The young teenager looked at Erasmi and swallowed before rushing out, "His car..." as he pointed to Erasmi.

With a frown, Erasmi quickly caught the drift and raced out, worried about only one thing.

The people who had been eating in the cafe were not gathered around his car, chatting among themselves as they pointed at his now battered car. His eyes widened at the sight of the windows smashed as a surge of red-hot anger raced through him.

He glanced around at the people and spotted a few goons standing a small distance away, wearing menacing grins and holding baseball bats.

Clenching his fists, he moved to confront those troublemakers but was stopped by Big mama who quickly intervened, " Don't do it, young man. They are Her people and must have come to find trouble with you."

Erasmi shot a glance at the old woman before looking around at the group of gossip mongers before fishing out his cell phone and calling the police. The people scattered under his stare and quickly shuffled into the cafe, while Big Mama asked the boy to go and fetch a mechanic.

Carefully, Erasmi walked to the car and took out the letters and photographs that were now dusted with powdered glass while a few bigger shards had even torn through a few photographs.

His eyes hardening, he looked at the goons carefully. For now, he would let the police handle them. But they would not be free for long.

Big Mama watched the man hold the things close and frowned. The man did not seem worried about his car but those letters and pictures seemed to be important to him.

Just then the police arrived and Big Mama could only grimace as she watched the officer stepped down and swagger over.

Quickly marching to the man, she stepped in his way, " Why are you here? Send the commissioner."

The officer cast a dismissive look at her, " Do you think the commissioner has time for some petty vandalism? And you don't obstruct the investigation. You might be the big mama here but you are not above the law."

The police officer looked carefully at the man before him, standing there next to the old car, in faded jeans and creased shirt. This man had dared to challenge Mrs Stewart? What a fool.

"What is going on here?"

Big mama turned to look at Erasmi, trying to warn him that this officer was crooked, but the man now ignored her and spoke calmly to the officer, " My car was vandalized."

The officer, with an indifferent expression, took a cursory glance at the damaged car. "Just a car, nothing serious. People have real issues to deal with. Are you on the run from any enemies? We do not take lightly to outsiders bringing trouble to our little town. So, I suggest you get in your car and drive away."

This time, Erasmi smiled and turned to Big mama, " Big Mama? This might take a while. I'll take you up on the offer for that muffin..."

Erasmi then ignored the officer and the goons and calmly walked back into the cafe.

Chapter 314: Emergency Meeting

Ian walked back into his office with a weary look. Why did grandfather have to leave such a responsibility to him. Dam* it! He'd believed himself to be the favored grandson but now it seemed that his grandfather seemed to consider him a pain in the b*tt.

With a curse, he punched the wheel as he muttered to himself, " If I'd known you would do this to me, I would have never brought you those expensive teas, you old man!"

His thoughts turned to Isabella and he wondered if she could be the candidate for what he needed to do. She was attractively, hot, sassy, smart and experienced in sleeping around. Thus ticking all the boxes. Everything was perfect and maybe she could be...A sly smile played on his lips as he considered the benefits they could give each other.

No, he shook his head. If things went south with her, he did not need Nora coming at him with a pitchfork. The last things he needed to do was complicate these matters.

As he walked into the large office building, he looked around at the various female employees, going about. Should he ask someone from their employees? Nah. That would also mean trouble.

Before he could reach his office, he was intercepted by Seb, who stepped into his way, " Emergency meeting. Top floor."

Ian frowned and looked at Seb," Emergency meeting? Why did I not know of this?"

"You would if you'd checked your phone," Seb answered as he followed Ian into the elevator.

Ian quickly fished out his phone and checked the message from Demetri with a grimace. The message had been sent almost two hours ago, when he'd been making breakfast for...

"Thanks for the update, Seb."

Seb nodded and glanced at Ian with narrowed eyes," So, where were you yesterday? You didn't come to..."

Ian grimaced and looked at Seb," I was busy with Best man duties."

Seb chuckled and shook his head," Poor you. I'm going to be telling Demon to give me the Worst Man duties. So, no responsibility at all. By the way, we are five groomsmen. And Nora has only two bridesmaids at most. Isabella and Evana. What about the rest of us? Do we need to get out own dates?"

"What? Is the great Seb frost having difficulty scoring dates?"

"Ha! As if. But you know what happens if you ask a casual date to accompany you to a wedding. I'm not falling into that trap. I'll just beg Nora to pair me with Isabella."

"Don't even think it!" Ian snapped before realizing he'd probably just shot himself in the foot. If Seb senses something amiss, he would not let it go...

As expected, Seb quickly threw a mischievous glance at Ian and teased," Are you calling dibs on the Maid of Honour? Hmm? Do I smell a loooooovvve story in the making?"

Ian shot him a deadpan look," If you mess up things with Nora's best friend, what do you think Demon will do with you? I'm saving you a trip from being thrown to the South Pole to study the topography there to establish a hotel."

Seb shuddered at the threat. He hated the cold! He most certainly would not want to traverse with penguins.

As they walked out of the elevator, Ian added, " Also, Nora is going to ask two more girls to be a part of her bridesmaids."

"Really? Tell who? Are they some new friends?" Seb asked with interest.

This time he received a probing look from Ian who spoke calmly, " Olivia and Dora."

Seb, who was about to say something about new girls to explore quickly shut up. "Why is she asking Olivia? She barely knows the girl. And Dora is too little. She should be the flower girl."

"Try telling that to Princess Isidora. She's already sent a long video letting everyone know that she is suffering great injustice in not being allowed to help with the preparations when she is the one who played cupid and helped Demon and Nora meet again."

Seb shook his head and muttered something about choosing inappropriate people for bridesmaids' duties.

But Ian was not one to let things be and said, " Well, little Dora is definitely off limits but you can flirt with Olivia. After all..."

"Don't go there, Ian." Seb said warningly before increasing his stride and walking faster towards the conference room, ready to distance himself from his brother.

Ian shook his head and with a sigh, looked at Seb who was still trying to run from the distant past. As if he ever could.

As he walked in, Ian looked at everyone seated there with a grimace. Why did Demon still have to wear that horrid expression? What kind of a situation was this? And where was Gabe? Shouldn't he be appearing on the screen already?

"Whats up? Where's Gabe? And Erasmi?"

Demetri sighed and rubbed his head, " Erasmi has already left for his trip. He'll get in touch to keep us in the loop. And Gabe...he's out there looking for Arabelle."

"Arabelle is missing?" Ian asked in alarm while Seb cursed under his breath.

"When did this happen?"

"Its almost been a day. He reached there and she'd already been gone a few hours. They've already looked around. It seems her mother was able to find her and took her away."

"Dam* it! She'd always been a ticking bomb!" Seb groaned loudly while Ian asked with concern, " How is Gabe holding up? How did they discover her?"

"He's frantic. When he came here for Grandfather, he forgot to cover his tracks."

Lucien sighed, " And this happens just when Arabelle was reacting well to treatment. Gabe was so hopeful."

Demetri nodded with a severe look while adding, " There's more. It seems that she was not just taken away but Mrs Winthrop has even threatened that because her daughter had been forced to live in darkness because of Nora, she was going to make Nora suffer for it."

Chapter 315: You Can Try

Leaving the officer behind, Erasmi casually took a seat in the middle of the cafe and leaned back nonchalantly as he waited for his muffins. It seems his idea to find a place to stay here and observe things under the radar had just been shot to smithereens.

Shrugging his shoulders, he thought to himself so be it, " So be it. If I can't carry my plans quietly, then I'll carry them out with a resounding bang."

Gently, he placed the letters and pictures into the folder that they had originally been in and placed fidgeted with his phone, while waiting. Meanwhile, the other patrons huddled in small groups, whispering about the upcoming confrontation and making bets about who would win.

Just as Big mama placed a plate of an interesting-looking apple crumble muffin, the agitated officer stormed inside. With a sigh, Erssmi placed his phone on the table, and proceeded to ignore the man and dug into his muffin.

His face flushed with anger, Officer Hopkins glared at the man who had humiliated him and dared to oppose his authority. Banging his hand on the chair, he shouted loudly, "Listen here, outsider. I suggest you leave before you find yourself in real trouble. You have no idea what you are dealing with! Right now, only your car has been broken and you cans till leave. If your bones are broken..."

Erasmi calmly bit into the muffin and cocked his head. "I don't take kindly to threats, officer Hopkins. My car has been vandalized by those men who are now standing behind you and instead of investigating, you are threatening me. What would you like to say about that?"

Officer Hopkins chuckled dismissively. "This is my town. And those are my people. You are the one who is seeking trouble. Don't try to act smart!"

"What do you mean he is seeking trouble? He was only trying to protect me from that woman as a kind-hearted person. But those people tried to create trouble for him instead and then you are..."

"You be quiet or I will..."

Before the officer could utter any more threats, Erasmi chuckled warningly, "I'd think twice before saying more...Officer Hopkins."

"Do you think you are some big shot? What will you do? I'm going to arrest you now and throw you in a cell to rot for a few days! That will put some sense in you!"

Erasmi sighed and stood up casually, and walked to the man, leaning down to whisper slowly, "I don't think you can, officer. You're going to have your hands full."

As he said this, loud sirens echoed outside and soon, a few junior officers stepped in, nabbing the goons who had been standing behind Officer Hopkins and the commissioner followed.

Officer Hopkins hesitated as he saw this scene. Could this man have the power to call the commissioner? No. It must be a coincidence or maybe Mrs. Mayor had sent him here as a backup...

Having reassured himself, Officer Hopking straightened and quickly greeted the commissioner. The man looked around the cafe and the people who were still watching raptly and sighed, "What is the situation here, Officer Hopkins?"

Hopkins smirked at that and shrugged his shoulders, "Just a minor incident, sir. Nothing to worry about. This strange man here is trying to create trouble and I was just having a word with him."

"Vandalism is not a minor incident officer." Erasmi cut in.

Officer Hopkins sent him a resentful glare and threatened, "Don't try to cut in. If you had not instigated those gentlemen, they would not have..."

"That's enough, Officer Hopkins. I have seen the car outside. This was not something done out of a moment of anger but these men had come here intending to create trouble. Take them away. And you! You are under investigation as well. It would be best if you surrendered your badge and gun while the investigation is underway.

As the onlookers watched in fascination, they could not help but look at this stranger in awe. He'd been here less than two hours and created a buzz. Big mama elbowed the young teenage boy and questioned, "Do you have any idea what is going on?"

The young boy helplessly shook his head, "I have no idea, big mama."

Once the protesting goons and the officer had been escorted away, the commissioner quickly walked over to the man, "Mr. Erasmi. "I apologize for the inconvenience caused. Rest assured, we'll conduct a proper investigation. If you could leave a forwarding address, I'll make sure that an investigation report is sent to you."

"Thank you, commissioner. I'll be staying here for the time being. If you could guide me with some place to rent out for a few days."

"You must have come so far out to rest. I see. I see. You're in the right place. And this is Big Mama's cafe. She can definitely help you. Miss Martha. Please help Mr Frost here. He is a guest of our little village. Mr. Erasmi, I hope you can overlook this and delete the video... It will give a bad name to the town." The commissioner requested...

Erasmi agreed with a nod and answered, "I'll delete this and add pictures of the car outside while letting everyone know that you intervened quickly. Thank you again, commissioner."

As everyone dispersed, Big Mama quickly approached Erasmi, "You've done wonders, young man. I never would have believed that something like this would happen if not for that old coot commissioner walking in here. There are not many hotels in this town, but there is a small room available for rent, right above this cafe. I'll give it to you for free since you've been such a great help. You can check if it suits you."

Erasmi wanted to protest but now that the matters had been resolved, he could see the crowd turning towards him, curious to know more about how things had transpired. And he needed to avoid that so he nodded and quickly asked the lady to show him the place. He needed to escape.

Chapter 316: Who Is He?

Erasmi's exit left behind a cacophony of whispers as everyone started to discuss who this man was and how he had the power to summon the lofty commissioner.

Finally, someone who had been standing close to the commissioner quickly remembered what the commissioner had asked the man to do. Delete a video. Hopping on to their social media account, they quickly looked up at the trending topics. And there, at the last ranking topic was the name of their little town and police.

Like wildfire, the gossip spread among everyone as they quickly found out what had happened. As they watched, they could only shake their heads at the power of the internet and social media.

As Miss Marth returned, the boy who had first informed her of the goons quickly walked to her and showed her the multiple videos.

"See this, big mama. His name is Erasmi Frost. He is a big influencer. He shared the video of his car being attacked out of nowhere by those men followed by the live broadcast of Officer Hopkins insulting and threatening him."

Miss Martha frowned. She wasn't sure she liked people who were influencers. From what she had seen, most of them were unethical and would do anything to get famous.

She could not help but review that man's actions. Could it be that he had seen what had been happening and sensed an opportunity to gain more followers and fame? Maybe that is why he had challenged Hopkins.

If that was the case, she would need to ask that man to leave. She did not need any opportunistic people causing trouble here.

Jack, knowing that Big Mama was biased against influencers, quickly spoke up for the man, "Big mama. This man is not like this. In fact, he is very different from the usual people."

"What do you mean? All influencers are scum."

"Not him. He is somewhat of a mental health influencer. Actually, no one has ever seen his face. He rose to popularity about a year ago because of the way he has been helping people."

Jack showed the previous updates where Erasmi had shared how he'd lived in a semi-vegetative state for a decade and returned to the land of living just as suddenly as he had slipped into a coma.

Jack detailed how the man shared his experiences and helped other people to talk about recovering from long term disease and how to settle back among the living.

Taking the phone from Jack, Miss Martha quickly started reading through the posts the man had made, some were sad as he talked about all the technological changes since he woke up. Some were funny as he described his instances on learning the technology and interacting again with people. And some were heart wrenching as he detailed his struggle with recovering and having episodes of paralysis even now and how his family had almost given up on him except his twin."

The morning turned to afternoon and Miss Martha finally put down the phone with a vow to help the poor young man rest well. He'd been talking about taking a break and roaming around to finally relax and experience what he had missed out all these years.

On the other side, Gabriel returned to the Frost Brothers with a devastated expression. He had already searched high and low for Arabelle and the next step that he might have to take was one that would surely destroy him.

Two years ago, he had been prepared for this plan B if his efforts to handle Arabelle failed. But all their efforts had been successful for the past eighteen months. And the tumor that had been discovered as the reason for her split personality had also been located and gotten rid of. She'd been going back to her old self with less need to depend on hypnosis.

And now everything had gone down the drain. He had been willing to bury his head in the sand for her and play the fool. But he was not willing to bet his family's life on this.

As he marched into the office, he threw the file on the table and took a seat. "This is our next course of action. Take it and know what to expect."

None of the Frost brothers picked up the file but only looked at their brother with concern.

"Gabe. Don't worry. Even if her mother has taken her away, maybe the previous treatments will stay in effect." Seb consoled his brother carefully.

Ian nodded along, "Yes. You know that the gaps between the hypnosis were getting longer. You said so yourself."

Gabe looked at the brothers gratefully before shaking his head, "I've been a fool too long. You guys can call me that to my face. I've recently discovered a cell phone buried a little further away on the edge of my property. The phone was stolen from an employee a while ago..."

The implications of the words were clear. So, it was a possibility that Arabelle might have been planning this and she was the one who had informed her mother of the right opportunity.

Without a word, Ian picked up the file, while Seb and Lucien leaned closer to lean together. After reading the contents together, Seb snatched the file out of Ian's hand and threw it on the table," Gabe Frost! You are right! You are a fool! And so would we be if we agree with your plan!"

Even Lucien who was always the patient one stood up," Gabe, we've kept our thoughts to ourselves regarding your decision to be with Arabelle even though we could see you were setting yourself up for unlimited pain. It was because we respected you and your choices. But this is not just self-pain! Your plan B is a suicide mission!"

Gabe opened his mouth to protest but was cut off by Demetri who spoke up," Gabe. We are not going to agree with this. And considering how stubborn you can be, we will apologize in advance."

Gabe stilled. What did they mean. Not giving him a chance to protest, Demetri nodded at someone... and in the next instant, Gabe had lost consciousness while Demetri ordered coldly to Ian," Keep an eye on him all of you. He's not going to be happy when he wakes up and finds himself in a house arrest."

The other three nodded with determined expressions. Sorry Gabe. It was for your own good.

Chapter 317: Anger, Worry and Guilt

"What the hell, man? We are your brothers!" Seb groaned as he barely avoided being punched in the face."

In answer, Gabe tried to punch him again but thankfully, his feet were definitely faster and he missed again.

"Ha! You need to be faster than that to get me, Gabe," Seb taunted only to miss the man's attack as Gabe kicked him in the ankle, making him fall with an 'oof'.

"And you need to stop talking Seb!" Gabe growled before turning his attention to Lucien who was standing in the corner, panting with gloves on, still trying to recover from the previous round with Gabe.

"You bast*rd! That hurt! Are you trying to make me disabled."

"I'd have hit you a bit higher, if I wanted to do that! You expect me to play nice to you after you've drugged me and brought me here as a prisoner?"

"We had to make sure you didn't do anything stupid out there. You're ours, you know." Lucien spoke calmly.

"I'm not a child!" Gabe retorted, frustration evident in his voice. "I can take care of myself. I don't need you all babysitting me."

"Ha! Yet here you are, unable to land a single punch!"

Angered, Gabe turned to Seb with a growl, renewing his efforts to beat the shi* out of Seb.

Seb continued to weave and dodge agilely, taunting continuously, "You've got to be faster than that, Gabe! You're getting old. Your hand eye coordination is slower than eighty year old man!"

Gabe's eyes narrowed as he lunged forward again, determined, "Just wait."

As the sparring continued, Gabe's movements became more calculated, and Seb found himself having to put in more effort to evade the attacks. The atmosphere in the room shifted from frustration to a competitive energy, with both giving it their all and Seb playing on the offensive letting Gabe get a taste of some punches as well.

It was a long time later that Gabe and Seb both collapsed in the boxing ring, panting to catch their breath while their faces seemed to be blue and black with bruises.

Lucien winced and for the first time thanked the fate that he was the youngest and Gabe had instinctively gone easy on him. Seb and Gabe's face looked like a vivid abstract painting.

His heart ached when Gabe grabbed Seb and hugged him before kneeling on the ground broken. The first order of priority for dealing with the grief had been to let Gabe dispel his anger.

Gabe's love had finally come to an end. After years of loving a woman, he'd finally accepted that she was dead to him. And the man had been about to bottle all that pain inside him. Even though at this moment, their priority should have been finding Arabelle and stopping any plan she might come up with, it had been equally important that they not let Gabe fortify his walls.

The next stage would be to help him finally bury her remains. Literally and figuratively. Only then would they be able to see their brother recover.

All of them had always wished that Gabe would let go of the toxicity that was Arabelle but none of them had wanted this kind of an end. Not at the price of Gabe himself.

Lucien looked at Seb who looked back at him and the two brothers silently threw their arms around Gabe, taking him in a protective and comforting hug. They felt Gabe tremble before he took a deep breath, trying to compose himself.

Finally, Gabe, without a word, stood up, wiping the sweat from his brow and avoiding their eyes and walked out of the room, leaving behind a murmured, "Thank you."

Soon, the loud crash of a door banging closed had them running outside, worried that Gabe had left the house, only to be relieved that he had walked into his own room.

Lucien looked at the closed door and then at Seb, "Do you think he will be alright?"

"He'll have to be Lucy. But it's going to be a long time. And he may never be the same."

"Well, haven't we always been changing. We'll help him come out of the darkness."

Inside Gabe's room, the air hung heavy with the remnants of both physical and emotional exhaustion. He stood in the middle of the dimly lit space, his hands trembling slightly as he tried to process the storm of emotions raging within him.

His grief, anger and worry pulled him in different directions, tearing him apart from within. The woman who he had always dreamt of cherishing and protecting, he was now orchestrating the opposite. He looked at himself in the mirror and gave a miserable smile. His outer self seemed to reflect the inner self with bruises all over.

Gabe took a deep breath, attempting to steady his trembling hands and collect the shattered pieces of his composure. The memories of Arabelle that he had started to cherish, once warm and comforting, now felt like shards of glass under his skin. Gabe knew he had to face the reality, daunting as it may be.

He'd already taken the first step towards the darkness now. Letting go and acknowledging his own mistakes. He knew that all he had to do was take a step forward and his brothers would be there waiting for him with their arms spread. But how could he face them if he caused them to be hurt?

If Arabella had really been acting all along or had managed to fool him for so long and returned to her old self then it means she was upto something much more sinister than he could imagine. And he would not let his love become a pain to his brothers.

Nodding to himself, he walked out of the room with a determined expression. Without looking at Seb or Lucien, who were both staring at him, he grabbed the ice pack and put it to his face. " I need to find her before anyone else. You guys can either come with me or I can run away on my own. Either way, I am not staying under house arrest and doing nothing when there is a threat roaming outside because of me."

Chapter 318: Ian's Plan

"Hello there, handsome," Isabella purred as she strolled into the cozy cafe, her eyes sparkling with excitement. She couldn't help but notice the way Ian's gaze lingered on her, and a thrill ran down her spine. After all, she'd taken care to dress for this handsome man, since she had not been able to stop thinking of him after that morning. Dam* she hadn't thought of someone like that since her crush on Tom Cruise.

And somehow every male lead in the novels she had been trying to read had taken on his face and the female lead, hers. She tried to curb her excitement. Even though he had been the one to ask her out, she did not need to show she was interested so early. Ian Frost might be an experienced playboy but she was not going to fall into his bed on the first date.

"This might not be a date." Her she-devil inner voice tried to rain on her parade, continuing, "if the experienced playboy was wining and dining you at this place, then you need to run."

Isabella rolled her eyes at herself but the inner voice continued to talk in her head, "Also, you ho*, you've already slept in his bed... technically."

"But without him.", she pouted to herself.

Her inner conversation came to an end when Ian rose from his seat with a charming smile gracing his lips. "Isabella, you look stunning as always," he greeted, pulling out a chair for her. She sat down delicately, marveling at the smooth movements.

The experience this man might have had helping women into chairs, "helping them out of their clothes..." the inner voice added.

As she tried to keep herself from blushing, the man leaned down and whispered, "I liked it better when you called me Hot Ian."

The redness on her cheeks returned full force from his words as well as the way he effortlessly flirted with her. Trying to keep her composure which took every bit of concentration she could muster, Isabella smiled at him, "Too bad. I'll have to get drunk again to see that hotness."

Ian's eyes heated at the challenge as he answered her with an easy smile, "Oh. I have other ways to get you to agree that I am hot."

Isabella chuckled at that and quickly realized that he really did. The man just had to use that irresistibly seductive voice and his look to make her heart race. Dam*, why did those glasses have to add to his hotness? They were supposed to murr it. Already the temperature was increasing and he hadn't even done anything.

Where did this sudden attraction come from. She'd been perfectly fine dancing with him all those Frosties at Nora's birthday party... Well, if only she had the answer to that question... But now was not the time. "Concentrate bella baby."

"So, what's the occasion? A business meeting, or did you just want to bask in my delightful company?"
"Why did you add that part you fool? Be casual" The inner Bella added her two cents.

Ian poured her a glass of wine that had been chilling on the table and then for himself. "Well, I can't deny that your company is delightful, but there's actually something specific I wanted to discuss with you. Something I would like your help with."

Isabella stilled in the middle of tasting the wine. He'd really asked her out for something to discuss and not for a date? "Throw the wine on him and leave Bella baby. He should have said so when he called."

Isabella managed a small smile and asked him, "Sure. Tell me." as she reminded herself that he had never mentioned a date. She'd been the one who had been overly excited. Maybe she needed to throw that glass of wine on herself.

"Nora is in danger."

Isabella's eyes widened in surprise and concern. The mention of danger and Nora in the same sentence instantly erased any trace of playfulness or flirtatiousness from her. She leaned forward, her voice laced with worry, "What happened? Who's threatening my Nora baby?"

"You know about Arabelle?"

"Heard of her. Demetri's wanna be girlfriend. Bat shi* crazy. Was engaged to the second Frostie, I think. She died with Lara, didn't she?"

Ian grimaced at the horrid nickname of Frostie but did not remark on it. Nora called them that as well and she was incorrigible. Evana had also taken to referring to them like that.

"She did not die. She is married to Gabe. He loved her and took her away to keep her safe."

"Really? Is that why he moved base out of the country? Wow."

Isabella was stunned as she heard of this development. She'd heard Nora tell how the Frost men were totally loyal and did not cheat. She'd given an example of Gabe who had been in love with that Arabelle for years and not even looked at other women, despite the girl's madness. To be truthful, Isabella had almost envied the woman.

But now she pitied the Gabe Frost. What was the point of being loyal to such a woman?

"Anyway, long story short, she had been kept away from here due to her being a safety threat and for her own health reasons. However, she disappeared from the homestead where she had been secured."

"Holy shi&! You mean she has escaped and is now going to attack Nora? What was Gabe Frost thinking? Why would he stay with such a woman? And why would he let her escape." Isabella burst out, already imagining bad scenarios for Nora! Dam* it! Couldn't her best friend have some peace in life?

Ian grimaced. "We've all felt that, Isabella. Gabe has also finally accepted defeat and given up on Arabelle.. In fact, he is now... forget it. Anyway, Arabelle is the reason I've asked you here. I need your help."

Isabella agreed without a second thought, "Of course, I'll help in any way I can. What do you need me to do?"

Chapter 319: You What?

"You want me to spy on my best friend? Do you think I am some specialized agent who can do that?" Isabella asked incredulously staring at Ian as if he had just asserted that he was The Pope.

Ian shook his head and sighed, "Spy is such a harsh term, Bella. And it implies passing on information. You don't need to do that. Nora is already under surveillance from some top class security experts. However, Demetri does not want her to know, for the time being. So, the best way is for someone to always be around her on the off chance that she decide to ditch the security or get suspicious. She's got sharp instincts."

"She had to have those. Or else she would not survive this long. So, you want me to act as a safety blanket to help maintain the ruse that all is well?"

"Somewhat like that. If Demetri or one of us stick to Nora all the while, she will get suspicious. But with you, she won't be that wary, I think."

Isabella nodded and placed her hand on the table, tapping her nails nervously against the table as she questioned, "I understand that. But what if someone slips through the security and does attack Nora? I am not even well trained like Nora to be able to protect her."

Ian caught her nervous gesture and caught her fingers with a comforting hand, gently stroking her wrist to soothe her nerves. "You won't need to protect her. You are not being used as a shield. She's under multiple layers of security at the moment. And on the off chance you do encounter any dangerous situations, do not try to engage. The two of you need to make a run for it. If she is alone, she will definitely try to fight it out. But if you are with her and she knows that you cannot fight, she will choose escape."

Isabella looked down at Ian's hand on her and marvelled at how natural it felt. Dam* she needed to get her head checked. And why was he holding her hand for no reason? Even if he was comforting her, shouldn't he take back his hand after a moment. But the tanned hand there seemed to have no intention of letting her fingers go...

Isabella shook her head and agreed while trying to lighten the atmosphere, "Sigh! And here I was thinking of getting a cape and being the superhero to protect Nora and instead you've turned me into a sidekick who's not supposed to fight crime but make a swift exit when things get dicey. Is that about right?"

Ian stared at Isabella and wondered why she sounded unhappy about this... Carefully, he used his words to gauge her mood, "Are you unhappy about something?"

Isabella took a deep breath and reminded herself that she did not know Ian Frost well enough to judge him so she should not take offense at his thoughts, and slowly explain, "I am not the kind to ditch my best friend, Ian. I don't know what you expect me to do if things go south but I won't leave Nora alone. And I do not want to become a liability."

"You won't be." He swiftly assured her and continued, "I'm only asking you to be a safety blanket. I assure you, Arabelle will not get within 1000 meters of her."

Isabella nodded and assured him, "I understand. I'll do my best. Thanks Ian."

Ian nodded and as she started to pull her hand away, realized that he'd been holding her hand for a while. And he did not want to let go."

As he toyed with the idea of tightening his grip, a shadow fell over the table suddenly and a man lunged towards Isabella with a shout, "You sl*t! You ruined everything!"

In an instant everything changed as the man grabbed the bottle of wine on their table and raised it over his head.

Before anyone could react or grasp what was happening, Ian's quick reflexes kicked in. In an instant, he stood between the man and Isabella who had frozen in shock at the site of the attacker.

In quick movements, Ian disarmed the man, the bottle of wine clattering beside Isabella with a loud clatter as Isabella ducked, barely missing being hit with wine and shards of the bottle.

Soon, the cafe's staff arrived and made quick work of curbing the man's attempts at continuing the assault. Isabella shivered as she watched the man being taken outside by Ian and the security. The reality of the situation sank in, and fear gripped her, making her limbs feel like lead.

Ian returned a few moments later, and quickly scanned the surroundings for any other signs of danger before walking over to Isabella who seemed to have frozen in shock. Softly, he placed a hand on her shoulder, only for her to let out a small scream, causing the already shocked diners to look over in concern and sympathy.

"Are you okay?" Ian asked softly and saw her give a confused nod-shake of her head as she continued to look outside the door where the man was still screaming obscenities.

He quietly pulled her towards him into a tight hug, wanting to comfort her from being observed by others and offer warmth. Her hands came around his waist and she clung to him, trembling all over. He continued to hold her until the police arrived at the scene worried that this man might know Isabella and had planned the attack.

It was only as they quickly investigated that he knew the man had believed Isabella to be his cheating wife since they had the same hair colour and had thus reacted badly, his mental stability shaken.

As the police left, with the culprit and their statements, taken, Ian looked down at Isabella and quickly intertwined their fingers. Come on. We need to go from here.

Still looking shaken, Isabella nodded and quickly walked out of the restaurant, her thoughts in a whirl.

Chapter 320: A Family

Erasmi stood at a distance, his gaze fixed on the unassuming house, grappling with the uncertainty of whether he was making the right choice. Having spent two days in New Creek, he had only mustered the courage to approach this family.

Contrary to his expectations, the place had its own charm. Though the house hinted at a bit of neglect and slight need for repair, it emanated a comforting homeliness.

That night when he'd left for here, blindsided by anger and the unjust blow that the old man had dealt him, he'd been sure of his decision. But now, he was not so sure.

He wanted to get to know his son. His son. The feeling that filled him was one that he had no way of describing. He'd not even met the boy and already the need to love him and protect him was making him crazy.

He'd lost more than a decade of his son's life... Who could have imagined Nellie was six months pregnant when they had the accident. And that she would die but their little underdeveloped premature baby would survive?

Dam* that old man! It did not matter what reasons the old man gave him to justify his actions, this was not something he would forgive. He wanted to give the child a loving family. And he did not think that his brothers would not dote on his baby? Who could be more loving than them? How did he guarantee that his child had a loving family? From a few pictures every year that the adoptive mother shared for Caius' every birthday?

Caius... It meant rejoice. Had anyone been given a chance to rejoice when he had come? Even his own brothers remained unaware of their nephew's existence. He'd come here with the some intention of taking his son away, let that family know what it meant to take away someone's child.

But sanity had prevailed somewhere over the road, the anger in his heart replaced by sadness. He would not be able to snatch his son from a loving family. If he was happy, would he be able to take responsibility for upending his life?

And then from what little he had understood at the small diner seemed that he was already suffering a bit with his adoptive mother sick. He remembered being a ten-year-old without parents. How angry he had been inside. Yes. Caius could be the same.

He looked down at the phone, the child looked so much like him and Nellie. It almost made him smile. He wanted to share the picture with Demon, let him know this is what Demetri and Nora's child might look like. After all, him and Demon were identical twins and Nellie and Nora looked alike.

The time on his screen reminded him that he would have to go to the house soon. He wanted to meet Caius but for his well being, he needed to talk to the adoptive mother first.

According to his grandfather, Caius had been given to a couple who could not have children. But from what he had heard at Miss Martha's place, the child had lost a father when he was small...

Before he could walk across the street, he suddenly stopped and watched as a group of teenaged miscreants stopped outside the place. Within a moment, the serene atmosphere was shattered as they started to throw things into the garden while shouting that these people needed to leave their town.

Angered at the audacity of the boys of not only destroying private property and trying to threaten a woman, Erasmi marched forward towards the boy who seemed to be the ringleader, instigating everyone to be louder and rowdier.

"What is going on here?" Erasmi demanded, his voice firm and unwavering. His imposing figure cast a shadow over the group, and the mischievous glint in the leader's eyes flickered with uncertainty.

The ringleader, a teenager with unruly hair and a rebellious demeanor, hesitated for a moment before smirking defiantly. "Just having a bit of fun, old man. What's it to you?"

Erasmi's jaw clenched at the disrespectful tone. "This is someone's home, and you're causing a disturbance. Show some respect."

The boy chuckled rebelliously and even though he looked intimidating, ignored the man, "Mind your own business, old man. Don't interfere with our work."

This time, Erasmi did not use words and simply caught the boy by the collar and lifted him up, "You can try saying that again. I'll just be helpful and call the police."

As the boy was lifted out of the bicycle, his hands still clutching the handlebars, the other boys quickly came out to surround him but he simply had to glare at them threatening and they were frightened away by his aura.

"We won't do it again. Please let us go." Finally, a meeker teenager squeaked out while the others nodded in agreement quickly.

From the corner of his eye, he noticed the door to the house open and silhouette of a woman walking out. He grimaced. All expectations of meeting the adoptive mother had just gone up in the air.

Slowly, he lowered the boy so that they were now at eye level and spoke calmly, "If I see you or any of your friends, so much as look in the direction of this house, I will bury you all alive so that not even the dead would be able to find you. Am I clear?"

The boys nodded all nodded hurried and he let the leader go, making them scamper away.

As he watched them leave, he clenched his fist and sighed, trying to compose himself and control his anger.

Just as he closed his eyes, he heard a soft voice from behind speak softly, "Thank you for your help. These boys have been getting more and more audacious each day.."

"Its alright. They won't trouble you again," Erasmi assured the woman as he turned around.

Unexpectedly, as the woman caught sight of him, her eyes widened in shock and she fell to her knees.