

Benefits 321

Chapter 321: Mrs Mercer

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

Erasmi hurried forward and extended a hand to the lady, "Are you alright, miss?"

As he got a careful look at her, he realized that this was probably not the woman he had come looking for. This person looked too young. Maybe she had been scared of the boys, he deduced, relieved that this was not a reaction from seeing him. However, in the next moment, he could not help but doubt himself.

The girl looked at his hand, then him and then the surroundings before slowly shaking her head and trying to get up on her own. Her eyes almost seemed to be accusing him to wanting to harm her. She moved to kneel and stand up, however, before she could, she was wracked with coughs which made her small body shake.

Erasmi looked down at the frail looking fay-like girl and wondered who this was. Could it be that the couple had adopted another child along with Caius. He crouched down in front of the girl and gently tried to pat her back, to help her breathe.

The reaction this time was even more alarming because she jumped to her feet and ran back towards the house with an alacrity that would have made the fastest sprinter surprised.

Erasmi watched the girl disappear into the house, bewildered by the unexpected turn of events. Did he look that bad? He'd even taken care to shave himself before coming here...He stood up, unsure how to proceed now. Should he knock on the door or should he go back and come at another time?

The decision was taken out of his hand when the door opened again, the girl walked out and said, "You can come in."

Cautiously, Erasmi stepped into the threshold of the house, calling out, "Miss, I didn't mean to frighten you. I'm sorry, I'm looking for someone..."

"It's me. You're looking for me." The girl told flatly as she gestured for him to take a seat at the table.

Stumped, Erasmi looked at the kitchen curiously while the girl placed a large jug of tea in front of him and a glass, while ordering curtly, "Have some tea."

Erasmi looked at the tea and then the bristly girl, "You are Mrs. Mercer?"

"Yes." The girl answered straightforwardly.

To take a moment to compose himself, Erasmi poured himself a glass, wondering how this girl... no woman could be his child's adoptive mother? She looked in her early twenties.

As he took a sip of the tea, he reminded himself that he should not judge the woman and tried to introduce himself, "I am sorry to barge in unannounced. You might not know me..."

"I know who you are. I recognized you at first glance. You look like a grown-up version of MY son."

Erasmi did not miss the emphasis on the word 'my' and took another sip of tea. It seems the woman was not as receptive of him as the old man had implied.

"You are here. Does that mean Mr Elijah Frost is gone?"

Erasmi nodded carefully. The woman nodded and murmured her condolences before looking away.

As she turned her head, she was once again had a coughing fit that shook her frame, making him worry. Hadn't he heard at the diner that she'd fallen sick. No wonder she had such an air of frailty...

Concerned, he stood up and took a step forward, keeping a respectful distance. "Are you okay? Can I get you some water?" She hesitated, then nodded slightly and Erasmi quickly grabbed a glass off the table and filled it up.

Once her breathing was normal again, he spoke carefully, "Mrs Mercer, since you know who I am, I'd like to speak about Caius. He..."

Before he could continue, the woman quickly cut in, "Mr. Frost, you've made a wasted trip. I will not give my son to you under any circumstances."

Erasmi opened his mouth to clarify that he was not here to 'take' Caius away but the woman did not give him a chance as she continued fiercely, "I know what I and my husband agreed to with Mr. Frost all those years ago but the circumstances have changed over the years. Caius doesn't know anything about his biological family and we are already very troubled with... things. This is just not a good time for Caius to go away from here. And I won't let you! I am his mother while you are only his uncle!"

Erasmi frowned as he quickly realized that she was mistaking him for Demetri, probably because that is what the old man might have implied. But as he tried to get in a word of explanation, the woman continued to ignore him, "You don't understand the suffering he has felt. Caius has his own troubles as a growing up boy and bringing you into his life would only complicate things further."

Erasmi's frustration grew, and he tried to assert himself and make the girl listen, "Mrs. Mercer, I—"

But she cut him off again, her voice rising in intensity. "This is not the time for your presence! I won't let you disrupt his life, and that's final!"

Erasmi's patience reached its limit. He took a deep breath, his voice finally rising to match hers, "Mrs. Mercer, listen to me! I am not here to disrupt anything! I am not his uncle. I am his biological father!"

The sudden shout silenced Mrs. Mercer. She stared at Erasmi, her eyes wide, processing the words he had finally managed to voice. The room hung in a charged stillness as the weight of the revelation settled between them.

Seeing that the woman in front of him had finally stopped talking, Erasmi breathed a sigh of relief and tried to talk calmly, "I am not Caius' uncle. I am his father."

"You are not Demetri Frost?", Mrs Mercer asked uncertainly.

Erasmi nodded and introduced himself, "I am Erasmi Frost. Demetri is my twin."

"But...but you're not dead. Why are you not dead?" As she said the words, she seemed to realise that she'd said something horrendous, and her mouth formed an o... which she covered with both her hands.

Chapter 322: I Apologize

Erasmi had never thought that he would be amused when someone asked him why he had not died. But looking at the poor woman's face, he could only chuckle in amusement.

Her hands still covering her mouth, she stared at him, a mix of disbelief and embarrassment evident in her wide eyes. "I-I... I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to sound heartless. It's just... even your laughter is like my Caius."

Erasmi's amusement disappeared, and he looked down before looking at her slowly, "His laughter is like mine, Mrs Mercer."

Mrs Mercer shot him a horrified look before nodding slowly, "I... uh...I don't know what to say... I was told that Caius' both biological parents had died in the accident, and he was barely saved by the doctors as a premature baby. It was your grandfather who made the arrangements for Caius' adoption... He had a few conditions before the adoption to which we agreed but I don't understand... why did he lie to us?"

Erasmi grimaced and explained, "I was presumed dead, Mrs Mercer. In fact, I was dead for the last ten years. I only returned a year ago..."

"I don't understand..."

Knowing that he needed to explain himself, he slowly recounted the details of how everyone had been made to believe that he had died and only his grandfather and twin had been aware of his barely alive self. And then suddenly he had started to return to his senses about a couple of years ago.

Silence reigned as he slowly finished the details of the story and watched as the woman wiped her tears inconspicuously. Taking the chance, he quickly added, "Mrs Mercer, I am not here to take Caius away from you."

The woman looked at him in shock before she questioned him slowly, "You're not?"

"No. At least not yet."

Erasmi watched as Mrs Mercer immediately straightened like a protective lioness, ready to attack him and raised his hand, "Please listen to me."

"I have only recently discovered about having a child. And while I want to know everything about him and take him away, for me what is of utmost importance that he stay in a place where he does not have to suffer. So, there is no way that I would be taking him away from the only parent he has even known. What I would like is a chance to get to know him and be in his life."

"And when he knows you and trusts you? You will feel less guilty taking him away from me?" Mrs Mercer asked quietly.

Erasmi sighed. "To be honest, I've not thought that far ahead. I just want to get to know my son."

"My son." the lady snapped to which Erasmi just shrugged. He wouldn't be arguing semantics.

His calm attitude seemed to somewhat surprise the lady and she took in a deep breath and sighed, "I'm sorry from snapping at you. Its good that you are being honest but not thinking of the long term would be unjust to Caius. He's never known a father. If he were to get attached to you, and then later you decide to leave..."

"No. I have no intention of leaving now or ever." Erasmi asserted.

"I..."

He watched the woman gulp and clench her hands and sighed, "Mrs Mercer. Is there anything..."

Before he could question her, Mrs Mercer started to cough roughly again. Hurriedly, he handed her a glass of water and waited for her to catch her breath.

As the lady's breathing settled again, he realized that the coughing was not due to sickness but due to nervousness. Ever since his arrival here, she had been panicking, causing her throat to close and the coughing fits to start.

"You are scared of me." Instead of a question, it came out as a statement and as the woman looked horrified, letting him know that he'd hit the nail bang on.

"But why are you scared of me? I've already assured you that I won't be fighting you, Mrs Mercer."

Taking deep breaths, the lady closed her eyes for a moment and opened them again. Slowly, she spoke, "Mr Frost. I'd like to ask you for some time to assimilate to this sudden situation. You've had two days to come to terms with this..."

Erasmi looked at the woman carefully, his instinct telling him that something was not right. But now was not the time to question the lady. With a slight nod, he said slowly, "Very well. I'll come see you after two days, Mrs Mercer. I hope you will be able to answer my queries then."

As he stood up to leave, his eyes scanned the surroundings for a moment, stopping on something for a split second, before he left without a backward glance.

Late in the night, a small cab arrived at the door of the house. A young woman walked out of the car with a large bag and placed the bag in the trunk of the car before speaking with the driver and rushing back inside.

Next she brought out a smaller bag, handed it to the driver, and rushed to return.

However, before she could go back again, she found her way blocked by a large man. A scream almost escaped her as she looked up at the man whom she'd sent away a few hours ago.

"Are you going somewhere, Mrs. Mercer?"

"I.. I..."

Erasmi watched as the woman's throat closed up and shook his head. He had really hoped to be wrong in this instance. He watched disdainfully as she tried to speak but couldn't. Taking a step closer, he was about to help her when a small voice suddenly spoke up angrily, "Who are you? Get away from my mother!"

It was dark but as Erasmi watched the young boy march out confidently and stand between him and the lady, he could not help but be amazed at the child. This was Caius. His son. He was so brave. Standing there. Protecting the woman he called his mother.

Chapter 323: A Friend

Nora stared at Isabella who stared back at Nora. The two girls were engaged in a staring contest, which neither was willing to lose out on. With each passing second the intensity of the contest increased. Nora broke the silence, her voice laced with sly curiosity. "Alright, Bella baby. Truth time. What's the secret you're hiding?"

"I haven't lost yet, sweetheart. I am going to be the one who wins today. Not even the strongest gust of wind can make me blink."

Nora scoffed at that, " You'll blink first. Mark my words. And then I will know why you are hiding here with me."

"There is no way you can make me talk, darling." Isabella smiled, even as her eyes threatened to water. She could not blink today or everything would be blown. Nora was already suspicious.

Nora narrowed her eyes. Something was definitely underfoot. Demetri had become even more miserly with his words. Ian and Seb were always asking for a visit and pretending to beg for food. As if those two really liked to eat the food she made. They had professional chefs at home and Ian was better than any acclaimed chef. And now, when she asked Isabella out to take shopping and rant to her, the girl actually refused to go out and insisted that she come to her house.

Nora wondered if she'd landed in some kind of parallel universe where the characters in her life had not turned completely opposite but only deviated a little from their original personality.

She felt her eyelids begin to strain to close but she reminded herself that she could not do it. Nope. She had no hope of making Ian or Seb talk. Questioning Demetri would mean him working to make her forget the question. So she was left with only one soft target. Isabella Ruffalo...

Just as her eyes twitched, ready to blink, Isabella's phone started to ring, startling them both into blinking at the same time.

They pointed at each other before saying in tandem, "You lost."

"No, you lost!"

Like the best friends they were, the two of them also rolled their eyes at each other before laughing and calling a time out. As Isabella looked down at her phone, she grimaced. She would have declined this call and turned off her cell phone if she was not in need of an urgent distraction to keep Nora off her tail.

With a sour face, she showed Nora the called ID and answered the call. A grouchy male voice echoed through the speakers, making her wince, "Where are you?"

"Home."

"Where were you last weekend?"

"I told you that I was going to see Nora. I returned just last weekend."

"You were with Nora during the day. Where were you at night? Haven't I warned you that you have to change your ways? You're not allowed to go w*oring again!"

As if a lightbulb had been turned on, Isabella's expression lightened and she quickly answered, while turning away from Nora, "Hey! I did not go w*oring! I was with Nora until night and then she went with

her husband! If I was still in my wh*ring days, I'd have spent the night with them in a threesome. But did I? No. I was a good girl and went to sleep with Ian Frost only. One man only!"

The silence on the other end was resounding while behind her Nora almost dropped the glass in her hand and sat down. Well, this was news. However, before she could say more, the man on the phone started to yell, "You slept with whom?"

"There wasn't much sleeping involved actually." Isabella added hopefully.

The other end seemed to have been at a loss for words as he bellowed, "Isabella! How dare you. Wait till I..."

His voice was cut off as Isabella disconnected the call and paused. Well, the man never had good timing all his life. But today it couldn't be said to be bad. After all, even though the basta*d made her blink and almost lose the match, he'd provided her with an idea for a perfect distraction.

As she turned back, Nora stood staring at her with an eyebrow raised and arms crossed in front of her. Picking up a piece of delicate-looking mini quiche from the tray and waved it teasingly in front of Nora. "Well, darling, it seems our staring contest just took an unexpected turn." Quickly she popped the appetizer into her mouth to keep herself from talking.

As expected, Nora thought that this was her secret and quickly caught on, "You sly fox. You slept with Ian? I thought you had the hots for Erasmi."

"I have the hots for all Frosties."

Nora picked up on a quiche herself and sent another measuring look at Isabella, "Bella baby. I know all of them are hot. But you cannot convince me that you want to sleep with them all. So, Erasmi to Ian?"

Isabella grimaced. Well, she could be truthful about that at least. "Gosh, Erasmi was hot and the chemistry between us was explosive. But..."

"But?"

"Dam* it! Getting close to him is like cheating on you!"

"Cheating on me?" Nora asked perplexed.

"Look, I cannot tell the difference between your Demetri and Erasmi so it was almost like... you know flirting with Demetri. And that is just... eww! So I turned off the hots."

"You can do that? Turn off the hots?" Nora asked curiously. She'd definitely never be able to turn that off for Demetri...

Isabella looked at her friends' face and wagged her finger at her, "I know what you are thinking Nora baby! And that is just disgusting! Of course you can turn off the hots for someone who is good looking. But not for your life partner! So, don't try to make me jealous with that face."

Nora grinned at Isabella, not denying the truthful accusation and instead asked, "So, how is one of the most experienced Frostie in bed?"

Isabella froze... Uh oh. She had not expected that question. What was she supposed to do now?

"I'm not kissing and telling! I'm a lady. And you are a married woman. How can you ask about someone else's se* life?"

Nora narrowed her eyes at Isabella again and looked at her blushing face before letting the matter drop. Something was definitely up. And she was going to find it. If Isabella wasn't going to talk, Ian would need to be tortured...um questioned.

Chapter 324: Troublesome

"Ian Frost! You are a pain to track down!" Isabella stormed into Ian's office, followed by Ian's apologetic looking secretary behind her.

As the thumped her purse onto his desk, the secretary tried to apologize, "I apologize, sir. I tried to stop the lady but she just..."

Ian waved a hand at the secretary, "It's alright. You don't need to add her to the list."

"The list? What is that?"

Isabella asked as she sat down and stared at him.

Ignoring her question, he leaned down, pulling out a bottle of wine from the small refrigerator beside his desk.

"Would you care for a glass of wine, Isabella?" Ian's tone was calm, almost as if he'd been expecting her arrival.

Isabella hesitated. Did he have to be so nonchalant about everything? Without waiting for a response, he poured the red liquid in a glass and offered it to her before pouring another drink for himself.

As she took a sip, Ian observed her over the rim of his own glass. The corners of his lips curled into a subtle smile as he observed her. She looked pretty even with that little fretful frown in the middle of her forehead.

"So, Miss Isabella Ruffalo, you were looking for me and now you've found me..."

Isabella snorted at that, "I'll tell you when you tell me what this list is."

Ian chuckled, taking another sip of his wine before finally setting the glass down. "The list, my dear Isabella, is simply a compilation of pretty women who managed to find their way to my office uninvited. And were then banned from being allowed into the Frost building. You'd almost earned a spot on that list just now."

"Got a lot of angry women coming for you? Anyway, I came here to tell you that you are not so great in bed."

Ian's amused expression faltered, and he coughed, nearly choking on his wine. He blinked at Isabella, a mixture of surprise and disbelief evident in his eyes. It took a moment for him to compose himself. But she did not give him that before dropping another bomb.

"You couldn't even give me the Big O."

Thankfully, he had not taken another sip of the wine or he would have definitely choked to death.

He set his wine glass down with more force than intended and a faint blush colored his cheeks.

"Well, that's a rather personal observation," Ian stammered, attempting to recover his composure. " But here's the thing, Isabella, we've never been together in bed, so I'm afraid I don't know how you reviewed my... um performance."

"Nora." Isabella muttered out.

Ian looked at Isabella in disbelief and said horrified, " I can assure you I've never even thought of doing something like that with Nora. I don't know how she is giving out such false information!"

"No. No! This is what happened..."

On a rushed breath, Isabella quickly explained what had happened about Nora's suspicion, her idea to deflect the suspicion and eventually having to blurt out that it was disappointing sleeping with him and she couldn't remember it because she'd been drunk.

As she watched his serious expression, Isabella tried to defend herself, " I'm sorry, alright. I couldn't think of anything else. I did tell her that it could have been good but I don't remember because I was too drunk. Are you too angry?"

Ian's serious expression slowly transformed, and he stood up, walking around the table. For the second time in her life within a week, Isabella felt herself caged between Hot Ian and a chair as she blinked up at him, "Bella, how about I help you so that you won't have to lie next time?"

"H..how?" Isabella blinked at him.

"You can see if I can bring the big O for you."

Isabella flushed and pointed a finger at him as she stuttered, " You... you..."

Before she could say more, the phone on Ian's desk rang, interrupting the moment.

Straightening with a sigh, Ian tapped the speaker button on the phone and soon the secretary's voice sounded, " Mr. Ian. Mrs. Nora Frost is here. She's asked to see you."

Isabella jerked at that, grabbed her purse and quickly looked around for a place to hide while the secretary continued, " Should I send her in or ask her to wait when she comes up?"

Ian looked on as Isabella finally realized that his entire office was transparent and had almost no place to hide. Panicking, Isabella mimed asking him where the washroom was to which he shook his head, letting her know that he did not have a washroom in his suite.

"Send her in. Don't tell her that I have a visitor."

"But Sir..."

As he pressed the button to close the call, Ian watched in amazement when she really did find a place to hide... and crawled under his desk.

Dam* she looked hot. All those po*n movies with a submissive secretary that he had watched suddenly emerged in his head, making him curse.

Quickly putting away their glasses, Ian went to his chair and took his seat

Isabella blinked at the view in front of her and blinked. Uh oh... She did not think she'd needed that view. As he pushed his chair inside, she felt his knees almost cage her shoulders and winced. Slowly, she tried to move away only to be blocked by the desk. Dam* it! She was having some really bad ideas these days.

Closing her eyes, she tried to concentrate and told herself to stay calm. There was no need to get flustered. Soon, she heard Nora walk into the room and breathed slowly. She'll go soon. Nora must have dropped by to confirm her story. Thankfully she had come straight here when Nora left her or else she would have been exposed.

"Nora, what brings you to my office today? Did you get lost? You need a map to Demetri's office."

However, Nora simple narrowed her eyes, and announced, "Isabella is pregnant!"

Chapter 325: Shocked

Ian's eyes widened, and he nearly toppled over in his chair, catching himself just in time. While a loud bang echoed from under his desk where Isabella had straightened at this news and banged her head against the underside of the desk.

Isabelle covered her mouth to stifle a gasp and rubbed her head slowly.

Nora frowned at the loud sound, " What was that?"

"I banged my foot against the table? Isabella is pregnant?" Ian asked uncertainly. For one if she was really pregnant, he was hundred percent sure that it couldn't be his.

"Pregnant? Isabella? Are you sure?", Ian stuttered, his voice a mixture of shock and disbelief.

Nora nodded solemnly, her expression unwavering. "Yes, pregnant. And she claims you're the father."

Ian's face turned a shade of red that could rival a tomato. He glanced down at the desk, where Isabella was undoubtedly regretting her life choices at that moment about lying to Nora. Ian opened and closed his mouth several times, unable to form coherent words.

"It's impossible!" he finally claimed. He'd heard a few wild things in his life but this topped them. Could Nora be lying? He looked at her innocent face and doubted himself. She had to be lying. Otherwise, Isabella would not have hidden here after telling such a lie, right?

Suddenly, he felt a pull on his pant leg, and pushed back his chair to put some distance between her and himself. Pregnant? He'd been careful to stay away from that word ever since he understood how procreation worked. He was still trying to think of a way to come out of this when Nora questioned him, "Why is it impossible? Are you infertile?"

"What? No?"

"Impotent?" Nora asked cheekily and almost hopefully.

Ian winced and did his best to glare at her only for to get more audacious, "Did you..." And made a scissor motion with her fingers.

Finally, Ian burst out, "No! She cannot be pregnant because I haven't slept with her yet!"

As he shouted those words, Ian winced as Isabella pinched his foot and almost kicked the poor girl. Standing up quickly, he walked away from the monster under his chair and only then realized that Nora was looking at him with a triumphant gaze. Dam* it! He'd been tricked by her even after being warned!

Nora, tapped her fingers against the chair and asked him slowly, "What do you mean yet?"

"Huh?", he asked in confusion.

"What do you mean that you have not slept with her 'yet'? There is no yet. Ian Frost you keep your hands and other parts of your body to yourself and away from my friend. And now, you can tell me what it is that you are hiding from me."

Ian frowned. He was not going to be fooled twice. "What do you mean?"

Finally, he had the satisfaction of seeing Nora look confused. Unfortunately, it did not last long as she came back," Something is up. I am sure of it. Why would Isabella lie to me otherwise?"

"She lied about being pregnant?" Ian asked, trying to put on his most innocent face.

"About that! Why did she lie to me that she slept with you?"

"Look... I... I took her to my house that night. She was drunk and I did not know her address. I think she was probably just yanking your chain. But why would you say that she is pregnant? She isn't right?"

Nora gave a small guilty smile," Well, I needed the shock value... And no she is not pregnant. But don't you dare think to go anywhere near her! She does not need the drama in her life."

Ian secretly breathed a sigh of relief at narrowly escaping. Thankfully, Isabella's story kept her distracted. But he would need to warn Demon about her suspicions. No wonder he'd warned them that they wouldn't be able to hide things for long since she had really sharp instincts. Even after so many precautions, it was a waste. He just hoped that Arabelle would be found soon.

"So, Miss Nora, would you now like me to give you that map to my brother's office? I'm sure he'd like a nice long lunch break."

He waggled his brows teasingly and watched Nora turn a bit red as she hurriedly apologized for the confusion before running away.

Finally, he went to the person who was responsible about this and knelt down," Are you alright?"

Isabella gave him a sheepish smile and slowly crawled out. As he extended his hand to help her, he gently rubbed her head," That was quite a whack you took to the head."

Isabela winced and groaned," I never imagined Nora would do something like this."

"Next time you decide to start a rumor, at least make it something less mysterious and scandalous. I don't need my reputation tarnished." Ian murmured, his hand still in her hair, caressing the crown of her head gently.

Isabella playfully nudged him, "Oh, please. Your reputation can handle a little scandal."

As she said this, she suddenly realized how close and intimately they stood, as he held her with one hand while his hand was entangled in the other hand. The moment seemed to freeze as Ian too had probably realized the sudden change in atmosphere.

Looking away, she broke the gaze and bowed her head, " I'll go now too. At least, Nora is not much suspicious anymore. I'll... I'll go now."

Ian watched her hug her purse as she walked towards the door of his office. She'd almost reached the door when he called out, "Bella?"

Isabella stopped and turned around, looking at him questioningly.

Ian looked at the girl and suddenly felt doubtful. He'd been about to ask her out for a date but somehow he wasn't too sure. Seeing her expectant face, waiting for him to say something, he sighed, "Its nothing. Just wait for a few moments. That way you won't mistakenly run into Nora."

Isabella nodded and smiled, "Goodbye Ian."

Chapter 326: Caius

It was dark but as Erasmi watched the young boy march out confidently and stand between him and the lady, he could not help but be amazed at the child. This was Caius. His son. He was so brave. Standing there. Protecting the woman he called his mother.

Even though he was taken aback at his son's unexpected appearance, Erasmi could not help but feel proud. The boy's defiant stance, despite the fear in his eyes, struck a chord within him. He crouched down to be at eye level with Caius, a sincere expression on his face.

"Caius, right?" Erasmi spoke gently, "My name is Erasmi Frost."

Caius squinted at him, suspicion evident in his eyes. "Why are you here? What do you want? Are you here to trouble my mother like those bad people?"

He glanced at Mrs. Mercer who stood behind the child and then back at the boy, "No. I'm not here to trouble your mother. I'm here to help her. I'm a friend."

"Friend? But we were going to go to mother's friend's house tonight. Are you here to take us?"

"No. That plan is cancelled. Your mother was worried about you so she was running away. But now that I've come here to help her, there's no need to run, right?"

Erasmi watched the little boy give him a hopeful look but instead of believing him, he looked at his mother and asked, "Is that right, mother?"

Erasmi sent a challenging glance to the woman, daring her to defy what he'd told the boy.

Mrs Mercer looked between her son and Erasmi Frost before nodding slowly, "Yes, baby. He's a friend."

Caius nodded and sent Erasmi a measuring look, "Then don't hurt my mother. I'm warning you."

With that, the little boy trudged back into the house, leaving the man and woman standing there.

Erasmi crossed his arms in front of him and questioned the woman, "Maybe you'd like to come clear?"

Mrs. Mercer cleared her throat and inhaled deeply, "Alright. Can you give me a moment? I'll put him back to sleep and then..."

Eransmi nodded, "Sure. I'll go and get your luggage. And Mrs Mercer? I've extended you a hand of friendship. I'll advise you to not refuse it and try my enmity." He did not like the look of fear that the woman sent him but he was not above forcing her to give up Caius. He did not want to harm the child, but he was not willing to stay out of the boy's life because of someone's absurd fear.

As he walked back into the house, he sat down in the same place he had int he afternoon and casually looked around. His guess had been accurate. The woman had been planning to escape. He winced to think what would have happened if he'd not read the letters or come here later.

Finding his son would have been like looking for a needle in a haystack. Erasmi sighed and looked at his watch.

Mrs Mercer came down after almost an hour and as he looked at her expression, he could not help but shake his head. The woman looked as if she'd swallowed a few lemons. She'd probably hoped that he would be gone if she took her sweet time coming down.

"Would you like something to drink?"

"All I need is an explanation, Mrs Mercer."

The woman winced. "Please call me Ava."

Erasmi nodded but continued to maintain his silence.

The woman sighed and continued, " How did you know we would be leaving tonight?"

"I'm waiting for an explanation, Mrs Mercer. But to answer your question, your tickets were on the stand there when I was about to leave."

The lady winced at her own foolishness and explained slowly, " I wasn;t escaping from you. Caius has been suffering here for the past few weeks. You saw those troublemakers when you came here. But I think he has been suffering much more than he has let on. And I've been useless in helping him. In fact my son is not trying to protect me. A few weeks ago, another set of people had come to my door at night and they tried to come inside forcefully. I tried calling the police but they came too late. So, I got scared and planned to take Caius to yuor grandfather and ask him for help."

"However, before I could do that, my ex husband arrived here. He... was not a good man."

Erasmi watched her struggle to breathe and shudder. Quietly, he stood up and poured her a glass of water. As the woman calmed down, she continued, " Anyway, I'd been hiding from him here in this small town. But some people told him my location and he arrived here yesterday. Thankfully, we were not at home when he arrived, so I requested a kind neighbor to lie to him and say that we'd already left town."

"So you were really going to leave this place and run away?"

"Yes. I have no choice. He is not a man who can be reasoned with! He's violent and prone to temper tantrums. I saw him yesterday from afar, banging on my door, shouting vile things about how I was a slut* for breaking off my marriage and running away. He said that he had proof that I was an unfit mother and he would take him away. I can't fight him. He is a powerful lawyer...And I have no support."

"Mrs Mercer... Ava. I know it might be difficult for you to trust me but please try. I've just told my son that I am your friend and here to help you. I will keep the first promise that I have made to him."

Ava looked at him carefully, wanting to believe this man but her past experience telling her not to. However, this man was Caius' biological father. And if her son could have a father who would be a positive male figure then she was willing to take a risk...

Hesitantly she gave him a nod, which Erasmi acknowledged with a nod of his own.

Chapter 327: Just You Wait!

"Mmmmm, something smells good enough to eat," As his hands crept around her waist, Nora was instantly surrounded by warmth that she had come to crave all the time.

"Of course they smell good enough to eat. I'm the one making them." Nora pouted as she flipped the egg slowly, while Demetri nuzzled against her.

"I'm not talking about the eggs, kitten. You smell delicious."

Nora turned her head to face him, a playful glint in her eyes. "I'm not on the menu, you know."

"That's not what you said when I was savoring you in the morning," he retorted with a wicked smirk.

Nora made a face at Demetri, rolling her eyes before moving to take the eggs off the skillet.

"Come on, have some breakfast."

"Mrs Frost. What special day is it today, that you've prepared a feast?"

Demetri asked as he looked down at the multiple dishes spread out on the table.

"Its a bribe." Nora said easily as she sat opposite Demetri, looking at him with narrowed eyes.

Demetri raised an eyebrow, feigning surprise. "Bribery, you say? What do you want in exchange for this culinary delight?"

Nora sighed and looked at Demetri's tired face. Something was bothering him that he was hiding from her.

"The truth."

Demetri lifted the plates and casually slipped a few pieced into her plate before taking a few himself and looked at her, "What truth?"

"The truth that has put that look in your eyes. You may be expressionless, but I have learnt to read your expressionlessness. You're hiding something Demetri Frost. And I am not happy about it."

"Mmm. I know, It's why you've been scaring poor Ian to death."

"Ha! He called to complain to you?"

"Nah! He's too scared of you to whine to me about you. He did, however share his misery with Seb who did not fail to miss his chance to make fun of him."

Nora grinned and shook her head," Seb wouldn't miss a chance to trouble Ian if the man was even drowning. He'd wait until he was almost under before jumping in to save him." Her smile disappeared, however, as she complained," And you are changing the topic."

Demetri smiled," Yes, I am."

"But why?"

"Nora, do you trust me?"

"Yes, of course."

Demetri looked at her carefully and nodded," Thank you. Then I'll ask only this of you, don't ask any questions for now. I want you to prepare for our wedding with an open and relaxed mind and for your exams. Nothing else. And if there comes a time that I feel like I can no longer handle things alone, then I'll let you know. Can you do that?"

Nora looked at Demetri carefully and nodded slowly," I can do that. But I don't like it. And I am warning you Demetri Frost, if you ever try to do something like this again, hide things from me then I will... hang you upside down from the ceiling till you resemble a bat!"

Demetri smiled," Noted. I won't hide anything from you in the future after this matter."

Nora nodded with a nod. She'd only promised to not ask any questions. It did not mean she could not investigate on her own."

Demetri caught her devious smile and shook his head. She was going to try and investigate. He'd have to divert her.

"Have you decided on your bridesmaids?"

Nora stabbed at her fluffy eggs and sighed, "There's only Isabella and Evangeline for now. Isabella is the maid of honour so she is going to be paired with Ian. And if I pair Evana with anyone but Lucy, then she will probably kill me in my sleep. So, that leaves Erasmi, Seb and Gabe as single. I've already told them to let me know if they'd like me to add someone to pair with them. Gabe did not have a reply. Erasmi said he'll get back to me and Seb looked as if he might have an apoplexy at the thought of bringing someone to the wedding."

"I have a name that you might be able to add." Demetri said quietly as he sipped the coffee.

"Who?"

"Olivia. If you don't mind, you can ask her to be one of your bridesmaids."

Nora's face lit up! "Yes! I can do that! I actually like Olivia. And that reminds me. Is Olivia married. I don't think I ever saw her with anyone. And if she isn't then why does she not have the surname Frost?"

Demetri smiled, "She is not our biological sister. Our sworn sister. Livi is connected to the Frosts the way you are connected to my brothers."

It took a moment for the penny to drop. The way she was connected...

"You mean..."

"Mmm... she holds the heart of one of the Frost brothers in her hands."

Demetri watched the wheels turn as she started eliminating one by one and wondered if she would be correct. "It can't be you, Gabe, Erasmi or Lucien. So it has to be Ian or Seb?"

Nora felt incredulous. Out of all the Frost brothers, these two were the most notorious playboys. She knew of course that once they fell for someone they would probably be as faithful as the rest of the Frosts but she could barely understand the fact that... either one of them had actually fallen for the girl and yet continued to keep his distance.

"Is it Ian?"

Demetri smiled and shook his head. Nora's eyes widened further. It was Seb?

"Really? How is that even possible? Seb? The one who swears to remain single all his life? But if he really in love..."

"Why does he not pursue her? Why is he not already with her?", Demetri completed her question for her, to which she nodded.

But Demetri simply smiled and wiped his mouth, before standing up and beginning to clear the table, "I am not telling you."

"You fraud! How can you tell me only half a story and then leave me hanging."

Demetri shrugged, "How I did just now. It's not my story to share after all."

With a cry of frustration, Nora stood up and ran to Demetri, jumping onto his back. With a jerk, Demetri caught her knees as they reached his waist and teased her, "You think I'm a tree, kitten? Climbing on me like this? Hmm?"

"Ha! You didn't have a problem when I was climbing you in the morning, Mr Husband. Just you wait, I'll find out everything!"

Chapter 328: What Happened To You?

Evangeline paused her movie as she turned to look at Lucien when she heard the door to the house open. She needed to complain to him! She'd come here all the from Estania for him and instead she was left stuck in his home while he was busy somewhere else.

She knew of course, she could visit with Nora and even explore the place, but she wanted to spend her time with him. Before she could complain however, a look at his face had her mouth falling open.

Quickly, she stood up and raced to him, "What happened to you? Were you involved in a bar fight?"

Lucien gave her a half grin which soon turned into a wince as she touched the bruises on his face. As she looked at him in sympathy, Lucien groaned, "This is nothing. You should see Seb."

"You fought like this with your brother?" Evana asked incredulously.

"Hmm."

Evana watched as he unbuttoned that staid shirt of his and quickly tried to think well, "Why did you hit Seb so bad? And why did he hit you?"

"Hey? Who said I hit Seb? He'll make my life a living hell if I try to hit him." Lucien groaned as he threw the shirt into the hamper before walking into the kitchen.

"But you said... you fought with your brother...", Evana asked in confusion.

"Yes! Not with Seb. He and I fought together with Gabe."

As he took out the first aid box, Evana took it from his hand and picked up the medicine and Q-tip to apply to him.

"But why were you fighting amongst yourselves? Does it have something to do with the division of your grandfather's assets?"

Lucien winced and looked at Evana in confusion, "Huh? No it has nothing to do with money. Its..."

As Lucien tailored off, he paused. Demetri had specifically asked them to keep these things from Nora but maybe they would be of help.

With a burst of inspiration, he questioned Evana, "Babe? Your shadow guards are still around?"

As Evana nodded, Lucien quickly asked her to spend as much time with Nora as possible. This way, Nora would have another layer of protection.

A frail girl sat huddled by the window, a haunting sadness in her eyes. The room was shrouded in the darkness, the only source of dim light in the room coming from the cloudy sky outside. The soft patter of the rain was the only sound that echoed in the room. Arabelle gently traced the patterns that the rain made on the window glass and smiled absently.

Just then the door to the room opened and a woman entered and called out, "Miss Arabelle. I brought your favorite spaghetti."

She approached Arabelle cautiously, the creaking floorboards beneath her barely audible over the rain. "Miss," she said softly, her voice a gentle murmur amidst the rhythmic drumming of raindrops.

Arabelle's gaze, however, remained fixated on the outside world, oblivious to the woman's presence. Slowly, she placed the steaming plate on the side and carefully touched the girl's shoulder, in an effort to connect, "Miss. Please, you need to eat." she spoke pleadingly.

However, she received no response, as if she was talking to a wall. "You can't keep doing this to yourself. Didn't you tell your mother to bring you from there? To take you away from that man?"

This time, Arabelle jerked, "His name is Gabe."

"Who cares what his name is! He is the one who held you there and kept you imprisoned. You should forget about him now that you are away from him!"

As the woman spoke with frustration, Arabelle closed her eyes and covered her ears, refusing to listen. Her short hair which was only now regrowing after her surgery stood on end as she pulled at them to block out the woman's irritating voice.

However, the woman continued to talk and continued, "Don't worry. He will never come back to you. We will keep you safe from the horrible man."

In an instant, the woman let out a scream of pain and horror as she found the plate of hot spaghetti on her foot while Arabelle screamed, "His name is Gabe Frost! He is Gabe. The only one who has always loved me! And taken care of me! I want to go back to him! You are the one who has kept me imprisoned! All of you! Why did I call that woman? If I had not called her, then my Gabe would still be with me!"

The caretaker had already run out of the room, scared by Arabelle and in pan due to her burning injury while Arabelle continued to scream inside.

Soon, a team of doctors and nurses rushed in and quickly worked in tandem to calm her down and control her temper and she was put to sleep as she continued to murmur Gabe's name.

Two hours later

A woman gently opened the door and peered inside. All traces of the assault from earlier had been erased from the room, leaving it spotless.

Arabelle opened her eyes slowly at the sound of the noise and smiled slowly, "Hello there Mrs Grady. How are you?"

The lady smiled and hobbled inside, "Very well, Miss Arabelle. Here, I brought a plate of spaghetti for you."

Arabelle smiled and took the plate, bringing it close to her nose, "Ahh! This is so good. Its such a great feeling to be back home. Thanks Mrs G."

"You're welcome, miss. Call me if you need anything."

"Of course. Thanks Mrs G. What happened to your foot? Why are you limping?"

A fearful look passed over the woman as she quickly answered, "It is nothing miss. Just an accident."

"Take care Mrs G."

As the lady closed the door behind her, Arabelle closed her eyes and savored the spaghetti. If only she could have a glass of wine with that. It would be perfect.

With a pout, she picked up her phone and stared at the camera in it. Sigh! Why was her hair growing out so slowly! She needed to get away from here as soon as possible. She had so many things to do...

Chapter 329: Against the World

Caius crept into the room slowly to observe the man whom his mother had called a friend. The man lay sprawled on the couch in their living room, snoring softly. His mother had warned him in the morning to not startle or wake up the man while she'd gone to buy groceries. He was supposed to be in his room.

But he'd already finished all his homework and even studied some more. And he was bored. He knew his mother wanted to protect him but if she'd allowed to let the man stay here, then he couldn't be very dangerous, right.

Curiosity written all over his face, he walked to the man and peered over the man's sleeping form. And frowned. This man looked familiar. Was he some movie star? He was pretty sure he had seen him on television. Also, he looked so huge. He wasn't even able to fit on their couch.

As he stared down at the man, he eyes suddenly snapped open. Startled, Caius yelped, jerked back so vigorously that he lost his balance, and comically tumbled backward like a clumsy acrobat.

Erasmi, who'd just woken up, blinked in confusion, wondering what had just unfolded as he saw the little boy sprawled on the floor.

Erasmi's initial confusion, however, turned into a bemused smile as he gazed at the disheveled Caius on the floor. "Well, well! Looks like I've got myself a little ninja intruder," he chuckled, his deep voice resonating through the room.

Caius, still on the floor but now grinning sheepishly, quickly scrambled back to his feet. "I-I'm sorry, sir. My mom told me not to wake you up, but I got bored," he confessed.

The mixture of innocence, mischief and curiosity in his eyes made Erasmi smile and he patted the little guy's head, "It's alright. It was time to wake up anyways."

As Erasmi stood up, he loomed over the little boy and tousled his hair, "And don't call me Sir. Makes me think of an old grey professor. You can call me Erasmi."

"Erasmi?" Caius asked with a cute little frown.

"What? You don't like my name?"

"Isn't it very girlish?"

Erasmi chuckled. "It is, isn't it? I suffered quite a bit during my school days for it. But I think its quite unique. Like your name."

"Its alright."

"You don't like your name?" Erasmi asked as he started to walk towards the bathroom and washed his face.

Caius followed behind and answered, "I like my middle name better. Its also unique and no one can tease me about it."

"Really? What is your middle name?"

"Demetri."

Erasmi paused and smiled. "Demetri is a good name."

"Thanks. When I grow up, I'll use my middle name." Caius proclaimed. Erasmi chuckled at that. If Caius really did that, his brother would gloat no end. That smug smile would be pasted on his face permanently.

"Your mom is not home?"

"Nah. She's gone to town to buy groceries." The boy said slowly, a bit of worry in his eyes.

"Why does that make you worried?"

Caius sighed. The anger and helplessness in the little boys breath made Erasmi narrow his eyes as the boy explained, "Some people in this town are bad..."

"And they trouble your mother?" Erasmi asked quietly.

"Yes."

Erasmi paused as the boy followed him to the washroom and paused. It seemed little Caius had something to say. " You want to say something?"

Caius seemed to be considering his options as he tapped his fingers against his thigh.

"Are you really here to help mother and me?", he asked in a rush.

Erasmi paused, "Of course. What is it?"

"I... I didn't tell mother yesterday because she said we were going away but now..."

"What happened?"

"I've been suspended from school. They said I cheated in the exam." Erasmi watched the little boy struggle to say that as he shuffled his feet and tears glittered in his eyes.

"And did you cheat?"

"No! I did not. Not even a bit."

Erasmi nodded and gently patted the boy's shoulder, "It's the weekend. You'll be going to school on Monday as normal. But you have to tell your mother later. Then she will know but won't have a chance to worry. Right?"

Caius gave him a gratified nod and quickly raced away as he said, "I'll make some coffee for you while you go to the bathroom. My mother needs coffee before she can even talk in the morning. And she said I make the best coffee."

Of course, Erasmi knew the problem. His little boy was being tortured in school and this must have been the final way they could have thought of getting rid of him and pushing his dignity into the ground. But they were mistaken if they thought that he would let anyone get away by harming his son.

Erasmi nodded and watched the boy skip away. The next few days were going to be critical. On the one hand, he would need to convince Mrs Mercer to let him integrate into the little kid's life. On the other, he would have to do a balancing act for Caius. The boy loved his mother a lot. Which meant that any chance of using pressure had dwindled to negligible.

It seemed he would have to use the Frost name to give these people a taste of real power and suppress them once and for all.

As he walked out, engrossed in planning a perfect counter attack on the school, he walked out to see the little child standing there, waiting expectantly with a cup of coffee.

Bemused at the muddy color, Erasmi wondered what kind of coffee would have such a color and took the cup quietly thanking the kid. Caius looked at him and then at the cup as if asking, "How was the coffee."

Erasmi took a sip of the coffee and choked on the thing, the urge to throw up. What kind of horrible coffee was this? Why did it taste of... mint?

However, as he moved to spit out the coffee, he noticed the boy's dejected gaze and quickly swallowed it. "Its correct. You do make somereally good coffee."

Chapter 330: A Rowdy Girls' Night

"I've already tried white, you know. It is not my colour." Nora said as she sipped the coffee and looked at the other three girls accompanying her. She'd gone with Antonio's mother's arrangements in everything for the wedding, only for everything to ultimately fall apart.

Thankfully, the wedding had not been like the one's she'd imagined in her childhood. That would have truly pi**ed her off.

Isabella waved her hand in agreement. "And I am not wearing a horrible blush pink! It made me look like a cotton candy disaster. If I hadn't been worried about troubling you, I would have accused you of being a horrible friend for putting me through that torture! But since you did not marry that je*k, I forgave you."

Nora chuckled, appreciating Isabella's honesty. "Well, at least we learned a valuable lesson. And I'll make sure that there is no blush pink in the wedding colours.

Evana bit her lip, wondering if she should make a suggestion.

Isabella caught the gesture and waved at her, "Just say whatever is on your mind. We're in this together."

Evana nodded and took a deep breath as she asked, "Would you like to go for traditional Estanian wedding colors? Estanian wedding colors reflect a vibe of happiness and positivity. I know that since childhood, you must have some thoughts but maybe you'd like to choose those."

That caught Nora's interest. She'd already asked Uncle Alexander to be the one to give her away. Wearing the traditional Estanian colors would be a nod to her father's heritage.

Isabella, however, was not willing to risk it, "Wait a minute. First tell me what colors would these be? I am not going to risk turning into a christmas tree or a fruit pop next."

Evana giggled at the imagery of Isabella looking like a fruit pop and added, "It can be a red mixed with golden or silver for the bride and a champagne or silver for the bridesmaids."

"Well, alright. I can work with that." Isabella nodded. "You have my permission to use these colors. I look good in both of those colors. And Evana will too so no need to ask her."

Evana shook her head at Isabella's back handed compliment and sighed. Though she had only met the girl twice, her style of talking had touched her. She was straight forward and almost without malice. It was a good feeling to have another girl friend.

Nora nodded, looking forward to this new Chapter in her life. The last time, she had been so lonely and burdened with making the arrangements, running around, that she had almost lost herself. Thankfully, this time she did not have to do much just have these fun meetings and discussions with her best girls and let the wedding organizer handle everything else!

"I quite like the idea of wearing a red gown. Evana show me pictures. But we need to add someone else in the picture to discuss the maid of honor dress. Then the three of you can decide which color you want."

"Three?" Isabella asked curiously. Did you get another new cousin that I do not know of?"

"No! You know her. Just not quite well. She's right here."

Curious now, Isabella and Evana both looked around the cafe for the third mysterious bridesmaid when Nora hollered, "Olivia!"

Olivia, who's been doing her best to disappear behind the counter, raised her head and waved at them all before quickly turning back to her till. She needed to look busy. Lucy had already warned her that Nora would definitely catch her and now she was here. And Olivia needed to avoid the train wreck coming her way.

But Nora was not about to let go. Ignoring the looks she was getting from the other customers, she waved at Olivia and directly proposed, "Olivia? Will you be my bridesmaid? I promise to not make you look like a cotton candy or a Christmas tree!"

Everyone chuckled at the vivacious proposal, congratulating the bride while another customer clapped, "Now this is a proposal we don't often get to see. Come on, Olivia, say yes to the girl."

Olivia waved at everyone and quickly made her way to the table with the three girls as she threatened Nora, "Just for this stunt, I ought to ban you from this cafe!"

Making her already big eyes even bigger, Nora put on a cute expression as she asked, "Then, are you rejecting me?"

"As if anyone can. Look at yourself in the mirror. No wonder poor Demon fell for you hook, line and sinker." Olivia shook her head as she pulled the chair. It made her feel a little awkward to join the girls. She did not want to reveal the past but knowing the Frosts, Nora and Evana had already been apprised of her story probably.

However, both the girls did not ask anything making her feel comfortable. Soon, she could not help but laugh at the antics of Isabella and Nora who seemed to be intent on making everything difficult for the wedding organizer and the poor Frost brothers.

"I think you are going to turn into a bridezilla Nora. And then we will have to run for our lives."

"Ha! Me and a bridezilla. As if. I am going to be the coolest bride ever." Nora beamed at the girls who simply shook their heads in indulgence.

"Well, how about we discuss something for the bachelorette party?" Isabella leaned in and whispered softly.

Nora leaned closer as well and said, "No strippers."

"Why? This is not fair. You've got Demon Frost and this 'Angel' here has her Lucifer." What about us poor single girls? No. Olivia and I want hot and se*y male strippers! At least six of them, in all colors and sizes..." Isabella pouted and complained.

Before Nora could say anything, a droll voice sounded, "Well well, Miss Isabella. That is quite a bold confession to make in broad daylight. Are you sure six is enough?"

Isabella looked at Ian who stood there with a smile on his face and groaned.