

Benefits 351

Chapter 351: Thankful

Isabella clutched the file tightly, standing before the imposing entrance of Frost Industries, her mind echoing with doubts that refused to dissipate. Even the pep talk she had given herself that morning seemed futile against the persistent waves of uncertainty that washed over her.

It was Nora who had first approached her with the idea, explaining in hushed tones that Ian urgently needed a new assistant due to some undisclosed incident involving his previous one. The sudden and mysterious vacancy raised Isabella's suspicions, making her wonder if there was more to the story than Nora let on.

Just a mere two days ago, Ian Frost had been an inadvertent witness to her most humiliating moment, and now, she found herself on the verge of working for him? The timing seemed too perfect, too much of a coincidence. Isabella probed Nora, seeking reassurance, and though her friend insisted it was her own idea, the doubts lingered.

"Come on, bella baby! You're my maid of honor. You have to help me."

"How does being your MOH come into this? Your wedding is related to Ian Frost having an office assistant?"

"See, Ian is begging to take Nina. If he takes Nina, Demetri will be stressed. If he is stressed then I will be stressed. If I am stressed, I'll turn into a bridezilla! Bella baby! You have to save me from turning into a bridezilla."

Isabella shook her head at the sheer lack of logic in that argument. Her and Nora had their share of illogical things but this one took the cake. And yet, here she was, standing at the threshold of Frost Industries, ready to work as Ian Frost's assistant.

However, the only problem now was... how to face her new boss? The man had actually stepped forward to defend her, only to have his head almost bitten off by her because she'd been too embarrassed.

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly, muttering to herself, "Its okay, Isi. You can do it. You've already put your foot in your mouth. What more can go wrong?"

Her words, however, seemed to jinx herself as the moment she stepped inside, her heel caught on the step, causing her to lose her balance and tumble face-first onto the floor, papers scattering in every direction. Cursing under her breath, she hastily straightened herself, attempting to stand up. But as fate would have it, she flailed again, this time colliding with the floor and adding an unfortunate knock to her knee.

Isabella cursed herself anew, bewildered by the sudden appearance of a seemingly klutzy gene she never knew existed. Could this be a cosmic signal, a warning sign urging her to reconsider the path she was about to take?

Taking a moment to collect herself, Isabella closed her eyes, drawing a deep breath to quell the rising embarrassment. Slowly, she attempted to stand up once more. Even with her eyes shut, she could almost sense the curious gazes of the few people in the lobby who had become spectators to her impromptu performance.

Thankfully, she'd come early enough that there weren't many people to witness her embarrassing situation. As she thought to gather her belongings, she sensed a presence near her, and when she opened her eyes, she was met with a pair of impeccably polished leather shoes right in front of her. Slowly, her gaze traveled upward, taking in the long legs that seemed to stretch on forever, until she reached eye level and found Ian Frost peering down at her with a mixture of surprise and amusement.

"Well, this is quite the entrance," he remarked, a subtle twinkle in his eyes as he added, "While I do like the current position we are in, I don't think the location is quite suitable."

The innuendo was not lost on Isabella and she blushed furiously, looking at the hand that he'd extended to help her up. "Thank you," she mumbled, accepting his hand and rising to her feet with as much grace as she could muster.

As she straightened, Ian swiftly squatted to the ground, his sudden movement catching her off guard. Startled, she took an involuntary step back, teetering dangerously close to falling backward once again. A rush of panic surged through her until, unexpectedly, Ian's hand deftly caught her leg, preventing an imminent stumble.

"Don't move, Isi," he said calmly, his voice a reassuring anchor in the midst of her momentary instability. "We don't need you to be carried out on a stretcher. I'm just gathering the scattered papers."

"Thanks," she managed to say, freezing in spot.

His touch, though intended for practical purposes, sent a subtle warmth radiating through, making her extremely aware of the position of his hand on her leg.

Once the papers were back in order, Ian stood up, releasing her leg. Their eyes briefly met, and Isabella found herself captivated by the understanding in his gaze.

His small smile as he said sympathetically, "First day jitters are the worst." made her heart go warm as he then handed her the papers, with a teasing smile, "All set. Now, let's ensure that you safely make your way to your new office without any further acrobatics for the rest of the day."

Isabella looked at his back as he walked in front of her and felt a lump in her throat. If she'd seen concern or questions about that day in his gaze, she would never have been able to work here. But by letting her be and not making a fuss, he'd ensured that she felt easy and comfortable. And she could not have been more thankful. Nora was right. Any girl that the Frostie brothers would choose, she would be lucky. She'd seen Nora blossom with Demetri and Ian's personality gave her a whole new level of respect for them.

Once they were alone in the elevator, Ian explained, "Initially, you were to pretend that you were working for Demetri but I've thought of a better way to handle things. For now, you'll be interning with my assistant but..."

As the elevator doors opened, Ian stopped talking and when he next spoke, his voice changed, "Isabella. Sit there for now." and strode into his office.

Chapter 352: An Assistant

Ian stormed into his office, the door slamming against the frame with an ominous resonance that reverberated through the room. "Miss North, what exactly are you searching for?"

Tiara jerked around, her eyes widening in trepidation as she met Ian's cold, piercing gaze.

"No...nothing," she stammered.

"Nothing?" Ian's voice dripped with suspicion. "Then, why are you in my office at this moment?" He moved deliberately towards his desk, scrutinizing the surroundings for any sign of betrayal.

"What are you hiding behind your back?" He asked softly as he advanced further into the room.

Tiara's voice quivered. "Nothing, sir."

"Miss North." Ian's tone turned even more severe. "I don't like asking the same thing repeatedly. So, enlighten me."

She shivered under the weight of his gaze, her guilt palpable. Meeting his icy stare, Tiara reluctantly placed an envelope on his desk. "I was attempting to keep this here."

Ian glanced down at the envelope, his expression darkening. "What is this?"

"My resignation letter."

"Resignation?" Ian's eyes bore into hers. "Miss North, why do you want to resign?"

"It's personal reasons, sir," Tiara stammered.

Ian's smile took on a more dangerous edge as he replied, "Personal reasons?" Or are you trying to get away? he thought to himself.

His tone softened, a feigned sympathy in his eyes. "Miss North, we've worked closely together. If there's something troubling you, perhaps I can help. Resigning might not be the only solution."

Tiara hesitated, her eyes wavering under the illusion of empathy Ian projected. "I... It's just complicated, sir."

Ian strode forward and gently placed a hand on her shoulder, "Complicated, you say? People go through rough patches. I believe in addressing issues rather than escaping from them, Miss North. We have a well-established support system in the company. You know you can ask for help."

Tiara swallowed hard, guilt gnawing at her. "I appreciate your concern, sir. It's just... I never intended for it to come to this."

"Intentions can sometimes be misunderstood," Ian replied, maintaining a facade of understanding. "Why don't you share what's bothering you, Miss North? It might be easier to resolve than you think."

Ian shook his head with cynicism as he watched Miss North almost break down as she fell to her knees and apologized, "I'm sorry, Mr. Frost. I'm really sorry. I did not mean to. I really did not want to betray you."

Slowly, he guided her to the chair and helped her into it, "Explain yourself."

"I... I shared some private information about you and the others with the Winthrop group... I did not want to. But Lady Elena has some..."

As Tiara North continued to cry, Ian sighed and placed a file in front of her, "She has these?" Tiara picked up the file from the desk and then threw it with shivering hands as she looked at Ian with shock.

"You... you knew."

"Miss North, this is the internet era. You should know that everything on the internet once will leave a digital footprint."

"When... when did you know?" Tiara asked, her eyes downcast with shame.

"About your antics in university or your betrayal?" Ian asked with a question.

"Both," she said in a small voice.

"The pictures were never a secret, Miss North. The betrayal however, I was unaware of until a few days ago."

Tiara North looked up with hopeful eyes as she realized that the pictures that she had been fearing would surface had never been a problem and she had not been thrown out of the company despite the news of the betrayal. With a trembling voice, she asked, "Then..."

Ian scoffed, "Miss North. You overestimate yourself. You are well aware of my private life and my own...preferences. So, I am in no position to judge what you do in your personal time or in the past. The betrayal, however..."

"Then why did you not..."

As Tiara questioned him, she came to a realization, "You did not fire me because you intend to..."

"You almost made me question your intelligence, Miss North." Ian said calmly.

Tiara fell to her knees once again as she said, "No, please, Mr Frost. If she discovers that I passed on wrong information, she will share those pictures everywhere. It may...I'll be destroyed, Mr. Frost. My marriage will be ruined! My husband has just transferred to a different city. I'll move there quietly. Please, Mr. Frost."

"You think you can escape so easily, Miss North?"

"Mr. Frost. Please. My husband is a very orthodox man. I will be destroyed, please I beg you. I wanted to come to you but I was scared. I...Please help me."

Ian sighed, "Miss North. You took this decision out of my hands when you betrayed me instead of coming to me. Now, the only way to get even an idea of what Elena is planning is you, so even if I want to let you go, you're in too deep."

Miss North continued to cry and Ian could only look away. "Miss North, please compose yourself. I'm sure if your husband loves you, he will be able to overlook your past. But, if you are this scared, I'll try and make sure that these pictures are deleted from the web."

Tiara North stood up and quickly wiped her eyes as she looked at him, "You can do that? Of course you can do that. I should have known. Mr. Frost, I'll do everything you say. I swear I never meant to betray you. I will pass on everything that Lady Elena asks me to do and do everything as you say. You won't have a complaint in the future."

Ian smiled as he said, "Miss North. You are right about one thing. I won't have a complaint against you in the future. Your resignation has been accepted. Today marks the beginning of your notice period."

As Ian said this and turned around, his eyes widened. The door had not closed behind him and the entire altercation had been noticed by Isabella who stood there frozen and wide eyed.

Chapter 353: Kind Intentions= Blue

Isabella wished she could either be invisible or a fly on the wall in Ian's office. At least then she would have been able to hear what was being said. Or she should have maybe tried to learn lip reading. Then she would know what the dialogues being said were for the drama that had played out in front of her.

She would have to ask Nora for details. When Nora had first proposed to work for Ian, she'd been so lost in her own feelings of humiliation that she'd not asked much. The only thing on her mind had been to find a way to get out of this. All sorts of assistant-boss scenarios played in her head, her natural curiosity and gossipy nature piqued.

Could it be that the problem with Ian's assistant was that he'd slept with her and then things went sour? She wanted more while the playboy refused to settle? As she was thinking this, Ian turned around and his gaze directly caught hers. She widened her eyes. Uh oh, she'd been caught red handed staring at them. Did her face look as if she'd been imagining embarrassing things?

As he turned to walk towards her, Isabella prepared herself to apologize and be scolded but before she could take another step or open her mouth, the man closed the door with a soft click, putting in some privacy. Now what was she supposed to do?

Ian turned around and stared at the woman who was now begging again and sighed, "Miss North. Please compose yourself. The fact that you have not been thrown out of the company is the limit of my leniency. Now, I would suggest that you take the consequences of your actions and walk out of here with dignity. The woman who is going to replace you is already here. You can begin her training. She will be an assistant to you as far as the HR is concerned. I will personally handle your resignation until then."

Tiara North looked at the implacable face and straightened herself. She'd worked for this man for five years and knew for all his laidback personality, the man was ruthless and unmoved in his decisions. She'd have to take what was given.

With a small bow, she thanked the man and walked out.

As the door closed behind her, she noticed the young woman standing there still like a statue. With a cold face, she looked at her, "You can sit there, Miss. I'll see to you in a few minutes."

Isabella watched the woman go and released the breath she had not realized she was holding. Even with her tear-stained face, she looked intimidating. She looked at the closed door and hesitated. Should she go in or not?

Her dilemma was solved when Ian called her phone, "Come in, Isabella."

Once inside Ian's office, Isabella hesitated for a moment before mustering the courage to speak. "I'm sorry for witnessing that. I should not have."

Ian waved off her apology as he gestured for her to sit and continued, "It's alright. It was my fault for not making sure that the door was closed. Now, quickly, Miss North has resigned just now. For the moment, other than the responsibilities of being my assistant, you would have one added task."

Ian paused and Isabella leaned forward in question, "Yes?"

"Keep an eye on Miss North. She is not to be trusted. So, make sure that you are alert. That's it."

Having said his words, Ian turned back to his file and Isabella hesitated. Perceptive as ever, Ian raised his head and questioned, "You have something you want to ask?"

Isabella nodded hesitantly, "I just want to confirm that I'm not stepping into some murky waters. Is this about an ex hating you? Did... did you and your assistant have, um, a personal relationship and the reason for this caution is a relationship turned sour?"

Ian stilled and leaned back, his gaze penetrating as he met Isabella's eyes. With a measured tone, he refuted her assumption, "No, Isabella. I don't sleep with employees of Frost Industries. Ever. Never have. Never will."

"Oh." That was the only thing she could say. Something about the way he said it niggled at her, though. Realizing that she had been dismissed, Isabelle hurriedly stood up and made to walk out.

It was only as she was at the door again, that Ian's voice sounded again, "Miss Ruffalo, before you go, remember, discretion and professionalism are key in this role. Ask Miss North to take you to the HR."

As she closed the door behind her, Ian's words lingered, and a subtle realization hit her. In that moment, she wasn't just Isabella Ruffalo but Miss Ruffalo; an employee of Frost Industries.

Ian shook his head as he stared at the closed door and mumbled to himself, "Never have, never will. Who are you even talking to? Her or yourself?"

Taking off his spectacle, he rubbed the bridge of his nose, the irony of the words not lost on him. Yes, he'd never dated or even looked at any employee in all this time, making sure to never muddy waters.

However, this time it was going to be a test of his resolve. After all, how was he to continue doing that, when he couldn't take his eyes off his assistant's a**? That tight skirt made him want to pin her against the wall and see for himself if it could be lifted easily...

Shaking his head, Ian breathed deeply. Why did he not think things through before taking his proposition to Nora and Demetri. He'd been toying with the idea of having a fling with Isabella at the back of his mind and now he'd gone and put a stop to that himself. No wonder Nora had been so happy about his proposal and easily accepted the role of taking the job offer to Isabella.

His kind intentions were now going to give him blue balls.

Chapter 354: Nepotism

Isabella sat at her desk, her gaze occasionally drifting toward the closed door on the side. Unexpectedly, she found herself working for Ian Frost, despite lacking hands-on experience and possessing only minimal qualifications.

She'd seen the questions on the faces of the people in the office when Miss North had 'introduced' her while announcing that her only credentials were that she'd been recommended by the 'boss' himself.

"Miss Ruffalo, instead of daydreaming about the boss, it would be more productive if you graced us with your attention on sorting those invoices," Tiara North remarked snidely.

Isabella raised an eyebrow in response. It seemed Miss North had taken an instant disliking to her. And was now bent on picking up a fight. Tsk tsk. The woman did not know how thick skinned she was.

With a subtle but confident smile, she replied, "Certainly, Miss North. I'll get right on those invoices, and maybe, in the process, I'll uncover the secret to catching the boss's attention as efficiently as you have." The hint of sarcasm lingered in her words, leaving a sly undertone as she redirected her focus to the task at hand.

Miss North's face reddened with a mix of anger and speechlessness at Isabella's retort. Clenching her jaw, she retorted, "You may want to focus on your work instead of trying to be clever, Miss Ruffalo. You may have been recommended but that does not give you the right to slack off. Whatever you did to get that recommendation from him, it won't work again. He does not sleep with employees."

"Miss North. You're mistaken. It wasn't Ian Frost who recommended me. And... I don't think I had to get on my knees..."

She let that statement hang in air as she, as she shamelessly revealed that she had witnessed the entire scene earlier. Isabella had not intended to reveal any claws to the woman, but really, this woman was getting on her nerves. And she did not believe in taking things lying down. It would be only detrimental in the long term. She started as she meant to go on. If anyone wanted to make jibes, they better be prepared to receive some too.

Miss North's expression transformed from anger to sheer speechlessness as she marched forward," Miss Ruffalo, you..."

Just then, a cold voice cut through the tension, "What is going on here?"

Ian Frost stood at the doorway, his piercing gaze shifting between Isabella and Miss North.

Tiara North quickly whirled around and apologized," Its' nothing Mr. Frost. Miss Ruffalo seemed to have a few questions after I have repeatedly explained these things to her. Its alright, I'll explain it to her. She's inexperienced after all."

Isabella's eyes narrowed at the barb. The woman was something. She was already trying to undermine her. Just as she opened her mouth to respond, Ian answered, "Miss North, a student is only as smart as the teacher makes them. Make sure the lesson is clear. Miss Ruffalo, you will be following me for the post-Lunch meeting at the downtown hotel today. Miss North can explain the details to you."

"But sir, I was going to lead that meeting... I've been preparing for months..."

"Miss North. That meeting was a chance for you to prove yourself and advance within frost Industries. Since you are resigning, you can handover the work done to Miss Ruffalo."

"But..."

"You are smart enough to not argue, Miss North."

Isabella packed her things for the day, finally breathing a sigh of relief. She'd been worried for nothing about Ian pitying her and thus sending the job offer through Nora. Working for him could be considered a punishment, if anything.

The man was a slave driver. All day, he'd been sending work her way, demanding results with an unyielding intensity.

And then there were all those people who seemed ready to attack her just because she was 'recommended'. It was as if the mere mention of Ian Frost's endorsement had painted a target on her back. Colleagues eyed her with skepticism, attributing her position to favoritism rather than merit. They did not even consider that she might be actually qualified even if she lacked the experience and treated her as if she had below average intelligence.

She couldn't help but wonder if she had stepped into a battlefield rather than an office.

Still, Isabella refused to let the hostility deter her. She was determined to prove herself since she'd been given the chance. If nothing else, she'd learn and gain experience. Offices these days, they almost expected that a twenty something frish graduate should have as many years of work experience. Working experience for Ian Frost would definitely look good on her resume.

As she entered the elevator, Ian followed her inside. She'd not even realized that the man was behind her.

"Isabella? How was your first day? Did you have any more...adventures?", the teasing man had her sending him a second glance. The man had some kind of a split personality? All day he'd been barking orders at her, calling her formally, Miss Ruffalo this and that. She'd not been called Miss Ruffalo in all her life as many times as she'd been called that today.

And now he was teasing her... And then he tapped her nose and grinned even more, "Isabella? Why are you looking dazed?"

"You're not calling me Miss Ruffalo?"

Ian seemed taken aback as he shook his head, "Of course not. This is outside of work hours. Come on, I'll take you home."

Isabella shook her head at that, "Uh. No need. I'll go myself."

"Why? Your house is away from here and on my way. So it's not much of a difference. Do you have other plans?"

Ian did not know why he was pushing but the thought of Isabella going back to see that abusive man had somehow been troubling him so he'd decided that the best option to take care of that would be to spend as much time of the day with her as possible. As long as she was in front of him, he wouldn't have to worry about her.

Of course, he did not think behind the reason for his worry and ignored the little niggling that his heart seemed to be doing. As far as he was concerned, he was looking out for a friend.

Chapter 355: Along The Way

"I..."

Ian turned around to see Isabella standing frozen, her gaze intense as she shook her head. "Why are you not coming?"

Isabella sighed, casting a thin glance his way, and narrowed her eyes. "Because I don't really like having a target pasted on my head. Did you know you have groupies?"

Ian, perplexed, shot a questioning look at Isabella. "Groupies?"

"Groupies? You know, those female fans who might be interested in their idol? Like puck bunnies? Court queens? You get the drift."

Ian grimaced. "I know what 'groupies' means. But I don't know why you would say I have them. I'm no musician or band member."

"Well, I don't know the term that is used in the office, but really, I've been getting glares all day from all the females. I almost feel like I should stick a post-it to my head saying I have nothing to do with Ian Frost. Now, all this because they believe that you favored me over them. Imagine what they'll do if they find out I went home with you. Thanks, but no thanks. I'd like to be invisible for now."

Ian grinned at her response. "But you're not going home 'with' me. I'm just dropping you on the way."

"Doesn't matter, Sir. I am not risking losing my life just for a lift home."

As Isabella attempted to close the elevator doors to go to the ground floor, she failed to miss the heat in Ian's eyes at her addressing him as, "Sir."

Soon, the doors started to close, and Ian cocked his head, giving an order. "Wait for me outside the D bakery. No one will see you there."

Isabella opened her mouth to refuse but the elevator doors closed just then, leaving her with his last order. Sigh. All she wanted to do was get out of these cursed heels and soak in a long nigh bath. But if was going to come with her...

Fine. She'd go to the D bakery and then later, tell him to not continue this in the future.

Outside the D bakery, Isabella stood with a cup of coffee in her hand. Thanks to Ian Frost, she had discovered a good coffee place near the office. The cheesecake on display had looked immensely satisfying as well. Almost worth taking the risk of getting into the Boss man's car.

As she sipped her coffee, she noticed another man walking down the path, and her eyes widened. He, too, caught sight of her, and a slight, mischievous smile played on his lips. Before she could react, he enveloped her in a warm hug.

"Bella baby!" he exclaimed, his arms still around her as he pulled back to look at her. "Well, don't you look absolutely stunning in your formal attire today? I almost didn't recognize you. Did you come for an interview around here somewhere?"

Isabella smiled and nodded at Seb Frost and before she could explain that was working for his brother, the man whistled low as he gave her a once over, "I do hope your boss is either blind or not interested in women. I thought you looked hot in those fitted jeans but this skirt..."

Isabella giggled and was about to refute when a droll voice sounded," I, assure you, her boss is neither blind not disinterested in women."

Seb turned around and cursed at his brother," Dam* Ian! Why are you sneaking up on me?"

As he glanced at the car parked at the curb, Seb questioned," Did you stop by for coffee? By the way, I was just talking to Bella baby, here. She's started a new job around here. Wait, how do you know about her boss?"

"Because, I'm her boss." Ian said with a straight face before turning to Isabella," I was going to offer to get you some coffee but you already have it. Get in the car and we can be on our way. Bye Seb."

Isabella glanced at Ian's stiff face and wondered if something was wrong with the man. The man seemed to have mood swings. He'd been fine when they left but now he looked angry again.

With a quick side hug to Seb, Isabella waved her hand and quickly walked to the curb as Ian turned around.

As he closed the door behind her and turned around, Seb stood there with narrowed eyes, looking at Ian carefully.

"What?"

"Ian Frost. You replaced North with her?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"She's trustworthy."

"I see. Are you interested in her?", Seb probed casually.

"You know the rule, Seb."

Seb glanced at Isabella who was sipping her coffee in the car and then at his brother with a knowing smile, "Ahh, your golden rule. Not dating employees. Then does that mean you are not interested in her?"

"I'm getting late, Seb. I'll be going."

Seb burst into laughter at that evasive answer as he said, "Ian, my man! You might be short sighted, but you are certainly not blind! Sigh!!"

Saying that, Seb decided that he did not need that coffee anymore and promptly hopped into the backseat of Ian's car.

Grimacing at his brother, Ian walked around to the driving seat and started the car, "You live in the opposite direction. I'm warning you, I won't go to drop you off."

"No need, Ian. I'm going to alright. So, Bella baby? You've started working for Ian as his new assistant? How does that feel? Do you also think that he is a totally changed man in the office?"

Ian's hands tightened on the steering wheel as Isabella nodded as she turned around to look at Seb, "Yes! He was totally different in the office."

Seb grinned, "How so?"

Isabella thought carefully before saying, "I think he's more... umm dominating at work? Stricter?"

Seb hummed as he sent a meaningful glance at Ian, "Hmm.. He is a dominating one..." In a lower tone, he mumbled, "the question is are you submissive?"

"What did you say?" Isabella asked, with a frown, while Ian growled warningly.

Seb grinned and took out his phone to type a message, "How soon do you think you will break the Golden rule? Bet?"

Chapter 356: Invitation

"Hey babe? Are you free this weekend?" Seb's casual question caught Isabella's attention, and she shot him a questioning look while Ian shot a grim look to his brother in the rearview mirror.

Seb, flashing a mischievous grin, continued, "Ian and I are heading to a fantastic party for the weekend, and I was thinking it would be a crime not to have you join us. You've recently returned to the country, right? It's the perfect way to kick off some good times!"

Isabella paused, her smile fading slightly as she considered Seb's invitation. After a moment, she replied, "Thanks for the offer, Seb, but I think I'll have to pass this time."

Seb, undeterred, gave her a playful pout. "Come on, Bella! It's going to be epic. You can't miss it."

Ian, who had been silently observing, shot Seb a warning look. Seb, however, chose to ignore it, maintaining his charm offensive. "Ian's practically dragging me along. You can't let me suffer alone, can you?"

Isabella chuckled at that. She knew from the tabloids that both Ian and Seb were always 'dragging' each other along. "I'll have to rain-check this one. I have things to do."

"What kind of things?" Ian asked sharply, earning himself a surprised look from Isabella and a knowing look from Seb who sat back to enjoy the live show. He toyed with the idea of taking a leaf from Nora's book and recording Ian to share it in the group, but then Nora would probably kill him. She was quite protective of Isabella. So, he could only keep the thrill of this ongoing saga to himself... unfortunately of course.

"I... Its nothing. I'm going to be meeting my parents over the weekend."

"Oh.. Then next time, you can join us." Ian added awkwardly making Seb's grin widen even further. Just now, he could have sworn that Ian was ready to kill him for extending the invitation to 'that' party and now he was inviting her for the future. Tsk tsk. Double standards.

Seb couldn't resist adding fuel to the fire. "Yeah, Isabella, you're officially on the guest list for all the future shenanigans. Ian, you have to bring her next time."

Ian shot Seb another stern look, but this time Seb decided to acknowledge it with a wink before turning back to his current target, "So, meeting the parents? Is it some serious business or just a family gathering? I mean are you going to be introducing a boyfriend?"

Isabella rolled her eyes at that, "I'd have to find a boyfriend to introduce one. It's just a causal gathering my parents are hosting to celebrate my return."

"No boyfriend? How can you not have one? Are the men around you all blind?"

"Ha! As if! Its just that I am not blind. I wouldn't date any man."

"Ahh." Seb nodded enlightened. "So you are holding out for that someone special?"

"Hmm. Of course. Why would I cheat myself with finding someone not worthy?"

"Now this has got me curious. What kind of a man are you looking for?"

Isabella looked at Seb thoughtfully and said, "Someone who can handle me. He should be warm and kind. Always welcoming and ready with a smile. Who would listen to me blabber and not be tired or angry, etc etc."

Seb whistled and asked, "Well well. You are not what I expected babe. Now, where can we find such a paragon of virtue for you?"

"Here." Ian said, causing both Isabella and Seb to look at him in surprise.

"Here? She'll find a boyfriend here?" Seb asked drolly while Isabella cast Ian a befuddled glance.

"I meant we are here. At your home, Isabella."

"Oh." Isabella looked around to see that they had arrived at her apartment while Seb made a sound that suspicious sounded like a muffled laugh.

"Thank you. Bye then."

Ian nodded in acknowledgement while Seb waved cheerily, "Bye babe."

Isabella walked away with a wave while Ian and Seb continued to sit outside in the car. After a while, when Ian did not move, Seb raised an eyebrow, "Are you moonlighting as a security guard now? Waiting here all night?"

Ian glared at his brother, "I'm not your chauffer. Get off and come ahead."

Seb rolled his eyes and hopped off the car, to go to the passenger seat, only for Ian to almost try to run him over as the man, quickly reversed the car. With narrowed eyes, Seb tried to hop into the car, but the ba*tard was faster as he speeded away, as he lowered the window to flip him off.

Seb shook his head at that, "You bas*ard! I'll get back at you for this."

Patting his pocket to get his phone to book a cab, he then realized that he did not have his phone on him as well. It was still in the back seat of Ian's car and he was now stranded.

With a shrug, he started to walk back in the direction he had come from, letting the cool air, hit his face. It seemed he was going to lose another brother to the love disease. Though, he couldn't really fault Ian. Isabella was a nice girl, after all."

His thoughts involuntarily turned to his own love and a bittersweet smile graced his face. He knew the symptoms and the cure. Very soon, another Frost was going to be ready to be married.

Lost in his own thoughts, Seb realized that he had not walked in the direction of his home but somewhere else. As he found himself in front of a quaint cafe, he stilled and turned back angrily. This was not the place he was supposed to come to. However, he found himself unable to walk away until...

Quietly, he walked forward, looking inside. His heart thumped when he saw her but as she looked up into the darkness, he took a step back and turned around. He'd lost his sanity for a moment. This was not his destination.

Chapter 357: Not Really

Isabella looked at the news on her phone and shook her head at the news. Her poor brother in law had been wrongly named Demon. As far as she was concerned, Demetri Frost was as far from a demon as possible, he was such a homely man, only interested in Nora and his plants. Meanwhile the man in the news right now was a different story.

"How? How did he manage to look so delicious every morning, when he was out partying all night? That slave driver."

She moved around the room with her phone gripped in one hand as she gathered her clothing for laundry day and continued to grumble, "That slave driver. When does he sleep?"

It was baffling. After a week of working for Ian Frost, she knew the man worked harder than any of his employees. While they clocked off for the day, he was still working. Even last night, she'd left the work after earning some overtime, while Ian Frost had still been pouring over some security plans for upcoming events.

And yet, here he was, leaving a party after a night of revelry, in the early hours of the morning, looking as if he did nothing but party. She knew for a fact that this picture was definitely from yesterday because he was still wearing the same shirt, only it had been unbuttoned in the picture. Dam* that man was too handsome.

She zoomed in on the picture, checking out the exposed flesh before quickly zooming out, as she blushed. Looking at his face, she shook her head again, this time at herself as she asked the picture, "Hot Ian? Do you have some kind of secret energy stash somewhere that eludes the rest of the humanity?"

You party into the wee hours and then even go for a meeting like a bushy tailed squirrel in the morning? Do you even get a decent time for sleep?"

Isabella sighed as she tossed her laundry into the machine, still engrossed in her musings about Ian Frost. Maybe she should take Seb on his offer to party with them. Then she would be able to find out where this man got all that energy from.

As she contemplated going out with the Frost brothers, her stomach twinged, reminding her that there was a reason she had refused for going out with them and lying about meeting her parents. Gingerly rubbing her aching tummy, she bit her lip. She really needed to go visit the gynaecologist for a long-overdue check-up. Better to do it right away.

However, before she could do anything, a wave of intense pain hit her. Clutching her abdomen, she winced, panic flickered in her eyes as the pain intensified. Hurriedly, she fumbled with her phone to book a cab, her hands shaking slightly.

As she tried to navigate the ride-hailing app, the cramps intensified, making her feel lightheaded. The phone almost slipped from her grasp, and beads of sweat formed on her forehead.

Feeling nauseous, Isabella abandoned the attempt to book a cab and opted to call for help instead. With trembling fingers, she scrolled through her contacts, looking for Nora.

As the phone rang, Isabella's breath hitched with each passing second and she knelt on the floor, gasping in pain. Why did it intensify so much? Finally, when the phone was answered, she mustered the strength to mutter into the phone, "Nora, please... come quickly. I need you to take me to the hospital."

With that, she disconnected the call abruptly and slumped against the wall, concentrating on trying to breathe through the pain as she waited for Nora to arrive. Tears escaped her eyes as she thought of the way her mother used to help her through the pain and a wave of loneliness hit her. She missed her mom... In her vulnerable state, she clutched her phone tightly, willing Nora to come here as soon as possible.

She would need to open the door... Slowly, she crawled towards the door, each movement making her wince so that by the time she opened the door, she was sure that she was going to faint.

Soon, she felt someone rush in and pick her up off the floor and ask her what had happened to her. Isabella, still in the throes of pain, could only manage a weak point towards her abdomen. "Hospital... please."

Ian Frost swiftly scooped Isabella into his arms, concern etched across his face. He raced towards his car, gently placing her in the passenger seat. He'd been in the middle of pitching for a project when he'd received Isabella's call and almost ignored it. Thank heavens he'd not done that or she would have been worse.

As he drove to the hospital, his usually focused mind was consumed by worry for Isabella. He stole glances at her pallid face, the lines of pain etched on her forehead. He shuddered to think what would have happened to her if he'd not driven there like a madman.

She moaned in pain and Ian took her hand in his, gently rubbing her wrist, "We'll get there soon, Isi. You're going to be alright."

It was only as Isabella had been taken into the room by the medical staff that Ian was able to breathe a sigh of relief. He knew he ought to call Nora but right now, his mind was a mess. He was no fool and his mind was racing urgently with thoughts that he had been avoiding until now. Twice he'd seen her in agony and had been worried out of his mind. He knew himself well enough to know that he cared for this girl more than her just being an acquaintance or out of kindness.

With a sigh, he shook his head at himself and decided to call Nora. Isabella had intended for her to be here so that should be it. He needed to escape for now and think things through otherwise he might end up creating a mess.

Chapter 358: Hospital

The soft hum of the hospital room gradually brought Isabella back to consciousness. Blinking against the harsh lighting, she squinted and tried to make sense of her surroundings. Nora's face came into focus, peering at her with a mix of concern and relief.

"Hey there, Sleeping Beauty," Nora teased gently, a playful smile softening her features.

Isabella furrowed her brow, still groggy from the aftermath of the pain and confusion. "Nora, how are you?" she mumbled; her voice hoarse.

Nora giggled at that and shook her head, "I should be the one asking you that, silly. You're the one on the hospital bed."

That caused her to frown more and she slowly asked, "What happened?"

"Your ovaries started to act up in a big way." Nora said slowly as she gently patted Isabella's forehead.

"But don't worry. You were brought here in time and narrowly avoided surgery. But, you have to be careful in the future Bella baby. And for now, you've earned yourself a two day and one night stay at this amazing hospital."

"Thanks for bringing me here, Nora. If you hadn't come..." As Isabella said this, she realized that she'd been carried out of her house... Wide eyed, she asked, "did you really pick me up... and carry me."

Nora blinked at the question before grinning and flexing her 'imaginary' muscles in front of Isabella, "Uh huh. I carried you here with my superhero strength. Here, you want to touch my biceps?"

Just then the door opened, and Ian walked in with a small flask in his hand. Isabella's eyes widened at the sight and she was about to ask Nora what he was doing here when he looked at her and gently questioned her, "Hey, there. How are you feeling today?"

Before she could answer, Nora complained, "You have such bad timing, Ian Frost. I was just showing off my power."

"Ha! So that next time she can overestimate your superhero abilities. Really Isi, you think she can carry you out? The both of you would have died by the time she'd have been able to carry you out. You called me instead of Nora. Thus taking away Nora's chance to show off. And now she wants to use your pain to misguide you."

"Ian Frost! Just you wait! I'll definitely teach you a lesson, when the time comes."

Isabella grinned at the banter, forgetting her pain momentarily as she stared at the two 'kids' in front of her. She loved watching how everyone doted on her best friend after she'd never had anyone to shower her with love. A pang hit her in the chest as she thought of her own family. They'd always doted on her but now she'd lost that...

Ian noticed the expressions on her face, even as she tried to close her eyes and compose herself and quickly walk forward," Anyway, I've got good timing. She just woke up after hours on end and needs nourishment. Here, I got some soup for you."

As Ian said this, he gently raised the back of the bed, while helping Isabella to a better position to sit, while Nora went ahead to pour the soup into a small bowl.

Isabella had not expected that she would be able to eat but as the fragrance of the soup assaulted her nose, she could not help but feel hungry. Slowly, she sipped her soup while Ian said, "Isabella. Do you need me to call your parents? You have to stay the night. If you don't want to trouble them I can stay the night."

"Bella baby's are parents not here. They've gone for a world tour. But why would you stay the night when I'm here? I'm staying here."

Ian turned his gaze to Isabella thoughtfully as she looked away. So, he'd been lied to...With a sigh, he turned to Nora, "Fine. If you need anything let me know and I'll come over in the morning."

Nora nodded as she looked at Ian's face. Uh oh. Why did he seem so angry all of a sudden? Shrugging at his mood swing, Nora went to sit next to Isabella and asked her softly, "Bella baby? You want me to call your parents? You know they will come running if they hear something happened to you..."

Isabella shook her head and finished off her soup, "No need, Nora. I have you, it's enough."

Nora sighed and caressed Isabella's head as she leaned against the bed vowing that she would find a way to help Isabella.

The next time, Isabella woke up, it was already morning and Nora was puttering about the room, muttering to herself. Smiling, she looked at Nora, "Who are you cursing so early in the morning?"

Nora let out a little sound of fright as she heard Isabella's voice and quickly ran to her, "You're awake! How are you feeling this morning?"

"I'm much better. Not much pain."

Nora nodded. That's good then. I would have felt worst if you'd not been better and I'd left here."

"You're going?" Isabella asked with uncertainty.

Nora nodded and caressed her forehead again, "For a little while. I have a small practical exam in the uni and the professor is not willing to postpone. Ian is going to be here any time now and he'll accompany you for the tests."

"Okay. Go back! And slay the exam without worrying about me."

A little while after Nora left, Isabella was escorted to another room for her ultrasound. As she lay behind the curtain, waiting for her turn, she heard the doctor talking to someone else, "Mrs Frost. Are you ready for your ultrasound?"

Isabella's eyes widened as she heard the name and turned to look towards the side, as if she would be able to see through the curtain. Mrs Frost? It couldn't be Nora, right?

"Mr Gabe Frost. I understand that you are also excited about the child. If you don't mind, would you wait outside for a moment?"

Gabe Frost. The missing Frost brother was here? In this room. What should she do?

Chapter 359: Arabelle's Plan

"Mr. Frost, please wait outside. I'd like a word with Mrs. Frost before I begin the ultrasound," the doctor calmly requested, gesturing towards the door.

Gabe met the doctor's gaze briefly, his eyes scanning the room before he nodded and turned to step outside, leaving a lingering touch on Arabelle's hand.

"Don't go," Arabelle pleaded, her voice sweet and gentle, her grip on his hand tender.

Gabe gently caressed her wrist and reassured her, "I'm not going anywhere, Arabelle. I'll be right outside. Just a quick chat with the doctor, and I'll be back."

"Then, you won't go very far? I want to catch a first glimpse of our child with you," she insisted, her tone carrying warmth and anticipation.

Gabe paused, sensing the sweetness in her voice, "Of course, Arabelle. Let the doctor interview you, and then I'll come back. Okay?"

Arabelle nodded slowly, her demeanor softening as Gabe left the room. Once alone, she laid back on the examination table, closing her eyes, and whispered to herself, "What do you want to know, doctor? Gabe can always be with me. I have nothing to hide from him."

"That is good, Mrs. Frost. I'll summon him in a moment. Until then, if you could just move your clothing, I'll apply some gel. Once you're set, we can summon Mr. Frost back, right?" the doctor said, maintaining a professional tone.

Silence enveloped the room, broken only by a soft rustling sound as the doctor helped Arabelle with the sheet. Arabelle smiled slightly and nodded, "Alright, doctor. Do what you must."

The doctor gently applied the gel to her stomach, questioning Arabelle softly, "Mrs. Frost, there is no baby. In the future..."

Suddenly, Arabelle's sweet demeanor vanished, and her voice turned icy, "Doctor, I'll take care of my problems. Do what I've told you to do. Understand?"

"But, Mrs. Frost, if you don't start showing in a few weeks, Mr. Frost will realize that something is underfoot. How will you bring a child into this?" the doctor hesitated, sensing the shift in Arabelle's tone.

"Mind your own business, doctor, and do what I tell you. There's no need to think so much. Now, did you bring the video?" Arabelle cut in, her eyes narrowing with a menacing glint, the contrast stark between her sweet facade with Gabe and the intimidating presence she projected now.

The doctor nodded quickly, "Yes, ma'am. It is already in the machine."

"Good. And remember our lines."

The doctor acknowledged with a tight-lipped smile, as she summoned Gabe back into the room. The doctor, with feigned enthusiasm, directed Gabe's attention to the ultrasound screen. "Mr. and Mrs. Frost, allow me to show you the first glimpse of your baby."

With that she placed the wand on Arabelle's stomach, moving it about slowly. As a little heart beat sounded and a blurry image appeared on the screen, Arabelle smiled softly, looking at Gabe with tears in her eyes, "Gabe? Did you see that? Did you hear that? That's our baby, Gabe."

Gabe smiled widely as he cupped her cheek and agreed, "Hmm. That's our baby." As Arabelle closed her eyes and rubbed her cheek against his hand, she failed to notice the lack of emotion in Gabe's eyes.

After the display on the screen concluded, the doctor congratulated them, "Congratulations again, Mr. and Mrs. Frost. You're going to be parents. You can take a moment to celebrate and then I'd like a word with Mr. Frost."

Gabe nodded with concern but he was soon distracted by Arabelle who threw herself into his arms, hugging him tightly. "I'm so happy, Gabe. Our little family is starting."

Gabe pulled back, cupping Arabelle's face in his hands, "I love you, Arabelle. I can't wait to meet our baby."

Arabelle nodded and complained, "I want to celebrate today. We'll do that, today, Gabe! You promise."

"Of course we'll celebrate together, Arabelle. Now, the guards are all waiting outside. Why don't you go wait with them in the car, while I'll go have a word with the doctor?"

"Alright, Gabe. But come back soon. I don't like staying away from you."

Gabe nodded, gently sending her outside with a small smile as he said, "I don't like that either. I'll be there soon."

As Arabelle exited, Gabe's expression shifted from the façade of excitement to cold steel. Slowly, he stepped towards the curtain, his eyes intently staring there. Just as he would have pulled the curtain away, the door reopened and a separate doctor stepped inside.

Finding Gabe standing there, she questioned him, "Yes?"

Gabe shook his head, "Nothing doctor. I was just leaving."

As Gabe walked in to see the doctor, she looked at him, "Mr. Frost, there's something important I need to discuss with you."

"What is it, doctor?"

The doctor hesitated for a moment before carefully choosing his words, "I've noticed some irregularities in Mrs. Frost's examination. It's crucial that we address them sooner rather than later."

Gabe's expression shifted from concern to a mix of worry and determination. "Irregularities? What do you mean?"

The doctor leaned in, his voice lowered, "Mr. Frost, I recommend additional tests to ensure the health and safety of both Mrs. Frost and the baby. This is a delicate matter, and we need to act swiftly."

Gabe's worry deepened, but he nodded firmly, "Tell me what we need to do. I'll do anything to make sure they're both okay."

The doctor nodded, "I appreciate your understanding. Let's discuss the details and potential courses of action. For now please make sure that she gains adequate rest and she is not agitated for any reason. You need to cater to any demands that she might have. Even if they seem unreasonable. Her mental condition has been unstable and this time it is even more crucial with the way her hormones are changing."

"I'll do whatever it takes to ensure Arabelle and the baby are safe," he asserted, his jaw set with unwavering resolve as he nodded.

As Gabe walked out of the office, he glimpsed a man walking into the ultrasound room on the opposite side and turned away.

Chapter 360: The Secret

Isabelle almost jumped out of the little hospital bed when Ian suddenly entered the small room. She looked at him with wide eyes and was about to pull down her clothing, when the doctor scolded her, "Don't do that, Miss Ruffalo." She then turned to Ian and was about to say something about his resemblance to the man who'd just left but was distracted by the patient's constant movement and snapped at the man, "Are you her husband?"

Ian, caught off guard, glanced between the doctor and Isabelle. "Oh, I am Ian,"

However, before Ian could say more, the doctor continued, "Mr Ian. You need to take care of your wife's diet and see to it that she eats regularly and a nutritious and balanced diet at that. She has dysmennorrhea due to an infection and this time it was quite severe. While it is not so bad this time, the next time it might lead to severe consequences. Please see the gynaecologist and a nutritionist on the way... Also, there is the thing with her cervix being..."

"Doctor! Doctor! I'll handle everything. Please." Isabella finally interrupted vehemently.

The doctor cast a glance at the patient and shook her head with a smile at the young couple. They must be newly married if the wife was being so shy in front of her husband.

As the doctor left, Isabella quickly tried to sit up but felt a pain in her abdomen, reminding her that she was still on her periods. Wincing in pain and embarrassment, she hurriedly summoned Ian closer and said, "Gabe! Gabe! Gabe is here."

Ian frowned, " Gabe?"

Isabella shook her head at his slowness and said hurriedly, " Your brother. Gabe is here. He just went outside with his wife. Go go go."

Ian's eyes widened in realization, and without another word, he swiftly exited the room, leaving Isabelle to adjust her clothing and compose herself.

Ian returned to the room, disappointment written across his face. He looked at Isabella, his expression a mix of confusion and concern. "I couldn't find Gabe. Are you sure it was him? Why would he be here?"

"Because of Arabelle. Ian, you should know this..." As Isabella explained the entire conversation that she'd overheard between the doctor and Arabelle, she watched as Ian's eyes hardened with a ruthless determination and he spoke with clenched teeth, " Do these women have no limits? She is actually pretending to be pregnant and fooling Gabe? No wonder the fool actually disappeared without a trace! He must have fallen for her tricks again."

"Dam* it! I need to find Gabe as soon as possible and warn the others as well. Are you sure she plans to bring a child and not pretend to miscarry it?"

"I don't know Ian. She just ordered the doctor that she'll handle it." Isabella shook her head as she explained this.

As they walked back to Isabella's room in silence, Ian pulled out his cell phone typing furiously in it as he updated the others about the situation and how they knew about it.

As Isabella settled into the bed, she looked at Ian with concern, " What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know for now, Isi. What I do know is with this new development, we can try to guess what to expect."

Isabella grinned at that, " Then its a good thing I have keen ears. I just hope everything is sorted soon."

Ian looked down at her sincere face, raised up to look at him and couldn't help himself. He placed his hand in her hair and gently leaned down to peck her forehead and added, "You're like my super hero. Always rescuing me when I'm stuck at a dead end."

Isabella blinked at the sudden physical affection and was about to question him when the door to the room banged open and an older couple burst into the room with a mix of relief and worry etched on their faces.

The lady rushed forward, enveloping Isabella in a tight hug, while the man stood behind her, a stern expression on his face.

"Isabella! Why didn't you call us sooner?" Mrs. Ruffalo scolded gently, pulling back to cup Isabella's face in her hands, searching for any sign of distress.

Isabella winced at the scolding but managed a weak smile. "I'm sorry, mom.. I..."

Before Isabella could say more, the door opened again and a man stepped in, looking menacing as he marched in and ordered, "Did you have an abortion?"

Ian bristled at the man who had just entered the room and was about to throw him out, when the woman who's just been hugging and doting over Isabella turned and scolded the man, "Be quiet. This is not the time..."

However, the man bristled, "Did you do that? Are you here because of your ways?"

Ian watched as Isabella almost shrunk into the bed and suddenly wanted to... hurt this man.

Isabella's eyes met his before she quickly and ashamedly looked away to her father and tried to explain, "No. Daddy, I..."

However, before she could say more, the man stepped forward and continue to spout filth, "Come on. Do you really think she can explain? Look at how terrified she is that you discovered her here. She must have done this multiple times in the past..."

Ian's patience snapped like a taut wire, and he stepped forward with a glare that could cut through steel. "Enough," he declared, his voice low and dangerous.

The three people were all startled to see another man in the room as neither seemed to have realized Ian's presence.

Isabella's father turned to Ian and sneered, "Who are you?"

However the younger man interrupted before Ian could say, "Dad! He is the man that threatened me last time as well. He must be one of her boyfriends. I told you that she is still shameless, didn't I? Here you were worrying about her while she is getting rid of a life with her boyfriend..."

Before the man could say more, he found himself caught by the collar again, this time, being pushed against a wall as Ian gritted out, "I warned you to watch your mouth."