

Benefits 391

Chapter 391: Cold

Lucien Frost stared at the three people standing in front of his desk with their heads bowed, waiting for them to answer. When none of them dared to speak, he clenched his hand and threw the file on his table at their feet, his patience at an end.

"Is this what you are being paid to do? Or do you think that because zeros have no value, you can add them anywhere. Can you imagine the losses we would have to incur if this is the quotation we presented to the government and they accepted? Billions! The least you all can do is double-check what has been written before sending it to my office for finalization! Tell me, can you three afford this difference in amount if I sign these papers and submit them now?"

The three people shook their heads and mumbled apologies, while fearing for their jobs as they glanced at Lucien Frost surreptitiously. With a shake of his head, Lucien sent a glance to each of them, "Starting immediately, you will undergo mandatory additional training on quality control and accuracy in document preparation. Additionally, you will be placed on probation for the next month, during which your work will be closely monitored."

The employees exchanged anxious glances, realizing the gravity of the situation.

With that, Lucien leaned back in his chair, his expression unyielding as he continued, "Consider this a warning. One more slip-up of this magnitude, and you'll face more severe consequences, including the possibility of termination. I don't tolerate incompetence, and I expect nothing less than perfection from my team."

Quickly, the three of them apologized and left the office, thanking their stars that despite their supervisor having flipped his personality was still reasonable enough to give them another chance.

As expected, the discussion around the water cooler was soon rampant as the others talked among themselves, "Did you see the way he threw that file? I would have fainted there itself from terror if he'd done that to me."

"I used to be jealous that your desk was facing his office all day and you could admire him. But after this last week, I'm super grateful that I am not in his line of sight. I've never seen him so angry. It's like he's a completely different person lately."

"I heard Jenny crying in the bathroom. She was actually thankful for the mandatory training. She'd been sure that she was going to be fired."

"It was st*pid of her to not double check. Lucien's been on edge for weeks and its definitely aggravated in the past few days. Something's bothering him. And making mistakes at a time like this is like pulling a hungry tiger's tail."

"Didn't he go away last week? He was gone for two days. I thought he'd definitely return jovial after a good rest but he seems angrier."

Finally, fearing that they'd been standing there too long, they simply shook their heads as they muttered, "Sigh! I miss the boss who used to be easy going and would crack jokes in the middle of a meeting. Why is Lucien Frost turning into the Devil?"

Meanwhile, Lucien remained unaware of the gossip circulating about him as he immersed himself in the pile of work on his desk, unaware that he'd almost earned himself an epithet that could rival Demon's.

As expected, if there was gossip in the office, it could not be hidden from Ian and Sebastian Frost. And that is how, Sebastian found himself in Ian's office on this fine Friday afternoon.

"You noticed something?"

Ian bit into his sandwich as he looked at Sebastian carefully. "Uhh.. no? Did you get a haircut? If you did then you need to fire the person who did that..."

Sebastian frowned and shook his head, " Ian! I'm not your girlfriend who would ask you if you noticed something in my looks! I'm talking about Lucy."

Ian stopped staring at his sandwich and looked up with a thoughtful look, " I don't know. He's definitely tensed about something."

"Do you think the work pressure is getting to him?" Sebastian asked with worry but continued with the answer as well, "Lucien's been handling this for years. It's not like him to suddenly turn into a tyrant. Ian, we need to find out what's wrong with him."

Ian shook his head," Gosh, Seb. Get your head on straight. The guy is probably frustrated. He hasn't seen Evana for months. He was so excited last week when he went there, only for you to summon him back before he could even see her. She's coming here tomorrow, isn't she? He'll be fine then. If you want to blame anyone for this change, blame blue balls and yourself."

"I summoned him? What are you talking about?" Seb asked incredulously.

Ian stilled now as he turned to stare at Seb. The sheer confusion on his face was enough to let him know that the question he was going to ask him next... he wouldn't like the answer...

"Seb, did you speak to Lucien last week? When he went away? You called him for the Lagos Investment project?"

"No. I did not. In fact, the numbers on that were perfect, so why would I want him back?" Sebastian was no one's fool. It was clear to him that their Lucy had probably lied about something. "What do you know Ian?"

"Not more than you apparently, Seb. I told Lucien to take the last weekend and this week off and go to Estania to spend some time with Evana. But he returned immediately. He barely stayed in Estania for an hour. I asked him why he came back and he said because you needed him for that project."

"Dam*! He lied? That's not like him." Seb marvelled.

Out of all of them, Lucien was the one who lied the least. Even during his most rebellious days, the kid was always honest.

As Seb and Ian stared at each other, they knew that they would need to have a brotherly intervention immediately.

"You think something is a problem in their fairytale?"

"We'll have to observe over the weekend Seb. But lets hope not." Ian answered thoughtfully.

Chapter 392: Silence

Lucien massaged his tired eyes, easing into his chair with a sigh of relief. Fortunately, he had identified the issue before it could spiral out of control. As he gazed at the meticulously revised proposal, a deep sigh escaped him. The magnitude of recalculations he had undertaken was truly staggering.

As he closed his eyes, the ringing of his phone broke the silence. He wanted to ignore it but couldn't. With a sigh, he checked the number and answered the call, "Lucien Frost."

"Mr Frost. The cake and champagne you'd ordered for tonight are ready. Where would you like them delivered?"

"Cancel the order." Lucien answered coldly.

The person on the other end paused before carefully reminding the man, "Sir, the order is prepaid and non-refundable...It's a beautiful arrangement, and we wouldn't want it to go to waste..."

Lucien, unfazed, responded tersely, "Dispose of it. It's of no use now."

The person hesitated, perhaps surprised by Lucien's abrupt decision. "But sir, it's a specially crafted—"

"I don't care. Cancel the delivery, and if it's already prepared, discard it. The person it was meant for is not coming anymore. Its of no use to me. Now, I have more pressing matters to attend to," Lucien interrupted, the impatience in his voice evident. Without waiting for further arguments, he decisively disconnected the call. Lucien leaned back in his chair, and almost hurled the phone in his hand across the room.

However, he calmed himself at the last moment and inhaled slowly. As if on automation, his thumb slid to the notification centre of his phone and he read the message there with a sigh before ignoring the

message. The chat now had more than a hundred unread messages and he had no intention on reading them or replying to any of them.

Despite this, he couldn't ignore the final message that he'd read. She'd messaged him that she would be reaching here at eleven p.m. He looked at the time and realized that there was less than an hour... Snapping his laptop shut, he stood up and grabbed his jacket. He needed to go to the airport.

Evangeline stood still as she watched people passing by and the worry in her stomach seemed to intensify. She'd been having a sense of foreboding before even coming here and now, standing in this place alone, she was even more worried. She'd refused to allow any guards to come with her and insisted that she would be fine with Lucien since he would definitely come to get her.

But she'd been here for thirty minutes and he'd not come. She looked down at her phone and the unread message where she'd told him of her arrival and resisted the urge to call him. He'd been behaving oddly these last days. Was he so busy that he hadn't even been able to reach to all the messages that she'd sent over the week? Or was he ignoring her?

She knew if she called, he would definitely answer. But she was scared that if he did and she heard him coldly say that 'he would get back to her later' one more time, then she would definitely go crazy and say something stup*d! Because his 'later' seemed to coming never.

Maybe she should book a hotel room now instead of waiting for him to come and take her home. Just as she was about to pick her phone, she saw Lucien come racing in, looking around the airport worriedly. Every complaint that she had with him disappeared as she looked at his tired and concerned face, the way he was looking around for her.

Catching her bag, she quickly raised her hand so that he would see her and raced towards him. Happy, she failed to notice his feet falter and stop when he saw her coming his way. Lucien had almost stepped back when the unaware Evana threw her arms around him and hugged him, "Lucifer! I almost gave up and thought you wouldn't come."

Lucien closed his eyes and briefly patted Evana's back before taking her bag that she'd left at the side, "You must be tired after the long flight. Let's go."

Without waiting for a reply, Lucien stepped back, waiting for Evana to walk.

Evangeline paused and shot Lucien a look of confusion as she said slowly, "Lucifer. Its okay if you are busy. You don't have to come. I'd have managed on my own."

Instead of answering her, Lucien simply nodded tersely, "Let's go now."

As they drove through the topic, Evana could not help but send wary glances towards Lucien. He seemed like a different person. Cold and unapproachable. It was like she was seeing him for the first time. As she sat in the oppressive silence, she could not help but wonder what the reason for this change could be.

Pulling at the non-existent loose thread on her dress, Evana looked away and remained silent, not knowing what to say. She'd imagined so many things she would say to him when she met him eventually but now, she was unable to say a word.

Eventuallt, the car came to a halt and Evana almost jumped out of it, wanting to escape. However, in the next moment, she stopped as she looked up at the tall, well- lit building. He'd brought her to a hotel. The last time, she had stayed with him but this time, he brought her here.

She wanted to ask him, but he'd already walked inside and was talking at the reception. Soon, he returned, "Your room is ready. Come on, I'll show you."

In a daze, Evana walked behind Lucien, confusion and sadness etched across her face. Lucien, on the other hand, seemed to be unaware of her feelings as he stared at the elevator's doors.

As the elevator came to a stop and Lucien mechanically showed her around, Evana had to force herself not to cry. And yet, Lucien would not even look at her, but simple spoke, "I have to get back to the office now. I'll see you later. Goodnight."

Chapter 393: Scared

And yet, Lucien would not even look at her, but simply spoke, "I have to get back to the office now. I'll see you later. Goodnight."

As Lucien made a move to leave, Evana's fingers instinctively clung to the corner of his jacket, a silent plea in her eyes. The material strained, forcing Lucien to come to an abrupt stop. In the room, a weighty silence hung in the air, covered with Evana's confusion and Lucien's coldness.

Her voice, a delicate blend of vulnerability and determination, broke the silence, "Lucien, please, don't go."

Lucien let out a weary sigh, weariness etched across his posture, yet he made no attempt to break free or turn to look at her. But Evana was encouraged. Whatever it was that was causing this distance could probably be resolved.

With a glimmer of hope, she let go of his jacket and encircled his waist with her arms, pressing her cheek against his back. She felt him stiffen at her touch but she could only press her cheek against his back as she closed her eyes and whispered, "Lucien, I'm scared."

Lucien closed his eyes and inhaled slowly as her warmth seemed to penetrate to him through his clothing. He looked down at her small hands, holding onto him and felt his heart ache. "Evana..."

He felt her shake her head against him as she interrupted him, "Lucifer. I know we've been busy over the last few weeks. But I also know that our love is strong. But I'm scared. I don't know why but even now, as I am holding you, I feel as if there is a wall between us. A wall that I cannot even see, let alone scale it. I'm scared Lucifer that I'm losing you."

Lucien's jaw tightened as he heard these words, even as he felt suffocated at this moment, her fear stirred him.. Closing his eyes against the memories that were battering at him, he brought his hands up to pry her fingers apart.

But as his hand touched hers, she continued, "I can't lose you, Lucy. I cannot."

Lucien gently held her wrist as he took a calming breath, "Things are complicated at the moment, Evana. But you're not losing me."

He felt her tremble at his words of reassurance and the need to escape escalated inside him. He knew they needed to talk but did he have the courage to? No. Not yet.

"Then, why did you not take me home? Why bring me here and leave me in this hotel?"

"Because it is practical. I am not going to be home for the weekend and you're going to have plans with Nora and the girls. It will be easier to meet everyone from here rather than trudge back and forth."

"You're not going to be meeting me for the entire weekend?" Evangeline asked slowly.

"Yes. I have some deadlines to meet. I'm going back to the office even now."

With that, Lucien finally stepped out of Evangeline's embrace and walked out of the door, with a murmur, "Rest well, Evana."

Evangeline watched Lucien leave and the restlessness within her seemed to multiply as she walked towards the bedroom. The last week had been gut wrenching for her. The guilt of what she had almost done eating at her.

As she stepped into the room, she paused, as an unsettling thought lingered—did Lucien already know everything? Was that the cause of his distant demeanor? She dismissed the idea with a shake of her head; it seemed improbable. After all, he'd been engulfed in his demanding work schedule. She chided herself, attributing the tension between them to her own insecurities and guilt, convincing herself it couldn't be anything more.

Evangeline sank onto the edge of the bed, her mind continuously racing with doubts and questions. Picking up her phone, she looked at the screensaved there, carefully tracing his face in the picture.

"Lucien, do you really love me so much that you won't leave me? Even if I end up making stupid mistakes? But I'm scared Lucien. What if you are unable to forgive me? I don't think I'll be able to live peacefully or happily if you're not with me."

Maybe she could call him. She knew for a fact that he was probably driving now. But maybe he would... However, still worried and guilty, she could not gather the courage to call. Eventually, she messaged him, "Lucien, I... If you do get the time for a break, I hope you'll come over to the hotel. I'll be waiting."

With a sigh, Evangeline placed the phone aside and fell back onto the bed, hugging a pillow close to her. She knew he might not be coming back probably but she wanted him to come. She needed to talk to him anyways and make her confession.

The hotel room seemed to close in on her, suffocating her with its silence. Hugging her phone to her chest, she hoped and prayed for a message and when the phone continued to remain silent, she closed her eyes and murmured, "I miss you, Lucien. Come back to me, please."

A long while later, unknown to Evana, the door creaked softly, signaling Lucien's return. He entered the dimly lit room, his steps careful not to disturb her.

Gazing down at her sleeping form, he couldn't deny the conflict within him. He covered her with a blanket, tucking her in gently, as his eyes lingered on her peaceful yet troubled expression. Slowly, he sat down on the bed, placing his phone and watch on the night stand, and sat down next to her.

She seemed to sense his presence and instinctively snuggled close to him. Softly, he caressed her face, as she called out his name, "Lucien."

A faint smile tugged at Lucien's lips, but it didn't reach his distant eyes as he heard her.

As she tried to snuggle even closer, whispering his name with a hint of longing, Lucien's resolve wavered. He closed his eyes, a heavy sigh escaping his lips. "Just for a few minutes, he would forget everything and rest."

Chapter 394: Lucien's Nightmare

He leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes as a sense of happiness and peace descended upon him. Ian's offer had come at a time when he was on the verge of collapsing from exhaustion and missing his Angel. As the hostess served a glass of wine, he'd already left behind all the worried about responsibility and was now planning a surprise for his angel.

Opening his eyes, he swirled the wine in his glass and smiled contentedly as he wondered how she would react. Would she run to him or be so surprised that he'd have to race to her and gather her in his arms?

She would probably be busy in her office when he reached there. So he would have to plan his surprise accordingly. Grabbing his phone, he browsed through the websites of local florists and bakeries, he meticulously selected the perfect bouquet and cake for his Angel. The fragrant blossoms and delectable treats would be perfect for their reunion.

Next, he'd need to have his hotel room decorated to welcome her. A honeymoon suite so that they would be able to spend more time together. If only he could speak to Uncle Alexander. Maybe then he would be able to get her to leave the office for sometime.

However, he could only grimace. She would not appreciate that. And she would be away from the office next week so it would only create trouble for her in the long run.

After hours of waiting, he finally reached Estania. The warm air welcomed him and as expected, the bouquets of the flower he'd ordered was already waiting with his subordinate who greeted him, "Mr Frost, your car is here. And your room has been prepared as per your orders. Do you need anything else?"

"No. Thank you for your hard work." Lucien smiled at the man before quickly rushing out. Now that he was this close to her, he could not help but feel restless. He almost wished that the plane could have flown over the royal palaces. Then he'd have jumped out of the plane and directly gone to see her. Exhaustion threatened to keel him over but excitement kept his eyes wide open.

As he arrived at the large brownstone building that held her office, he suddenly had a feeling of misgiving. The place was unusually quiet. While not many people worked in this building, her trusted team of secretaries were also not in their usual places. He glanced at the time and realized that it was already evening. Maybe, they'd left early today.

Was it possible that Evana too had left early. Lucien grinned. That would be great. He'd have to wait longer to see her but at least then he could have all of her to himself. Grinning, he walked to her door, and sighed when he heard her talking to someone. She wasn't alone.

Maybe he should stop here and wait outside. He looked at the couch outside and sighed. He could wait but maybe he'd just show her his face, so that she'd know he was here. Placing the flowers aside, he grinned. That would be perfect. Lets see what she would do once she knew he was outside.

The excitement of the surprise led him to gently turn the doorknob, silently hoping to catch her off guard in the midst of her busy day. The vision inside, however, caught him off guard.

With a sudden jolt, he woke up, the vivid image of that unexpected scene burning in his mind. . Lucien lay there, grappling with the conflicting emotions that surged within. The room was quiet, the remnants of the dream haunting him.

He looked down at the peacefully sleeping Evana, her form outlined by the soft glow of the moonlight filtering through the curtains. The dream lingered, its vividness still etched in his mind like an unwelcome afterimage.

With a heavy sigh, Lucien carefully disentangled himself from the covers, trying not to disturb her peaceful slumber. He couldn't shake off the unease that had settled within him, the need to escape running through him urgently.

Quickly, he reached for his phone on the nightstand and slipped into his shoes, all the while avoiding the risk of waking Evana. The hotel room felt like a cage, and the air within it seemed to constrict him. Within a minute, he was outside, closing the door as silently while leaving as he had when he arrived.

Evana opened her eyes lazily and stretched, feeling refreshed. For a moment, she wondered why she felt so fresh when the lingering scent caught her attention. Her senses came alive as she realized that it was Lucien's scent that enveloped her.

In a daze, she patted her hand around on the bed, half expecting him to be sleeping beside her. But soon, the reality settled in as her hand was met with cold sheets. She was probably imaginging things. Lucien was not here. She shook her head at herself. Why would she fool herself like this? He'd already said that he was going to be busy all weekend... Since it was already morning, she needed to call Nora and plan for the day.

Looking around, she spotted her phone on the nightstand and then something else. She shot up in bed as if she had been electrified as she leaned forward and grabbed his watch. He had indeed returned last night! His scent had not been a figment of her imagination. Maybe he was still in the washroom.

With a burst of energy, she raced towards the bathroom, only to be disappointed by the empty space. However, she could not help but hug the watch to herself. At least he'd come over for her. This proved that she was probably over thinking things. They were still on the same page, even though they were constrained for time.

As for the mistake she'd made, maybe just maybe, she could get over that without telling Lucien... After all the matter had already been resolved...

Chapter 395: A Gathering

"Hey! Are you planning a wedding or a mass murder?" Isabella asked playfully, her eyes twinkling mischievously as she took a delicate sip of her wine.

Evana and Olivia burst into laughter, their giggles harmonizing in agreement with Isabella's jest. Nora, standing before the mirror, couldn't help but join in the amusement. A confident grin adorned her face as she glanced at the mirror, admiring the long slit on her dress that seductively reached up to her hip, effortlessly enhancing the illusion of her endlessly long legs.

"What mass murder? I'm just plotting to slay my husband with desire when he lays eyes on me," Nora replied, her voice filled with a teasing charm.

Evana, shaking her head in mock disapproval, chimed in, "You're planning to exchange vows in a church in that dress? And then have your husband harboring impure thoughts about you? If that's not enough, when others catch a glimpse, Demon is going to massacre everyone and end up in jail. What on earth were you thinking when you picked that killer dress?"

Nora's grin widened, and she playfully shook her head, "Oh, this is not the wedding dress. This is the Honeymoon dress."

"Whoa! In that case, it's fabulous. Bella officially approves of Nora darling's choice," Isabella declared with a wink.

Evana, still entertained by Nora's bold choice, nodded in agreement but couldn't resist adding, "While we absolutely adore the dress, sweetheart, we're not here for the honeymoon details. Spill the beans on the wedding dress. I can't believe you've kept it a secret until now. Come on, reveal the masterpiece that you've chosen for the big day."

"No more suspense! Nora, show us the wedding dress," Isabella urged as well, her eyes gleaming with excitement.

But Nora shrugged, "I think I might repeat the dress from my last time. Demetri had quite liked that dress."

Evana and Olivia looked on in confusion while Isabella's eyes widened, "You looked too beautiful in that dress but how can you..." And then another question popped up into her head, "What do you mean he'd liked that? He was there?"

"Yup. He came to confirm that I did not really marry Antonio..."

Isabella giggled at that and reminded her, "Well, you better not be wearing that dress. Come on. Stop building up the suspense."

Nora chuckled at Isabella's insistence and decided to end the suspense. "Alright, alright. No more delays. I'll reveal the wedding dress," she declared, disappearing into the trial room.

As the anticipation built, Isabella, Evana, and Olivia exchanged curious glances. Isabella couldn't help but muse, "If Demetri was at that wedding, what did he plan to do if you said 'I do' to Antonio?"

"I have no idea. Carry me away probably."

Olivia shook her head and answered, "Oh babe, if you said 'I do' he would have killed Toni first, made sure you were a widow and then taken you away. I know you think you probably punished Antonio that day but you saved his life."

"Don't say that! I'll end up regretting that choice. Gosh! You have no idea how thankful I am that he is not here anymore and chose to study abroad.

Moments later, Nora stepped out, and the room fell silent in awe. The wedding dress she wore was nothing short of a masterpiece. Adorned with intricate lace, delicate flowers, and shimmering diamonds that caught the light in the most enchanting way, the gown seemed to transform with every step Nora took. And while it looked white on the surface, there were undertones of blue there carved into the flowers...

Isabella was the first to break the silence, "Nora, that dress is absolutely breathtaking! Who's the designer? I need their number for my imaginary future wedding!"

Nora murmured something under her breath about not being too into the future that Isabella did not catch, before she answered, "Too bad, bella baby. This dress is designed by my husband."

Isabella and Evana both gasped as they heard this, "Is there anything that man cannot do?"

Olivia grinned at their reaction and added her two cents, "Why do you think he was called the Demon?"

"For his personality?" Evana pointed out as if that was the obvious answer but Olivia shook her head, "Uh huh. That too but mainly because that man is a fiend. He only has to see things once to learn them. There is nothing he cannot do. There were people who refused to participate in competitions because he was there in it and he never made mistakes."

Nora's grin widened as she heard that but could not resist adding, "Well, he did make a mistake this time."

The three girls turned to look at Nora who was grinning like a cheshire cat and Isabella could not help but ask, "What did you do?"

"I made a small change to his design."

Evana, Isabella and Olivia exchanged glances at that, "Well, this is interesting. So, what is this change?"

Slowly, Nora turned around to show the back of the dress. As expected it was as beautifull designed as the rest of the dress... but there were almost a million tiny pea-sized buttons at the back instead of a zip...

"Holy shi* Nora! You're going to have to start getting into the dress a day in advance to close all those tiny buttons in time for the ceremony."

"Nora darling, how can you torture your man like that? Aren't you worried that he will tear the dress apart."

Nora shook her head and grinned, " Nah! I believe in keeping things interesting. He's going to have to take his time... if he dares to ruin my dress..."

"Leave it to you to torture Demon. Good thing, I think. It will keep him grounded." Olivia toasted.

Isabella raised her own glass as she winked, "Demetri may be The Demon, but you're the real mischief-maker here, Nora. We might have to send a collective prayer for Demetri Frost."

Nora chuckled at that and shrugged happily. She didn't care if he was Demon or not. What mattered was that he was hers... Forever.

Chapter 396: Hush Hush

As the group dispersed after the fitting and lunch, Evana was intrigued by a cryptic message from Nora, urging her to return to the lunch venue. With a raised eyebrow and curiosity in her eyes, she slipped back into her chair and questioned, "What's up?"

Nora, with a secretive smile, replied, "Wait for a few minutes."

The doorbell jingled, signaling Olivia's entrance. Her surprise at seeing Evana still there was evident, and she directed a quizzical look at Nora, "I thought you said something about a surprise proposal. What's Evana doing here?"

"A surprise proposal?" Evana's heart fluttered momentarily at Olivia's words. Could Lucien have been acting strangely because he was planning to propose? The excitement was short-lived, though, as Nora clarified, "Isabella is the one being proposed to."

"Bella baby is dating someone?" Olivia's surprise was palpable, while Evana maintained a subtle smile. Lucien had shared Ian and Isabella's dating news with her, but the sudden leap to marriage caught her off guard.

Nora leaned forward with a conspiratorial air, "Oh, yes. And she's getting proposed to at the wedding, by a Frost."

Olivia's eager smile faded, and she paled. Isabella was dating a Frost? Demetri, Gabe, and Lucien were ruled out. Erasmi was absent so there was no way she was dating him. And Isabella was working with Ian who had a strict rule about not dating employees. She couldn't help but entertain the thought – was it Seb? Her heart clenched at the idea, but before she could voice her concerns, Evana spoke up, diverting the attention, "Ian Frost, huh? Seems a bit rushed. Why propose at the wedding and put her in such a situation?"

Olivia was caught off guard, feeling a mixture of shock and relief at the revelation. Ian. Isabella was dating Ian. But she quickly chastised herself. What did Seb have to do with any of this? She had no reason to be concerned about him. Seb just needed to be happy, wherever he was.

"He's not proposing marriage at the wedding. That's a separate affair, just in case Isabella decides to turn him down. His words, not mine. He wants me to toss the bouquet at her." Nora added mysteriously.

Olivia grinned at that, "What? Should we leap aside when you toss the bouquet, lest it land with us."

Nora nodded at that, "Uh huh, something like that.. Here's the plan..."

As Nora outlined the plan that Ian had made, Olivia and Evana could only grin and nod their heads. They had to agree that it was an awesome plan and someone like Isabella who loved grand gestures would be thrilled. While the planned everything forward, Nora couldn't help but send a worried glance at Evana. Once they were alone, Nora clicked her fingers in front of Evana, "You seem a bit lost. You okay?"

Shaking her head to clear her thoughts, Evana replied, "Yeah, just got caught up in my own head. I'm happy for Isabella, but it's all just so... unexpected, you know? Isn't it too soon for everything?"

But Nora shook her head, "Come on. You know these brothers. They are all the same, once they have decided on something they won't be hesitating or wasting time. Ian knows he wants Isabella forever, he is going to leave no stone uncovered to make her his. Even if that includes bribing me and Demetri for the bouquet toss."

Evana laughed at that, "So, you've been bribed? Tell me more." Evana knew that she was changing the subject, but the truth was that she felt a bit hurt. Though she accepted that as her own foolishness. Lucien had indeed broached the subject of marriage with her when he'd been planning for Demon's proposal but she'd told him that they should wait for a while until she was settled. And now that she knew that Ian was going to propose, she felt sad. Why did her and Lucien have to stay engaged only. She could marry him. She needed to tell him that she wanted marriage... Maybe she would do it after Nora and Demetri's wedding.

At the hotel, she entered the room, closing the door behind her, she was caught off guard by the sight of Lucien sitting on the couch, seemingly lost in thought.

A surprised gasp escaped Evana's lips, "Lucien! You're here." Without a second thought, she rushed towards him, her heart racing. Lucien looked up, a soft smile on his face, as if he had been waiting for her.

"Hey, you," he greeted, standing up as Evana closed the distance between them. Without any hesitation, she wrapped her arms around him in a tight embrace, finding comfort and solace in his presence. He'd come even though he'd said he wouldn't be able to.

"I missed you last night," Evana admitted, her voice muffled against his chest. "You'd come back. You should have woken me up."

Lucien sighed and explained, "I got in pretty late. Didn't want to disturb your sleep," his warm breath sending shivers down her spine. "But I'm here now. Let's talk."

Evana nodded and sent him a surprised glance, "What do you want to talk about?"

Evana could not help but feel butterflies in her stomach. Was Lucien going to propose to her right away? Was that why she'd been stopped midway?

As he gently nudged her to sit on the couch, and knelt on the floor in front of her, Evena's excitement jumped through the roof, with only one thought in her mind- Was he going to propose to her? And if he did would she say yes immediately or need time like last time? But she knew, she'd say yes, definitely. She wanted to say, yes to him. So that they would be together without anything between them.

Unexpectedly, as she was cheering herself to say yes, the words that reached her ears shocked her to the core, " Evana, lets part ways for now."

Her ears seemed to fill with a strange ringing as she heard the words, " Wh.. what did you say?"

And then she saw him, looking into her eyes as if he were talking to a stranger, and repeat, " Evana, we should step back and take a break from each other."

Chapter 397: Couples Fight

Nora sat on the couch, swinging her feet as she looked at the door thoughtfully. She really needed to accomplish this today. They were going to have a wedding soon and nothing was going as it should.

As the door to the house opened, she narrowed her eyes, ready for a battle. She watched as Demetri walked inside, while loosening his tie and stood up. Time to proceed without caution.

Just then, Demetri seemed to sense her gaze and looked up at her with a soft smile, " Hey, Kitten."

Nora paused. He looked happy to see her. Should she not... No. She needed to... "Demetri, we need to talk."

His eyebrows furrowed in confusion, but he nodded, hanging his jacket on the hook by the door. "Sure, what's on your mind?"

Nora paced the room, her mind racing with thoughts of how to approach this mission. She decided to cut to the chase and sighed, "Demetri... I've decided! I want to have a bachelorette party."

Nodding, Demetri caught her hand and sat on the couch, pulling her into his lap as he agreed, "So? I thought you were already having one."

As his hand carelessly traced the back of her neck, Nora gulped and continued, "No no! I mean a proper bachelorette with a male stripper."

The fingers on her nape paused and Demetri cocked his head. Nora held her breath in anticipation as Demetri cocked his head at her, looking at her in silence as the temperature around them dropped.

However, Demetri sighed and shook his head, "That's it? I thought it was something serious. You've found an agency to hire the stripper, or should I tell Nina to look into the matter?"

Nora stared at Demetri in horror and shook her head, "Are you even listening to me? Did you understand what I am saying? A male stripper who will be waving his junk in my face and probably giving me a lap dance. You are okay with that?"

"If that's what you want." Demetri shrugged and closed his eyes, leaning back his head.

Deflated, Nora looked at the man and found herself distracted for a moment as she admired Demetri's prominent Adam's apple. She wanted to kiss him... Shaking her head, she brought back her thoughts into focus, returning to her mission.

"If that's what I want? Are you saying it's okay if I have fun with someone else?" Nora asked.

Demetri opened one eye, peering at her with a bemused expression. "Nora, it's just a bachelorette party. Why the fuss? You're just looking. I trust you."

Nora sighed and poked her finger at his chest, "You're not even jealous about it? How could you? You are not the old Demetri anymore! You don't care for me already? Trust is good, yes, but a little

possessiveness doesn't hurt. It's normal for partners to feel a bit territorial, you know? Do you rememeber how you reacted to that Calendar? You've changed now that I am all yours!"

Before Nora could jump off his lap after her angry tirade, Demetri caught her and pulled her back into him, leaning back as she fell over into his arms, " You are the one who has changed. You used to look at me with stars in your eyes. And now you are trying to pick a fight. Come here..."

Pulling her upward, Demetri kissed her softly as Nora laughed and wound her arms around him, kissing him back. A little while later, Nora broke the kiss, placing her forehead against his, " You really are too much. Can you at least fight with me for once?"

"Why exactly do you want to fight?"

Nora pouted, " I read somewhere that fights between a couple make a relationship stronger. And we never fight. So..."

Demetri chuckled at her put off expression, " So you are looking for a reason to fight?"

"Yes! And that is the problem. You are too perfect so I couldn't even find a topic. You do your share of house chores and sometimes even mine. You don't forget anything about me and keep pampering me. You don't flirt outside so that I can be healous and fight you. When you're working overtime, you message me to rest! Demetri Frost, do you have any idea how long and hard I had to think of a topic so that we would disagree. And what happened in the end? You even agreed to a male stripper! Why can you not fight with me? We need to argue!"

"Because I cannot see to stand you lose and I don't lose any arguments, ever."

Nora shook her head at the audacioius statement, only getting more determined to look for a topic they could disagree over. "You're impossible, Demetri Forst. But challenge accepted. There has to be something, some topic that we can disagree on," she muttered to him, resolute in her mission.

"Well, actually there is something we might disagree on," Demetri pointed out.

Nora's eyes lit up at that. "Really? What is it? Tell me more."

"Our honeymoon destination. I'm changing our destination."

Nora felt her mouth fall open. "Oh! That is a good topic to fight about! Why are you changing the destination? I thought we agreed on going on the yacht and then touring the sea. How can you change the plans at the end minute and where are you taking me?"

Nora narrowed her eyes at his grinning face and warned, "You are jsut saying this so that we would have an argument, right?"

"No, kitten. I've changed the plans a bit... We need to add a few things to our list of ports during the honeymoon, so I took the liberty to add a few tourist traps and concert tickets for your favourite BTS..."

Nora jumped up a that and threw her arms around him, " See, this is what I mean! You won't even give me valid reasons to fight for you. Why are you so perfect?"

" Fine fine. I'll look for a reason to disagree with you and then we can fight. That was we can have make up se* too."

Nora giggled at that and snuggled into his arms, "Yes. We need to look for a topic to disagree on."

Chapter 398: Nora's Wish

"I can't believe what he has to put up with. Nora darling, I suddenly feel bad for your husband."

Nora grinned mischievously, a glint of amusement in her eyes, and licked the ice cream spoon as she finished narrating her entire saga of the attempted fight to Isabella.

Nora raised an eyebrow, her lips curling into a playful smirk. "Uh huh. He is the one responsible for spoiling me no end. He can only blame himself for my audaciousness."

Isabella giggled at that. Well, technically what Nora said was right. Demetri seemed to love Nora eccentricities, even encouraging them. However, her smile disappeared when Nora continued, "I think I

have to fight you as well. You've been hiding things, and we can't have secrets between besties," she commented, wagging her spoon at Isabella in mock seriousness.

Isabella chuckled, feigning innocence. "Oh, please! I'm an open book, just with a few missing pages."

Isabella rolled her eyes, taking a dramatic pause. "Missing pages? More like a whole hidden Chapter! Spill the tea, Nora! You are with the second most notorious Frost Brother. Don't think I haven't noticed how he has disappeared from the party scene. And you've been glowing like a firefly. So, are you going to confess or do you need me to use underhanded means and blackmail you?"

Nora stared intently at Isabella, trying to judge Isabella's reaction. While Ian had already made his intentions clear, Isabella's silence had been worrying her. Why was Isabella hiding things from her? Isabella shuffled in her seat and looked down, "I didn't mean to hide it from you. It's nothing, Nora. We're just messing around..."

"Uh huh. Bella baby, if you were messing around, you'd have been announcing your affair through the roof. You're hiding it. That means it might mean more." Nora pointed out softly, looking at her best friend. Just like Isabella knew her well, she knew her best friend too. If it had been a passing fancy mediocre relationship or fling, Isabella would not have stopped talking about it. But she had yet to speak a word about Ian, which meant that she was keeping him close. Things important to Isabella were never spoken about.

Isabella grimaced, "You know me too well, darling. Ian Frost really is something, huh?"

Nora shrugged, "Well, all Frosts are something, aren't they?"

Isabella nodded, "Hmm. They are. And that is why I'm not thinking much. I refuse to allow myself to think of the future, Nora baby. Ian... he's too good. He surprises me at every turn. He seems to know everything about me and tends to surprise me at every turn. He'll bring me hot chocolate when I'm least expecting it. And did you know he invited me to a date the other night but instead of taking me out, he put on a series of the K drama that I'd been meaning to binge watch. And then, when I was busy enjoying it, he held me in his arms and slept through the entire series! I never expected that...He remembers the littlest things even those I might have mentioned in passing and don't remember myself."

Nora leaned back, a sly smile playing on her lips. "Well, well, well, it seems like someone's got herself a Frost wrapped around her finger.

Isabella blushed, her cheeks turning a shade of pink that perfectly matched her strawberry ice cream. "It's not like that, Nora. I mean, sure, he's been doing sweet things, but, like I said we are just enjoying the present at the moment. I'm not sure where it is headed though and I am not looking for a direction, to be honest."

Nora leaned in, her expression turning serious as she held Isabella's hand. "Bella baby, listen to me. A Frost doesn't invest time and effort in a relationship unless he's really fallen. They are not known for half-measures. So, if Ian is doing all these sweet things, it's because he's serious about you. Don't delude yourself and open be prepared to open yourself to possibilities."

Isabella looked down, a mix of emotions swirling within her. "I want to believe that, Nora. But, my father... he's been pestering me for helping my brother over his gambling problem. I fear that if things get too serious, I might become a burden to Ian. I don't want that, Nora."

Nora sighed and gently called out, "Bella baby, you know of my troubles past. Do you think I should not have relied on Demetri for his help? Or that I was a burden to him."

"Of course not! That would have been foolish." Isabella promptly answered, indignant that Nora would think something like this.

"Then do you think that Demetri would ignore my problems just because I don't want him to interfere? Its just a matter of time that Ian will interfere in this problem, Isabella. I suggest you make up your mind soon."

Isabella widened her eyes as she heard Nora's words, "What do you mean?"

"Do you really think that Ian is someone who would sit back and let you handle things alone with your brother and father? The only reason he has probably not interfered might be out of respect for you. However, Bella baby, open your eyes and look at Ian carefully. Don't deny 'your forever something' for the two of you just because of the past."

Isabella slowly finished her ice cream, deep in thought. Yes. She'd probably been seeing it only from a single angle whereas Nora had laid out things in the bare. Could it be that that Ian was really as invested as her. She thought of all the little things he had been doing and how they'd been spending each spare minute with each other. Maybe it was time to consider a more serious relationship with Ian instead of taking it a day at a time as she'd been doing.

Isabella made a mental note to have a heart-to-heart conversation with Ian. Maybe they could be something more...Now that Nora had planted the seed of a 'forever' in her mind, Isabella knew things had changed for her.

Chapter 399: Overstepping

Ian strolled towards the front door, his gaze sweeping over the meticulously maintained front yard. The house before him held a special significance – it was the very place Isabella had spent her formative years. As he stood there, staring at the closed door, he could not help but give an irritated sigh.

He hated going anywhere uninvited. He should have met her family, formally proposed marriage and held a get together. Instead he had to come here to straighten up her brother and father as if he was a mafia.

Despite the nagging discomfort, Ian recognized the importance of the situation. He needed to make this aspect either change or disappear. And while Isabella might not be happy when she learnt of his actions later, he knew that she would hate herself even more if she had to be the one to take the decision of severing ties with people who were toxic to her. Specially with those whom she held good memories.

With a deep breath, he squared his shoulders and pressed the doorbell. The woman who opened the door resembled an older version of Isabella and even though Ian had seen her previously, he was still amazed. With a careful smile, he introduced himself, "Mrs Ruffalo. I'm Ian Frost."

"I know who you are. You're Isabella's boss. I recognise you from last time. What brings you here, Mr. Frost?"

Ian's eyes met hers, his expression serious. "Thank you for having me, Mrs. Ruffalo. I've come because there are matters that need addressing."

She motioned for him to enter, and as Ian stepped into the house and questioned him, "How is Isabella doing? Is she alright? She didn't have to be hospitalized again, right?"

"I'm sure you the answer to that already Mrs Ruffalo." Ian answered as he placed the few gift bags he had brought over.

Mrs Ruffalo stared at the package as if it contained a bomb and cleared her throat, "You didn't have to bring anything over, Mr Frost. You're my daughter's boss."

"It's a symbol of goodwill," Ian replied, the edge in his voice hinting at the seriousness of the impending conversation.

Mrs Ruffalo followed him into the living room where Ian sat on the couch without being invited. She stared at him in confusion, wondering if she should offer him any refreshments but the man shook his head, "Mrs Ruffalo. Please have a seat. I'd like to talk directly without beating around the bush."

Mrs Ruffalo nodded cautiously, waiting for the man to continue, which he did, directly, " "I've decided to pursue a more serious commitment with Isabella, and for that, I'd like to get a few things out of the way."

"You and Isabella are dating? But she said that you were only her boss and well wisher," The woman asked in confusion.

Ian smiled, "Mrs Ruffalo, I am Isabella's boss and well wisher. But I also hope to be her partner in the future."

"You have my blessings," Mrs Ruffalo muttered out quickly. However, this time, Ian's smile did not reach his eyes, as he thanked the older woman.

Mrs Ruffalo looked away, understanding without the young man saying anything. Ian Frost was here not to seek their approval for marriage to Isabella but to probably warn them off to stay away. She looked down and clasped her fingers before asking softly, " Mr Frost, has Isabella ever told you about her brother? Or our family?"

"Not much." Ian answered truthfully.

Mrs Ruffalo sighed and explained, "I know you do not have a good impression of me or her father and brother but things were not always like this."

"I know. And that is why, I've chosen to come here and understand things before I take action, Mrs Ruffalo."

"Take action?"

Ian sighed, "Mrs Ruffalo. I do not like to talk in circles. Since I wish to spend my future with Isabella, her happiness is my main concern. And right now, from what I can see, the only people who are making her unhappy are her family. So, either I step in and protect her or I give the family a chance to make reparations and save whatever is left of the love/ relationship. I've already seen that you still care for Isabella, even though you've distance yourself from her. And from what I understand, she's always known love from your family until a few years ago. So, could you shed light on that?"

Eliza Ruffalo stared at Ian with a complicated gaze as she finally sighed, "Mr Frost. I know of your reputation. You've been known to change partners like people change socks. Are you sure, you can keep my bella happy? Because she deserves it more than anyone else. The thing is..."

She took a deep breath and continued, "The truth is that Emerald is not my son. He is my stepson. He is Isabella's father's son from his first marriage. When I first married Gio, Emerald was a little baby, with Gio handling him alone. However, he was little and had no impression of his mother, so I took on that role naturally, nurturing the boy like my own. And then Isabella was born. Emerald doted on her and we thought that everything was well."

"But something changed around the time Emerald was eighteen. His biological mother returned and he started to live with her. In time, he somehow started to believe that his father had cheated him out of a mother, making me take his real mother's place. To reassure him that we loved him more than anyone else, somehow we started to dote on him more and more."

"Over time, Isabella seemed to demand our attention and we had to divide it between the two children, causing my little Iisi to become more and more rebellious to get her parent's attention. This caused her father to start to distant himself from her until one day, things fell apart. One day, Emerald came home with a friend who begged Gio to let him marry Isabella because she was pregnant with his child. Bella was sixteen at the time..."

Chapter 400: Bachelors Retreat

"Where is our crab?" Ian loaded the things into the pickup truck that had finally been able to see the time of the day. With less than two weeks left to Demetri's wedding, they'd decided to take an all-brothers weekend treat away for fishing and lazing around in general. And they were going to meet their oldest nephew as well so that was an added bonus.

"He's on his way. I had to forcefully wake him up to and drag him out of the bed in the morning," Seb groaned as he loaded another heavy bag into the back. "What the heck have you filled this with, Ian?"

Ian chuckled, glancing at the bag in question. "Just the essentials, Seb. Snacks, drinks, and a couple of those inflatable flamingos for the lake. You know, the important stuff."

Seb rolled his eyes, a smirk playing on his lips. "Inflatable flamingos? Are we throwing a pool party, or is this a serious fishing trip?"

"It's a get to know our nephews slash bachelor party. We can have some flamingos alright!"

"Flamingo floats for Demetri's bachelor party. Sigh! Ian Frost, if you hold such a miserable bachelor party, I'll kill you. Let me warn you, I will personally organise your party. And at the time, you, Lucy and Demetri can go to a corner and spend the night with your drinks while the rest of us will enjoy our night!"

Ian laughed and nodded his head, "Fine fine! You can do that. But for the wedding, I'll have to convince Isabella to say yes. She is, at the moment, not talking to me."

Seb raised an eyebrow at that? Really? Why?"

"Oh, I overstepped her boundaries. So she is rightfully angry. I'll get to grovelling after I come back. Give her time to calm down."

Seb rolled his eyes at his brother, knowing that Ian would already have began grovelling if things were bad but before he could say more, Lucien broke in, "I think I might not need to join Demetri and Ian. So, let me in on whatever you are planning."

Ian and Seb both paused in surprise as they turned to look at Lucien and his sunken face. It seemed their concern had been on point. But for Lucien to break up..." What did you do, Lucy?"

Lucien shook his head and jumped into the back of the truck and sat in the corner, with his eyes closed. Seb jumped in next to him while Ian walked to the driver's seat, " If you did nothing, then was it Evana?"

"Does someone have to do wrong? Nothing is wrong. Its just that we've decided to take a break. The long distance and lack of communication has shown us that the future might not be so easy to navigate. So, we've parted ways for the time being."

Seb and Ian exchanged another look of worry and sighed. But before they could grill Lucien some more, they noticed Gabe walking towards them with a small smile. Their brother had lost a lot of weight and his look had them share another look.

"Hi crab!" Ian called out, leaning out of the window. Gabe shook his head and throwing his bag into the back, he slid in next to Seb and Lucien, " Just because I decided to retreat from the social circle doesn't mean that I'm a crab now."

"You retreated into your shell whichmeans that you are the hermit crab." Seb pointed out.

"I'm here now, aren't I? Out of my shell?" Gabe pointed out.

Another glance was exchanged between Ian and Seb as they communicated with their looks about Gabe and Lucien being in the pits and looking for a solution about the two's moods.

Just then Demetri climbed into the truck and couldn't help but notice the serious vibes lingering. "What's with the long faces? Did someone eat all the snacks already?"

Seb, trying to lighten the mood, quickly pointed out," We were just discussing Gabe's evolution into a hermit crab. And don't get me started on Ian's choice of inflatables."

Demetri chuckled at the talk of flamingos and

Demetri chuckled at the talk of flamingos and looked at Ian with a raised eyebrow. "Inflatable flamingos? Are we fishing or starting a circus?"

Ian grinned, "A bit of both, actually. You know, making fishing stylish."

Demetri shook his head in mock disbelief, "Stylish fishing. I never thought I'd see the day. Alright, let's roll. I'm eager to see these glamorous fish we're going to catch."

The truck rumbled to life, and they hit the road. The atmosphere lightened as they drove with Ian, Demetri and Seb making a concentrated effort to keep the topic going on random things until finally, Lucien and Gabe decided to join in on the slump until they began a ridiculous game of karaoke where they had to sing completely wrong lyrics to the songs that were being played on the radio, followed by an argument about how Nora was planning a bachelorette party with a male stripper causing Seb and Ian to protest vehemently and threatening to turn back and go there, while munching on snacks that they were supposed to eat at the trip.

"I can't believe you finished the last packet of chips." Ian scowled at Seb as he moved to the passenger seat while Demetri moved to the driving seat after hours of driving.

"Hey! I was hungry! It takes a lot of work to sit in one place and sing, alright!"

"You were singing? More like making animal nosies! You're such a pig, Seb!"

"And you are such a petty party p**per! I got more bags of chips and snacks didn't I?!"

"Yeah! My favourite ones are not here! I want them!"

"That is not my problem! I got snacks. Who cares if they are your favourite or not?"

"Boys! Stop fighting! We are about to reach? Call Erasmi and ask him where we have to wait for him." Demetri interrupted the brothers in amusement, who were fighting like little kids.

