

Benefits 421

Chapter 421: A Proposal

The emcee's voice boomed through the venue, announcing the highly anticipated moments of the evening. "Ladies and gentlemen, it's time for the bouquet tossing and cake cutting ceremony! Let's have Nora and Demetri make their way here. And all the single ladies, better assemble on the dance floor.

Evana, Olivia and Isabella stood on the dance floor with a smile on their faces as they exchanged amused glances. Ian stood on the sidelines, a mischievous gleam in his eyes as he exchanged a subtle nod with Nora. Isabella, unaware of the orchestrated plan, stood next to Eva and Olivia, excitement bubbling within her.

With all the talk of the wedding and marriage, she suddenly wished that she really would be the one to catch the bouquet. The emcee took center stage, holding the bouquet high for everyone to see. "Alright, ladies, get ready! On the count of three, Nora will toss the bouquet, and who knows, maybe one of you will be the next to say 'I do'!"

As everyone in the crowd cheered, Isabella's eyes caught her parent's gaze in the crowd and she sighed. It was Ian who had made this possible. He had been the one who had forcefully shown her father Emerald's tricks, making sure that he was sent to a rehabilitation centre for his gambling and a councillor for his irrational hate towards her and their father.

Even though things were strained between her father and her for now, she felt, for the first time that she might be able to have her father walk down the aisle someday... It was something that she had given up on over the years.

She felt Evana nudge her elbow and realized that she was distracted while Nora was standing there for them with a sly smile on her lips before she finally turned back.

"One, two, three!" The emcee counted down, and Nora tossed the bouquet high into the air.

As the bouquet soared through the air, Isabella couldn't help but feel a flutter of anticipation. Her heart raced, and she subconsciously took a step forward, caught up in the excitement of the moment. Beside her, Evana and Olivia exchanged glances, sharing a knowing smile. Poor Nora had been practicing tossing that bouquet for weeks on end so that it would land exactly where they'd placed Isabella.

However, the bouquet seemed to have a mind of its own, for it seemed to be coming Olivia's way... Alarmed, Olivia stepped back while Evana could only grin at the spectacle as everything happened in the span of a minute.

Isabella's eyes widened in surprise as the bouquet landed directly in her hands. The crowd erupted into cheers, and she blinked, almost unable to believe her luck. What was this? How did it really land on her?

Eva and Olivia shared knowing glances, and Eva teasingly nudged Isabella. "Looks like someone might be next in line for a walk down the aisle."

Isabella blushed, laughing off the comment. "Oh, come on, it's all in good fun." She glanced at Ian, who stood with a satisfied smirk on his face, clearly pleased with the success of their plan.

The emcee, catching onto the playful atmosphere, chimed in, "Well, folks, it seems we have a potential future bride in our midst! Let's give a round of applause to the lovely Isabella! Ian Frost? You better be prepared to get down on your knees soon!" who quickly turned to Isabella and got on his knee, almost making her feel faint while the crowd cheered.

Feeling inexplicably shy, Isabella clutched the bouquet in her hand and ran outwards towards the balcony. She needed a moment to breathe... She was pretty sure, she'd forgotten how to do that.

Even as she hurriedly walked out with a red face, Ian bowed to everyone and made to follow her, as Nora, Evana and Olivia raised their hands at him to wish him luck. Meanwhile the emcee, distracted everyone with the cake cutting.

Outside, Isabella stood staring outside and the beautiful landscape, hugging the bouquet close to her, carefully inhaling the beautiful scent of the buds.

Suddenly, she felt Ian's arms surrounding hers as his breath was close to her ears, "Why are you crying?"

"I am not. I think something went in my eye..."

Ian smiled and kissed her neck, making goosebumps rise, " Ian, someone might step out."

"Nobody will." Ian whispered in her ears. "What do you think, Isi doll?"

"About what?"

"About catching the bouquet?" Isabella felt a moment of concern. Was Ian concerned about her getting ideas? Or was it what Erasmi said... Unsure what to say, she began, "It's just a tradition and folk tale... Nothing to..." Before she could say anything more she felt Ian take her hand and turn her around.

"What..."

"Hush." He took her hand in his, his fingers tracing a delicate path over her knuckles.

"These hands," he began, his tone a mix of admiration and something more, "have caught a bouquet tonight. And I can't help but wonder what kind of ring would look perfect on these fingers."

Isabella's eyes widened in surprise, a mixture of emotions dancing in her gaze. "Ian, you're being silly. It's just a tradition."

He chuckled, continuing to caress her fingers. "Silly or not, I can't help but imagine. Maybe a princess-cut diamond, elegant and timeless, just like you." His eyes twinkled with mischief. "But then again, you're all fire and spirit. A ruby, perhaps? It would suit you, doll, fiery and passionate. Or a sapphire, strong and resilient, just like the waves."

Isabella chuckled and tried to extract her hand from his, "You're making this sound like a whimsical fairytale. It's just a bouquet, Ian. It doesn't mean that you have to go and get a ring."

"You're right." Ian looked up, into her eyes as he smiled, "No need to go and rush to get a ring. Especially when I already have one here."

Isabella's breath caught again as Ian knelt down on one knee, carefully pulling out a little velvet box...

Chapter 422: A Proposal or two

Isabella's breath caught in her throat as Ian knelt before her. She brought her hand to her mouth, her eyes welling up with tears. The hints that Nora and Erasmi had dropped had not prepare her for the shock of this unexpected proposal.

And the ring was such a stunner... It was something she'd never expected... Of all the things she had imagined in her head about her perfect wedding, the one thing that she'd never been sure of was the ring. Diamonds somehow always felt cold and impersonal while rubies somehow felt too boring and traditional... However, he seemed to have created a perfect ring with diamonds, rubies and sapphire. This was the perfect ring... from the perfect man...

As she looked down at the ring and then at Ian's eyes, a mix of emotions washed over her. She wanted to hug him, to take the ring, to say yes a hundred times over, but she found herself frozen in the moment. Her lips opened and closed in a comical guppy-fish fashion, attempting to process the overwhelming rush of feelings and finding herself tongue-tied.

Suddenly a smile covered his face and she knew he was going to say something. and he did..."Doll, while I am willing to wait all my life for you, I'd really appreciate an acceptance before I have to schedule my knee replacement surgery."

Her laughter bubbled up, a welcome release of the tension she hadn't realized she was holding. "You and your sense of humor, Ian. Always on point." Shaking her head, she extended her hand to him, " I guess I should put you out of your misery and save you from fake knees...Oh Ian, I'll never want to take it off... its so beautiful..."

Finally, she let go of the feelings and as Ian held her hand, slipping the ring onto her finger. "Only because its on your hand doll," he whispered as he pulled her close to him, "Now, let me just..."

Bending his head, Ian caught her lips in a kiss. He tilted her head back over his arm and kissed her, starting with a gentle touch that swiftly intensified, leaving her clinging to him as the only stable anchor in a world that seemed to sway and spin. Her lips parted at the insistent touch of his tongue against them, sending electric tremors within her.

Before she could be swept away, however, she heard the sound of her distant cheering and her eyes snapped open. The realization hit her – they were still at Demetri and Nora's wedding.

A swift panic set in, and she jumped back from his arms, ready to take off and hide the ring. Before she could slide off the ring, Ian caught her hand and pulled her into his arms, "That ring has barely been there a minute and you are already taking it off? Doll, ours is going to be the shortest engagement in the history... You said you never wanted to take it off."

Isabella rolled her eyes and shot him a nervous look, "It's Nora's big day today! She's planned everything so carefully. I don't want to take the spotlight away from her..."

Ian rolled his eyes playfully. "You really think I'd mess up Nora's big day without permission? Demetri would kill me without a second thought. In fact, it was her idea to do this during the cake cutting. She's in on the plan."

Isabella's eyes widened in surprise. "Nora knew?"

Ian smirked. "Let's just say, she's an excellent co-conspirator. In fact, I planned to do this after the reception. But she insisted that it had to be done during the cake cutting. So that she can witness your happy face before she is whisked away by Demetri for their honeymoon."

As they rejoined the celebration, Isabella's rosy blush deepened as she realized that Nora was staring their way. With a happy smile, she raised her hand and showed the ring to Nora who squealed even from far away as she raced towards them, much to the amusement of others.

With a twinkle in her eye, she quickly caught her hand and sent an approving nod to Ian, "This suits her."

Isabella rolled her eyes and pointed out, "I can't believe you planned this? I thought you were supposed to turn into bridezilla so that no one would steal your light."

"I'd rather have you shine with me, Bella baby. That is more fun! Today has just become even more perfect."

As the night progressed, and the festivities continued with dancing and laughter, Isabella couldn't help but feel a wave of gratitude. Soon, the dancing continued and there was no one to steal her away from Ian as he held her close during the dance.

Even as everyone congratulated the bride and the maid of honor on their new status of being newly married and newly engaged respectively, Evana could not help but feel a pinch in her heart.

It was only when Lucien caught her gaze and sent a gentle smile her way that she tried to gather her courage to take the next step in their relationship.

The subtle pinch in her heart intensified, and she took a deep breath, ready to go to him and address the unspoken emotions between them.

Just then, Lucien, sensing her apprehension, came to her and offered his hand. "Shall we join the dance, Evana?"

She nodded, her hand finding comfort in his. As they stepped onto the dance floor, the world around them melted away, leaving only the gentle sway of their bodies to the rhythm of the music.

She felt him sigh close to her and she heard him lean close to her, "Life is full of uncertainty, isn't it? Ian dared not waste a moment to make Isabella his."

Evana nodded and gently leaned her against his chest, the steady beat of his heart comforting her. She felt his hand caress her hair and her heart caught. He hadn't done this in so long...

"Evana... someday, will you wear my ring?"

Evanageline felt her heart clench and she looked up into his eyes in shock as she nodded without hesitation, as if scared that he would retract his question.

Chapter 423: Fever

Olivia was drunk. She knew that of course, but she was appalled to ask for help. So what if she couldn't walk straight? She'd walk crookedly to her room maybe go zig zag like a snake... As she reached the end of the corridor, she blinked. There was only one problem—there were too many buttons to summon the elevator... which one was the real and which were the ones caused by her drunk haziness?

Crossing her arms, she swayed and nodded, "Challenge accepted." Carefully, she surveyed the wall and decided that the one in the middle was definitely the real one. Raising her finger, she slowly aimed to press the button, only to be met with marble wall. She sighed. It was a bit to the left...

Stepping back, she moved to press the button, only to stumble over the hem of her own dress...Just as she teetered dangerously close to losing her balance, a strong pair of arms enveloped her, and she looked up into a face that had haunted her dreams forever.

Smiling, she turned around and looked up at him with a smile and let herself take a deep breath as she rested her head back, murmuring his name, "Sebby."

The air between them crackled with emotions suppressed for long. Seb sighed, a blend of longing and restraint, his arms still securely wrapped around her. "Livi," he began, the sound of her name heavy with their complicated history. "You're not allowed to look at me like that."

Confusion furrowed Olivia's brow as she tilted her head to meet his gaze. "Like what?" she asked, genuinely puzzled.

Seb looked down at her confused face and a muttered a curse, as he quickly summoned the dang elevator. She'd already closed her eyes and was resting against him as if he was her own darn pillow! The girl had no sense of self protection!

As the elevator doors opened, Sebastian tried to move her along only for her to open her eyes and protest, "Hey! I can walk on my own. I don't need anyone's help. Let go."

She pushed away from him and he watched as she stumbled her way into it. "Are you sure you can go alone?"

"Yes! I don't need help... least of all from you. Come on, you little magic box, close the door and take me to my room!"

Seb shook his head and reminded her, "Fine. Then you can press the button for the floor as well."

Olivia nodded and as the doors started to close, she pressed a button, which left Seb swearing again as he jumped into the elevator. "You little fool! Do you think you have a room on the terrace?"

Shaking his head, he pressed another button but Olivia was challenged again, "I don't want to go to my room, yet. It is going to be super lonely. I want to go up to the terrace, watch the stars and take a breather. I know the terrace here is private."

Seb sighed and shook his head, not wasting his breath. There was no point. Once she had something in her head, she wouldn't let it go, whether she was drunk or not. But as he watched her sway, even as she tried to stand still, he was filled with visions of her falling off the terrace in her drunk state and breaking her neck.

Seb followed Olivia onto the terrace, a mix of exasperation and concern etched on his face. There was no way she was going to die on his watch. The night air was cool and he watched her shiver as she stepped out. With a sigh, he moved to take off his suit jacket to offer it to her, but she was already making a beeline towards the lounges on the side.

With a tipsy enthusiasm, she kicked off her heels, sending them clattering to the floor. Seb winced at the noise and glanced around, making sure they were alone.

As he turned back, however, any words or thoughts he had, flew out of his head. She looked like a Goddess...

The way she lay with careless abandon, her hair fanning her face, and moonlight bathing her in a soft glow. His heart stumbled with pain and he turned away, walking to the wall on the other side. She'd always been beautiful, so he didn't understand why he had to be surprised at this moment.

Resisting the temptation that was her, he kept alert for any sign of movement from her but could only hear her soft humming. Soon, that sound too stopped.

With a heavy sigh, Seb couldn't help but steal a glance back at Olivia, even as he assured himself that he was only checking to see if she was still there. She lay there, seemingly at peace, and for a fleeting moment, he allowed himself to soak in the surreal beauty of the scene. To imagine what could have been if things had not turned out... as they had.

"Sebby...", she called out his name and his eyes widened. Did she know he was looking at her?

"Sebby... come sit with me.", she called out again and he walked towards her.. He didn't want to. His brain reminded him that he shouldn't. But his feet seemed to be intent on answering her siren's call.

Carefully, he sat next to her feet, careful to keep a bit of a distance between them even on the narrow lounge.

She raised her hand and he instinctively knew, what she wanted. She hadn't forgotten and neither had he. Raising his hand, he intertwined their fingers... letting himself forget the distance of the past years between them.

"Sebby... it could have been us."

He stiffened at the words. He knew what she meant. It could have been them, celebrating their union. It could have been them, dancing in each other's arms instead of avoiding each other...

"If only..."

Seb carefully, removed his fingers from hers and stood up, to put distance between them," There are no if onlys in the world, Olivia."

Chapter 424: Do Overs

Olivia gazed up at him, her eyes searching his face for any sign of vulnerability. The atmosphere between them was heavy with unspoken words and unresolved emotions. "Sebby..."

Seb stepped back as she moved closer to him and stood up, "Lets go, Olivia. Its getting colder here."

Even as drunk as she was, she knew that he wasn't going to discuss the past. She could see it in the stubborn set of his face. Slowly, she nodded," Fine fine. I'll go. I didn't ask you to come here with me, you know. I'd have found my way back to my room."

Seb nodded and gestured for her to precede him as he followed her, sighing slowly. "Oh, I have no doubt you'd find your way back eventually, probably with a few detours along the way and maybe having lost a few things."

"But I am not your responsibility... anymore, Seb.", she goaded.

His jaw clenched even further and as they made their way back to the elevator, Olivia stumbled again while Seb instinctively reached out, placing a hand on her hip to steady her.

Any more words she could have said were lost in the moment, as she felt his hand on her. Such a simple touch and yet, she could feel everything within her come alive. She wanted to ask him if he still felt it too, but her words were lost as the elevator doors opened and Seb guided her in, pulling his hand away from her as if burnt.

This time, as they reached her floor, Olivia had closed her eyes, the tears there threatening to fall. She felt his hand touch her elbow to guide her out, and she lowered her head, not wanting him to see how she felt.

She fumbled in her purse for her key card but he couldn't wait to leave her, simply using his own key card to push open the door. It was only as he turned to leave that she caught his sleeve, still looking at the floor, "Be honest, Sebby. Have you never wondered? What if we made the wrong choices, Sebby? What if we let something amazing slip away because of our fear or pride?"

"Life doesn't give us do-overs, Liv. We can't dwell on the 'what ifs.' We have to accept the paths we've chosen."

Olivia looked up into his eyes finally and she knew he could see the tears there. She felt a bitter smile come on her face as his eyes softened. What was the point of all this? Even if he was as biased towards her as he'd been in the past... it wouldn't change their present or the past.

"We never got to say, goodbye, Seb. To give ourselves an ending? Can you hold me, Seb? Only for a goodbye? For old..."

The next minute, she found herself crushed against his chest, his arms around her. Olivia could feel the steady rise and fall of his chest, and the warmth of his body was both a comfort and a reminder of what they'd lost.

His hugs were still the same. He was the first man who had hugged her. She remembered how easy going he'd been. Sometimes hugging her for the silliest of reasons and sometimes for no reason at all. And she finally had his arms around her again, only for a goodbye that was years due.

"You used to hug me like this all the time, Sebby," she murmured, her voice barely above a whisper.

She felt him stiffen and his hold on her softened, pulling back softly, "Go and sleep, Livi. You won't like it when you remember everything tomorrow."

As he turned to leave, Olivia stood there, watching him walk away while she was left alone in a dimly lit hallway.

Taking the steps two at a time, Seb climbed the two floors to his own room with his mind preoccupied. He shouldn't have followed her out of the ballroom. He shouldn't have helped her. It would have been better if he'd contacted the reception to send another woman to help her. Why did he have to be such a masochist? Why?

Lost in his thoughts, he almost collided with a woman who was navigating the hallway in high heels.

"Oops, sorry about that, ma'am," Seb apologized, reaching out to steady her.

The woman smiled, her eyes sparkling, "No harm done. I'm quite used to navigating these heels, but they do have a mind of their own sometimes. And I was distracted... Thank you for saving me from a nasty fall!"

Seb smiled, "I'm glad you are fine. I would have hated seeing such a beautiful woman hurt."

"If I was hurt because of you, I'm sure you'd have accompanied me to the hospital. Dang! You saved me from spending the night with a handsome stranger." The woman flirted making Seb chuckle as he replied, "Hey! That is really my loss."

As she laughed at his joke, Seb felt a subtle shift in the atmosphere.

Glancing over, his heart sank as he saw Olivia standing behind him, her eyes fixated on them. The hurt in her eyes was unmistakable, and a pang of guilt gnawed at him, even though he hadn't done anything to be guilty of.

"I should get going," the woman said with a smile, as she winked at him, "Better luck next time..."

"Yeah, it was nice talking to you," Seb replied absentmindedly, his attention still drawn to Olivia.

Once the lady was gone, he hurried to Olivia who seemed to have frozen there. "What are you doing here?"

"Is she the reason you were in a hurry to deposit me to my room and come back here?"

Sebastian frowned in confusion before his eyes hardened, "Olivia, you need to go back to your room."

"You didn't answer my question."

"I don't need to answer it. We are only old acquaintances. Nothing else. It would do you well to remember that. Now, leave."

Olivia shook her head, "I won't."

Chapter 425: Just Go

Olivia crossed her arms, her eyes reflecting a mixture of hurt and defiance. "I won't leave until you give me an answer, Seb. I saw the way you were laughing and joking with her. Is she the reason you were in such a hurry to deposit me to my room and come back here?"

Seb's jaw clenched, frustration evident in his expression. "Olivia, this is none of your business. We're not involved anymore. I don't owe you any explanations."

"Maybe not, but I do have a choice, Seb. And right now, I choose to stay here," she retorted, determined to stand her ground.

Seb's eyes flashed with irritation. "You're being unreasonable. Go back to your room, Livi. This is not the place for you."

"Why? Because you have someone waiting for you?" Olivia shot back, her tone accusing.

Seb sighed, running a hand through his hair. "No, livi, that's not the case. You're jumping to conclusions."

Olivia simply raised her chin and stared at him, letting him know that she was not going to budge.

Throwing his hands in the air, Seb turned back and said, "Fine. Stand here all night, for all I care. I'm going."

Resolutely, he opened the door to his room, prepared to lock her out and have the security escort her back to her room, only for her to rush into his room, like a little burglar.

"What are you doing, Livi?"

She squared her shoulders, meeting his gaze head-on. "Well, if the woman you planned to spend the night with is gone, then I suppose I'll have to do. I'll be staying with you."

Seb's eyes widened in disbelief. "What? Absolutely not! You're drunk out of your senses!"

"Absolutely yes! I am drunk into my senses! I want you."

The atmosphere changed as Seb looked into her eyes. Did he hear her right? "You want me?" he asked slowly. She must be drunk beyond he imagined. If that is what was coming out of her mouth. Even in the past, when they'd been in a relationship, coaxing her from a kiss to making out had been a challenge. Yes, he'd enjoyed the challenge but sometimes...he'd wondered if...

Shaking his head at his own foolish thoughts, he knew the only way to get her to leave him was to make her leave was to scare her with exactly what she was asking. Closing the door behind him, he slowly prowled to her, letting her see the heat and need in his eyes. She wanted to offer herself to him? She better be prepared to...

He watched her eyes widen as she looked at the door over his shoulder, the side of his mouth kicking up. It was so easy to scare the little girl.

Looking at her wide eyes and moist lips, however, he felt his own heart beat. It didn't matter the countless women he'd slept with, it was only her he had yearned for. He needed to get rid of her, or else... everything he'd worked hard to control, would fall down like a house of cards. Time for some dangerous methods...

She raised her face to him, offering her lips and he knew what she wanted, expected of him. Instead of kissing her, he caught her wrist, carefully rubbing the inside, feeling her pulse. Raising it, he kissed her softly and warned, "Are you sure? I am not the same boy that I used to be."

"I know," she whispered. "I want you, Seb. The man you are."

In that moment, in that whispered confession, Seb knew that he was not going to restrain himself. He's always known, she was his Achilles' heel. And yet he tried, "Don't think this changes anything. Tomorrow, we go back to our lives, and this... whatever it is, ends."

Olivia nodded, a hint of defiance in her eyes. "Agreed. But for tonight, I'll be yours..."

You were never mine.' was the thought in his mind as he slowly bent forward to kiss her.

But he didn't. Instead he bent his head, his teeth grazing along her bare shoulder.

Olivia stiffened as she felt his teeth graze her skin, her eyes closing in surrender. She felt him pull of the strings with his teeth, from one shoulder and then the other. The dress slipped down, and she moved to hold it in front of her, to stop it from slipping down.

His arms moved around her waist, pulling her closed to him as he held her hands away from her body. Carefully, he traced her shape, his hands gently massaging her a** as he whispered, "You've finally grown this."

Olivia tried to speak but couldn't as she felt him continue to explore her with his hands. She felt him pull her close to him, squeezing her close.

Finally, he kissed her, just a brush of lips and yet, she wanted more. She opened her mouth, letting him have more access. She needed more and he was going so slow. She yanked his head, wanting him to deepen the kiss and she felt him chuckle against her mouth as he complied.

She felt him continue to pull down her dress with one hand as he continued to hold her close leaving her standing in the middle of a room with only a thong. She felt self conscious but he didn't give her time to think as he got rid of his own clothes. She glimpsed a tattoo on his arm but before she could even see her fill, he'd picked her up and carried her to the bed.

Slowly he traced small kisses from her neck, going downwards, his lips on her nip*le closing in softly and suckling. A moan escaped her even as she wanted to scream at the pleasure coursing through her entire body. Her hands clenched on the blanket and she felt him pause. Her eyes opened and met his gaze as he looked up at her.

"I don't want you to control youself, livi. Let go. Its only me..." he whispered.

Chapter 426: Indigestion

Seb glared outside at the rain, feeling as though even nature had conspired to mirror his gloomy mood. With a heavy sigh, he scrolled through the messages on his phone, replying to the congratulatory ones with gratitude and brushing off the invitations to parties with the excuse that he was feeling under the weather. Well, it wasn't entirely false—he was definitely under the weather, just not in the way everyone assumed.

With a sigh, he looked down at the untouched food on his plate and wondered for the nth time if his night time guest must have gone from the room or not. She'd been sleeping deeply when he'd left about

two hours ago. Dam* it! He'd made it a point to never sleep with anyone after having se* with them! And yet, like a fool, he had carelessly broken that vow with the very woman who had been the catalyst for it in the first place.

Just then, a person plopped into the seat next to him and then another on the other side. He ignored their silence presence and continued to pretend they did not exist. But, of course, they were not happy with being ignored.

"You've been eyeing that mashed potato like it owes you money." Gabe murmured making Seb look up at him with a frown.

"Yeah. Why the long face?" Erasmi wondered easily as he placed his plate of food in front of him.

Seb frowned and pushed the food on his plate. With these two here, there was no way he was going to get off easily.. He needed to distract them," Just thinking of some things..We're the only ones left with our broken hearts and fractured hopes, remember? The three of us. Demetri is settled. Ian is on the way and Lucien will find a way soon enough."

A moment of silence followed this as Gabe and Erasmi exchanged knowing glances at Seb's remark, understanding the weight of his words all too well. Each of them had found their love and lost them forever.

Gabe sighed, his tone gentle but firm,"You've still got a chance, you know. The past..."

Erasmi shook his head at Gabe as Seb stiffened and said nothing.

Gabe, however, leaned forward," Seb, Olivia is barely a few floor away from here. All you have to do is..."

With a frown, Seb placed down his cutlery," I don't want to talk about it. Me and Olivia have nothing to do with each other."

His heart called him a liar as it reminded him of how easily he'd fallen to his knees last night but his expression remained hard. It didn't matter that his brothers could see through him easily, he wasn't going to let anyone see the truth. Not even himself.

"Seb! Life is too small to hold onto the past. And the both of us know that things are not as bad as they seem... If you could talk to her..."

"Gabe! I don't want to talk to her. Or about her. Any love we had is not there anymore. Now, I'd like to eat in peace. So please spare me the indigestion with talks about her. Olivia is..."

Just then, Erasmi kicked him under the table and he turned to look at him with a frown, only to see him directing his gaze behind him.

There stood Olivia, her expression unreadable as she heard the entire exchange.

Seb felt a rush of guilt flood through him, his heart pounding in his chest. The urge to apologize welled up inside him, but he couldn't find the words to speak. Dam* it! She had to come here of all the places at this time? His gaze met hers, and for a moment, time seemed to stand still. He saw the hurt in her eyes, the pain he had caused reflected back at him.

Erasmi tried to smooth things over as he smiled and stood up, "Good morning, Olivia. How are you doing this morning?"

Finally, she turned away her gaze from him and looked at Erasmi, " Apparently giving people indigestion. I'd come down to grab some breakfast, but I think I don't like the atmosphere here anymore. I'll have it in my room. Bye."

Without giving anyone else a chance to say anything more, she whirled and walked away, her back ramrod straight.

Seb pushed away his own untouched plate with a sigh and turned on his anger at Gabe who was now eating peacefully, as if totally unaware of what he had caused.

Feeling Seb stare, he raised his eyebrow and ate a bit of his egg, " What? You're looking at me as if that's a bad thing. You and Oli have nothing between the two of you now so you shouldn't be concerned about her feelings."

Seb clenched his teeth, resisting the urge to stab his brother with the butter knife in front of him. As if reading his thoughts, Gabe casually moved the cutlery away from him and continued, " Of course you will need to apologize for being a jer* about the entire matter just now or you will be avoiding her at all family functions in the future. Oh... you already do that for other reasons. So adding another reason would not be a problem..."

Erasmi glanced between Seb and Gabe, watching carefully, as Seb looked ready to blow up and finally intervened, " Gabe. Did you wake up on the wrong side of the bed today?"

Gabe chuckled and shook his head, " Of course I did. I like doing that. Fine fine. I'll leave this scaredy cat alone for now. So, where are you going back? I'd like to keep Caius with me for a few days. He's got vacations going on, doesn't he?"

"We're going back tomorrow. And yes, I was about to ask you if Caius could stay with you for a few days..."

Gabe raised an eyebrow at that and asked carefully, " Are you by any chance interested in the mother of your son? I noticed you giving her multiple looks yesterday at the wedding..."

Erasmi shook his head, " Ava has been unwell for a while now. She'd be having continuous coughing bouts and breathlessness. She needs to get herself tested thoroughly but getting that done in the small town or with Caius... the boy is too sensitive towards his mother so... if he stays with you, I can get things done..."

Gabe nodded his head. He'd noticed the lady's pale face and almost frail figure yesterday. "I'll take care of Caius. You do whatever is needed. And since you will be here, I'll need you to look into another matter. I think Olivia has been having some problem at the cafe as well. And she's been hiding it..."

Before Erasmi could ask more, Seb pushed back his chair and stood up, marching out of the breakfast room. Gabe smiled and winked at Erasmi, " Now, I don't need to worry about Oli's problem..."

Chapter 427: Indigestion, My foot.

Olivia stormed down the hallway, her heart heavy with hurt and anger. She couldn't believe Seb had spoken about her in such a callous manner, as if last night meant nothing to him. As if they hadn't stayed awake in each other's arms, making love before falling asleep like that, as dawn broke. Talking about her gave him indigestion?

As she reached her room, she slammed the door shut with a resounding bang, the sound reverberating through the empty hallway. She winced at the loud noise, regretting the outburst even as her emotions threatened to consume her.

Alone in the silence of her room, Olivia sank to the floor, her body trembling with the weight of her emotions. Tears streamed down her cheeks unchecked as she buried her face in her hands, the sobs wracking her body with each painful breath.

Her own conscience mocked her, "What are you crying for? That he didn't wake up in the morning and forget the past? Do you really think he is going to let the past go so easily. He only took what you repeatedly offered last night. And he made it clear that it was a one night stand. It is not his fault that you woke up with a botched memory and expectations."

Just then, her phone beeped with an incoming message, distracting her. The contents of the message reminded her of what was important in her life and quickly she wiped her tears and stood up. She needed to pack. She was leaving this evening and there was no point in crying. Hadn't she already cried all the tears in the past? She'd asked for closure and he'd given her that.

The knock on the door had her stiffening as she turned to look at the door. Who could it be? Her question was answered as a clear voice spoke through, "Olivia?"

A wry smile covered her face. She shouldn't open the door, she knew. She needed to avoid him if she wanted to keep her sanity. But she never could ignore him. Taking a deep breath, she quickly checked herself in the mirror. Her eyes looked a bit swollen but there were no traces of tears on her face.

With a steady hand, she reached for the doorknob and slowly pulled the door open, revealing Seb standing on the other side. His eyes searched her face, and she could see the concern etched on his face, though he did not comment on her eyes.

He cleared his throat, "I'm sorry for just now. I shouldn't have said that."

She shrugged nonchalantly, attempting to brush off his words. "It's fine," she replied curtly, her tone guarded.

Seb's eyes softened, a flicker of remorse crossing his features. "No, it's not fine. I know I hurt you, and I'm truly sorry for that. It was callous of me."

"Seb, we've told each other worse in the past. Just let it go. We're fine."

Seb nodded slowly, however, made no move to leave, making her frown. "Are we alright then?"

Olivia sighed, "As alright as we can be, Seb."

"And about last night..."

She stiffened. "There is nothing to talk about. It was just a one night stand. Nothing to discuss or worry about."

Seb nodded again and stepped back, "Alright, I'll get going then. I... if you need anything, I... just know that you can come to me, okay?"

Olivia's chest tightened at his earnest offer, the warmth of his concern washing over her like a balm to her wounded heart. She nodded in acknowledgment, "Thank you. I need to pack now."

She gestured vaguely to the bed behind her where she'd thrown all the stuff around. "You're going so soon? Why not stay for a while? Consider it a gift from Demetri..."

"I have a business to run, Seb. And unlike you I do not have a bunch of lackeys so... if you'd leave..."

Seb nodded and walked away, without turning back. His conscience ate at him to question her about any problems she was having with her business, but he'd already offered to help her.

Dam* Gabe for putting these thoughts into his head and making him worry. He needed to get to know if something was the matter. Pulling out his phone, he made a call and sighed in relief. Soon, he would know if Gabe was just bluffing or if he was onto something.

Olivia sat in the driver's seat, her hands gripping the steering wheel tightly as she prepared to leave the hotel. Now that the big wedding was finally over, she needed to keep her distance from the Frosts. She'd done well over the past few years, hadn't she? With only Lucien staying in constant touch with her? Why did she have to get close to them all again and torture her with memories of the past? Nope. No more Frosties for the near future. Sorry.

As she was about to start the car, the passenger side door opened abruptly, causing her to jump in surprise. She turned to see Seb sliding into the seat beside her, a determined look on his face.

"What are you doing here?" Olivia demanded, her voice tinged with annoyance. She'd just promised herself to keep away from the Frosties!

Seb shrugged casually, as if his sudden appearance was the most natural thing in the world. "Need a lift to the city. My car's not working."

Olivia frowned, "This is your luxury resort! You can easily rent a car or ask someone to bring another car over," she pointed out.

Seb shook his head, his expression serious. "I don't have the money for that. And besides, think of the environment. Carpooling is better for the earth."

Olivia rolled her eyes, unconvinced by his excuse. "Right. So you just happened to need a ride at the exact moment I'm leaving? Weren't you planning to stay a few more days?"

Seb simply shrugged again, not giving her an answer.

Uncertain about his motives but feeling too exhausted to argue, Olivia sighed and started the car. "Fine. But I won't be driving out of the way to drop you home. You can arrange your own conveyance once we are inside the city."

Chapter 428: My Passcode

As they pulled into the rest stop, Olivia let out a sigh of relief. Her muscles were tense from hours of driving, and she needed a break to use the facilities.. Seb glanced at her, a questioning look in his eyes.

"Why are we stopping?" he asked, his voice breaking the silence that had settled between them during the drive. Now he could say something? He'd been as silent as a ghost all these hours.

"I need a break," she replied shortly, unbuckling her seatbelt and opening the car door.

Seb watched her for a moment before offering, "I can drive for a while if you want. Give you a chance to rest."

"No thanks. It's my car and I don't need your help. I planned to make the drive alone."

Seb shrugged, not pushing the matter as he watched her leave the car. A glance at the watch showed him that they'd need at least another couple of hours to reach the city at Olivia's speed. The girl still drove at the speed of an ox cart or she was purposely doing it just to torture him. Thankfully they had rules on the freeway and she was forced to drive at a slightly higher speed.

Maybe he should grab some drinks and energy bars to munch on to pass the time? As he moved to get off, his attention was distracted by the familiar ding of a message notification and he looked around.

Glancing at the screen, he noticed the message preview, and without intending to, he ended up picking the phone and reading it. With a curse, he placed down the phone, hopped out and raced to the store, grabbing a few things urgently. Thankfully, she had not returned by the time he was done with the shopping. Throwing his loot into the backseat of the car, he jumped into the driver's seat, just as she returned.

As Olivia approached the car, she noticed Seb already seated in the driver's seat, a slight tension in his posture. She frowned, feeling a surge of annoyance at his sudden change of position.

"What are you doing?" she demanded, her voice sharp with irritation. "I told you, I can drive."

Seb sighed, running a hand through his hair. "I know, I just thought... never mind. Let's just get going."

"What the heck? Why would you.."

"Livi, just get in and check your phone." Seb answered shortly. His answer gave her a pause and she cautiously went towards the passenger seat, and picked up her phone, while asking him, "Did you check my phone?"

"Yes. I am sorry about that. I did not mean to." Seb answered shortly, before quickly leaning over and pulling the seat belt over her. "I'll try to get us there at the earliest."

Olivia looked down at her phone, "How did you know my passcode?"

Seb threw a glance at her, "Hasn't it always been the same? Let's go."

Olivia checked the message and any thoughts of an argument flew out of her head. She was thankful that he was here with her. There was no way she would have been able to drive after reading that message.

With trembling hands she called the nurse, who answered on the first ring as Olivia questioned, "How is she?"

The nurse's voice on the other end was gentle but filled with concern. "Olivia, I'm sorry to say this, but your mother's condition has worsened. She's asking for you. It would be best if you could come as soon as possible."

Her heart sank at the news, her mind racing with worry. "I'll be there as soon as I can," she promised, her voice trembling with emotion.

Seb glanced at her worriedly, but Olivia seemed to have forgotten his existence. She lowered her head and was trying to concentrate on her breathing as she tried to reassure herself that everything would be fine. Without hesitation, he held her cold hands in his, and she clasped them tightly, as if holding onto a life line.

"Livi, it's going to be okay," he said softly, his voice filled with reassurance. "We'll get there as quickly as possible, I promise."

Olivia nodded, her breaths coming in short, ragged gasps as she struggled to regain control of her emotions. Even as she watched the outside view pass by, her mind remained fixed on her mother. She'd been showing signs of being better when she'd gone for the wedding. Why did her health deteriorate suddenly? What if something... No. She shook her head. Nothing would happen to her mother.

As Seb pulled up outside the small care centre, Olivia's sense of urgency overshadowed any lingering questions about how he knew where to go. With a quick nod of acknowledgment, she hastily exited the car, "I'll take back my car later from you. Thank you. Goodbye." leaving Seb to watch her hurry into the care home without further ado.

Seb watched as she hurried inside and shook his head. Even at a time like this, she wanted him to leave. As if he would. Sighing, he parked the car, grabbed a few of the energy bars, stuffing them into his pocket before following her inside.

As he entered the small room behind Olivia, he couldn't help but feel a pang of sadness at the sight of the frail woman lying on the bed. Her weak voice filled the dimly lit space, as she tried to tell Olivia to not be too sad. He felt like an intruder in that moment. What right did he have to come there?

Just as he was about to retreat, however, the old woman looked at him. He saw a small smile bloom across her pale face and she called out his name in a small whisper, "Young master Seb. You're here?"

Seb's heart skipped a beat at the unexpected acknowledgment. He took a tentative step forward, and stood near her. She extended her hand and he quickly took it as he greeted, "Mrs B. I'm here."

Chapter 429: The Past

Seb's heart skipped a beat at the unexpected acknowledgment. He took a tentative step forward, and stood near her. She extended her hand and he quickly took it as he greeted, "Mrs B. I'm here."

Mrs. Brown beckoned Seb closer, and he knelt down on the floor beside her bed. She looked at him with hopeful eyes, her voice barely above a whisper. "Why are you here, young master?"

Before Seb could respond, Olivia interjected, concern etched on her face. "Mom, you need to rest. You can talk later..."

Mrs. B weakly waved away her daughter and turned her attention back to Seb, her eyes pleading for an answer. Seb hesitated for a moment before speaking softly, "Olivia and I were together when she received the message about you. We came here together. How could I not have come to see my favourite old woman?"

A faint smile tugged at the older woman's face as she held his hand tighter, "You're still as incorrigible as ever, little Seb."

Seb smiled playfully, even as her nails dug into his palms, "And you are as beautiful as ever, Mrs B. Seeing you like this is breaking my heart."

Mrs. Brown chuckled softly, shaking her head at his words. "You've always been incorrigible," she teased, her tone fond as she remembered the young Seb. He'd always had a way with words. The naughtiest of all the little Frosts and one who always got out of trouble due to his glib tongue. He'd always been her favourite.

The light in her eyes waned as she thought of the way he had avoided talking to her for the last few years. She sent a glance at her Livi and then looked back at him with a solemn expression, she continued, "I'm glad you two have forgotten about the past and made up. You were always the best man for my Livi. If only..."

Realizing that her mother had mistaken Seb's words and assumed that they were together now, Olivia stepped forward to correct her but Seb sent her a warning glance, making her fall silent.

Mrs Brown failed to notice the exchange and closed her eyes, her hand now resting easily in Seb's as she spoke after a pause, "Thank you for forgiving my daughter and her foolish mistakes. She's always loved you but had to...I'm grateful to you, young master Seb. For everything. These last few years, I've always

worried about her. But now, I can rest assured knowing that she won't be alone in the world after I'm gone."

"Mom..." Olivia spoke sharply while Seb placed his hand over Mrs B's, " Mrs B! Don't talk like this. I am waiting for you to recover and run after me...."

Mrs B chuckled weakly and shook her head," You really are too kind, young master. You've given a poor servant like me so much love and respect...and you even loved my daughter... Thank you..."

"Hush, Mrs B. You were never a servant. You've always been a part of our family and so has Olivia."

"Will you promise me something?" The older woman asked quietly and even though he knew what she wanted, Seb did not hesitate. " Mrs B. You have my word. Olivia won't be alone. I'll always be here for her."

Finally, Olivia had heard enough. "Mom. You need to rest. Seb will wait outside and you can speak to him later. Please rest."

Seb smiled and rolled his eyes," Mrs B, your daughter is going to kick me out of the room. But she is right so I will listen to her once. Rest well. We'll wait outside."

Mrs B nodded and sent him relieved smile. His promise and his words had already alleviated her worries.

As they stepped outside the room, Olivia could not help but burst out. Taking hold of his elbow, she pulled him away from the door and broke out," You had no right, Seb! No right to give her lies and false promises during her last moments. This isn't something to take lightly."

Seb clenched his jaw and gently took her hand, the one she was poking at him with and spoke sharply," I didn't lie, Livi! I simply didn't clarify the misunderstanding. Your mother needed to hear that there was going to be someone there for you after she left this world, to rest in peace. As for false promises, I made none. I only made one promise to her, Livi. And I intend to keep that, whether you like it or not."

Olivia stepped back from his determined gaze and looked away. She couldn't wrap her head around these things right now. Not when her mother might not be here tomorrow...

She felt Seb move behind her and heard the sound of plastic. Gently, he held her in his arms, while pressing a small energy bar into her hand, "Here, have this. You're going to need it."

A moment of silence hung between them, heavy with unspoken emotions. Then, as if surrendering to the inevitable, Olivia leaned against Seb, her anger melting away in the warmth of his embrace as she held the energy bar in her hand, letting herself cry against him.

Her tears flowed freely, dampening the fabric of his shirt as she buried her face against his chest.

"I'm sorry, Seb," Olivia whispered between sobs, her voice muffled against him. "I just... I can't bear the thought of losing her."

Seb tightened his grip around her, his own heart heavy with sorrow for the woman who had raised him like a mother.. He knew there were no words to ease her pain, no gestures to mend her broken heart. All he could do was hold her, offering silent solace in the face of overwhelming grief.

"It's okay, Livi," Seb murmured softly, "We'll get through this together. I promise."

Olivia nodded against him and he took her to sit on the bench in the corridor. Gently, he broke the chocolate into little pieces and fed it to her, while he held her close to him. It was only a matter of time...

Chapter 430: A Nanny

"Miss Olivia."

Startled, Olivia jolted awake, finding herself slumped against the wall. The nurse stood nearby, her gaze gentle as she looked down at Olivia.

Olivia blinked, realizing that it was morning and that she was alone now. Dread crept over her as she asked the nurse, her voice trembling, "My mother?"

The nurse hesitated, her expression softening with sympathy. "Don't worry," she finally said, her words carrying a hint of reassurance. "She's doing better than last night."

Olivia breathed a sigh of relief, feeling the tension slip away as her body slumped again. But before she could gather her thoughts, the nurse continued, "She's looking for you and your boyfriend."

A pang of confusion shot through Olivia. "Boyfriend? I don't have—"

The nurse smiled knowingly cutting off what Olivia was about to say. "Sorry for being curious, but I'm also happy to have finally solved the mystery of the man's relation to Mrs. Brown."

Olivia furrowed her brows, her confusion deepening. "What do you mean?" What man's relation? What was going on? Was she having some kind of a weird dream?

With a gentle chuckle, the nurse leaned in, lowering her voice as if sharing a secret. "Seb Frost. He always visited Mrs. Brown monthly, bringing care packages and talking to her for hours before leaving. I was always curious about their relationship, but now I know. He'd sworn me to secrecy and since Mrs Brown was always content in simply having him visit, I did not interfere or break their secret."

Realization dawned on Olivia's face, her eyes widening with understanding. "Seb... has been visiting my mother?"

"For a year, now. Initially when he came to see her, I was apprehensive. You had not listed anyone other than yourself as family so I didn't want to allow him and contact you. But he simply insisted that the only permission I needed to let him visit was Mrs Brown herself. And then your mother also agreed with him so I kept it from you. I guess you had a bad breakup with him and that is why they kept it from you."

Olivia nodded in understanding as she heard the words. No wonder he'd known where to bring her and had not been shocked at the revelation of her mother's declining health. He'd known. Why? Why did he have to be like this?

On the surface he was full of cr*p, not the least bit concerned about anything in the world. And on the inside, the man seemed to be overflowing with generosity.

The nurse, unaware of Olivia's thoughts continued, "Miss Olivia, even though Mrs B has been fighting imminent death, the news of you getting together with Mr Frost has seemingly relieved her a lot. You're quite lucky, Miss Olivia to have found such a partner for yourself. It is very rare that a man might look after his ex's mother the way he has done."

Olivia gave a strained smile, the need to scream, welling up inside her. Yes. Seb Frost was indeed an amazing man but he was not hers. His being here last night had given her mother false hope and now she would be the one to bear the brunt of lying to her while he was gone back to his world.

With a sigh, she explained to the nurse, "My mother... she was their nanny. One of the many nannies for the Frost brothers who were a handful for a single person. Her charges were Seb and Lucien Frost."

The nurse's eyes widened in surprise, a soft gasp escaping her lips. "I had no idea."

Olivia nodded, her mind swimming with memories of the past. Of the times, Seb and Lucien insisted on visiting her mother to their home. That is how she'd gone and fallen for that little boy who was always messing with her hair. "Yes, she was like a second mother to Seb and Lucien. They treated her like family."

The nurse's features softened with understanding. "I see now. It makes sense why Seb would continue to care for her. And how he has cared for you. The two of you must know each other since you were kids. Oh my God! Look at me. Mrs Brown had asked to call you and I am here talking to you. Please come inside. Where is Mr Frost? Has he gone down to the cafeteria?"

Olivia shook her head and made to follow the nurse, "I'm not sure. I fell asleep and haven't seen him since. Lets go inside."

She didn't want to continue the conversation or she might be forced to scream. He'd created a mess last night and disappeared now, leaving her to face the consequences alone. Now, she was left with fooling her mother with lies during her final days.

Her mother's weak smile greeted her, and she felt her heart ache. She'd given up on seeing this smile today. The lost hope within her unfurled as her heart seemed to revive that her mother might miraculously recover.

"I'm here, Mom," Olivia said softly, taking her mother's hand in hers. "I'm sorry I wasn't here earlier."

Her mother squeezed her hand weakly, her voice barely a whisper. "You're here now, that's all that matters."

She watched as her eyes searched behind her and knew who she was looking for. Her hand tightened on her hand and she looked at her questioningly as she asked, "Where is... He not here? Did you say something to him?"

"Mrs B! Can she say something to me when I have you on my side. I went down for a few minutes to fetch us breakfast and you woke up. Are you thinking of avoiding me, Mrs B? I know you still blame me for the early greying of your hair. But you look beautiful with silver hair, Mrs B."

Mrs Brown smiled as she watched Seb come close to them as he leaned down to kiss her forehead before turning to her daughter and kissing her forehead as well, before complaining "You woke up and abandoned me."