

Benefits 431

Chapter 431: She Knows Me Better

Olivia rolled her eyes at Seb's teasing, a mixture of annoyance and relief washing over her, even as she felt conscious of his arm around her. "You're the one who wasn't here when I woke up," she retorted, a playful edge to her tone.

Seb grinned, his eyes sparkling with mischief. "Ah, but I returned just in time, didn't I? I went to get you some breakfast and I came back to see you had disappeared. Mrs B... your daughter is going to take revenge for you and turn my hair grey!"

The complaint brought a small smile to Mrs. Brown's lips as she watched them from her bed. "You two always were like this," she said softly, her voice filled with affection.

Olivia's heart squeezed at the sight of her mother's smile. Despite the circumstances, there was a sense of peace in this moment and she felt a pang in her heart. How long had it been since her mother had smiled like this? She'd even forgotten that. Would she have remembered this smile in the future? Or would she have remembered her mother as the frail and worried woman she'd turned into since she fell sick?

While she was on the verge of crying, Seb seemed to have sensed it as he squeezed her shoulders, without even needing to look at her.

Seb leaned closer to Mrs. Brown, pressing a gentle kiss to her cheek. "We'll go grab some breakfast, Mrs. B. You rest up, okay? And then, I am going to come and read some of the recent news about those atrocious Frost brothers and their anecdotes these days."

Mrs. Brown nodded, her eyes twinkling with gratitude. "Thank you, Seb. The Frost brothers are the best entertainment for this old woman."

Outside the hospital room, Olivia stepped away from Seb hurriedly, feeling the weight of conflicting emotions pressing down on her. Her mother and her were a family unit. A complete family. Why then, did Seb have to fit into their family as if he was an important piece of a puzzle and seemed to complete them? He had no right to be like this when they had no future.

"I thought you'd gone," she said, her voice tight with suppressed anger. "You can go. I'll let mom know that you're busy... She will understand."

Seb's jaw tightened, his own anger boiling to the surface, as he took a step closer to her. "You think you can explain my absence by using work as an excuse? Then you're only fooling yourself, Liv. Your mom knows me better than you do. She knows that if I've let go of the past, then nothing can drag me away from you at a time like this."

The intensity of his words hit Olivia like a punch to the gut, her resolve faltering as she fought back tears. He was right and she hated him for it. He was there for her, supporting without saying a word and yet his presence was as painful as it was comforting. He wasn't leaving her alone when she needed him, but he wasn't 'with her' as well.

"Seb..." she started, her voice wavering with uncertainty.

But before she could say anything more, Seb closed the distance between them, enveloping her in a tight embrace. Olivia's breath caught in her throat as she felt his arms around her, the warmth of his embrace melting away her anger and doubt, if only for a moment.

"Stop thinking, Olivia. Just stop overthinking about the past. I am here for you as a friend. Just accept that as it is. Leave the other things for later. You need to stay strong for Mrs B."

He was right. She needed to let go. Now was not the time to cloud things with her own emotions. There were other things to take into consideration. Stepping away from him, she looked away, "Let's have the breakfast you brought."

Quickly, they finished their croissant and coffee before Seb convinced her to go and get some clothes for herself as well as freshen up, assuring her that he would be here.

Even as Olivia agreed, under his and the nurse's urging, she couldn't help but stop at the door and turn back to see him holding her mother's hand as she slept. This man was going to bury her under the mountain of his kindness and she would never have a chance to get out from it. This was going to be her punishment for life.

Hurriedly, she went back to her home, grabbing toileteries and change of clothes before she hurried back to the care centre, only to find Lucien waiting there for her. Seeing him, she almost broke down, prompting him to quickly embrace her as he repeated the words that everything would be alright. She knew of course it wouldn't be but she wanted to believe him.

As she returned, she could only pause at the door again as she heard her mother laughing softly about something that Seb had said and she sighed, going inside.

Days passed, and their lives settled into a routine at the care centre with Olivia watching her mother's declining health each day, and yet feeling her mother's contentment.

It was on the seventh day since her mother's scare that Olivia was woken up from her restless sleep against Seb's shoulder by the nurse.

"Miss Olivia, I'm sorry to wake you," the nurse whispered softly, her eyes filled with sympathy. "Your mother... she passed away in her sleep."

Despite the inevitability of the situation, Olivia found herself feeling sucker-punched by the news of her mother's passing.

She felt Seb stir beside her, his arm tightening around her as if to offer support, but the weight of her grief felt too heavy to bear. Numbness washed over her, enveloping her in a haze of disbelief as she struggled to process the enormity of the loss. Her mother, her rock, was gone.

As they stood by her bedside, Olivia reached out to gently stroke her mother's hand, her heart breaking with every passing moment.

"Goodbye, Mom," she whispered, her voice choked with emotion. "Thank you for everything," while Seb watched with moist eyes...

Chapter 432: Goodbye

Olivia packed the last box of clothing and finally slumped into the couch of the living room. Her eyes scanned the now empty shelves that had stored her mother's precious belongings. She'd loved to collect those little sculptures but looking at them, reminded Olivia of all the fun times they'd shared choosing them on their travels. She sighed. It was better to pack them and put them in storage than let them sit

somewhere to collect dust. Maybe someday when she settled and bought a house of her own, she would put them on the shelves again... and not feel so broken about it.

"It's done," she murmured, her voice tinged with exhaustion and sadness which made her wince. It had been a month since her mother had gone from the world, and she hadn't been able to get herself to come over here and pack her things.

Isabella reached out a hand, gently squeezing Olivia's shoulder. "You did well, Liv. Its alright. Aunty is always going to be with you..."

Nora nodded in agreement. "And we're here for you, always."

Olivia managed a weak smile, grateful for her friends' unwavering support. She knew if they had not come over today and practically began packing things themselves, she would have spent today staring at everything as well, not doing anything else... "Thank you, both of you. I don't know what I would've done without you."

"Oh, you'd have done fine, Olivia. You're a strong girl." Isabella murmured as she passed a container of food to Olivia. The girl needed to eat. She'd lost so much of weight since the past month.

"I don't know about that. I haven't been able to do anything well these past few weeks. I doubt I could have arranged for the funeral... I feel so lost..." As she said, Olivia could feel her voice choke and tears threaten to fall. This is what she had been doing the entire time. Even as she told herself repeatedly that she should stop crying and be strong, she started crying at the most unexpected times.

As Nora and Isabella hugged her, she tried to compose herself. She heard Nora pat her head gently consoling her. An ironic smile graced her face as she looked up at Nora, "You've grown up! Now you're even consoling me so well, someone who is older than you."

Nora chuckled softly, brushing a stray tear from Olivia's cheek. "Well, someone has to keep you in line, Olivia. Also you're not much older...so don't try to claim seniority."

Olivia managed a weak laugh, grateful for the lightness that Nora's words brought to the heavy atmosphere. "I suppose you're right. I am atleast at an age to become a granny only..."

Isabella and Nora chuckled at Olivia's attempt as Isabella nodded, "Oh please. You would be too young a granny." Isabella handed Olivia a tissue, her expression gentle. "Give other grandmothers a run for their money why don't you?"

Olivia wiped her eyes and chuckled as Isabella probably wanted her to. She then took a deep breath, steeling herself to change the subject. "So, bella baby? Any plans for the wedding? Or is that going to be handled by Ian as well."

Isabella shook her head, smiling at the change in topic as she added, "Oh, I've warned him about that! If it were up to him, we would have been married by now! This time, if he steps a toe out of line, I told him that he would find his bride missing! All decisions regarding the time and date are going to be with me only."

Nora and Olivia chuckled at that and the exasperation in Isabella's voice. "How is he taking that?"

"Like a pig takes to bath! While he has agreed on the surface, he has made it a point to share all sorts of practices from China, India, Tibet, Japan about choosing an auspicious date according to the movement of the planets, moon etc. And somehow all those 'auspicious' days are falling next month! Almost every month this year!"

"Poor Ian, he must be going through quite the ordeal with having to wait for the wedding. I'm surprised that he didn't suggest elopement."

Isabella cast Olivia a look as if warning her not to give him ideas while Nora chuckled, "I'm pretty sure that he must have already considered the idea but doesn't want to anger Bella baby. She pretends to hate the surprises that he's been giving her when in reality she is on cloud nine."

Isabella rolled her eyes and made a face at Nora, "Well, I have to keep him on his toes, don't I?"

Their laughter was interrupted by a sudden wince from Isabella, her hand instinctively pressing against her stomach. Concern flashed across Nora and Olivia's faces as they exchanged worried glances.

"Isa, are you okay?" Nora asked, her voice laced with concern.

Isabella forced a smile, waving off their worries. "Oh, it's nothing. Just some cramps from Aunt Flo paying her monthly visit."

"Do we need to take you to the hospital?" Nora asked. She still remembered Ian's phone call from all those months ago...

Isabella shook her head, " Nah. Ian has been riding me about making changes in my lifestyle and making sure that I have proper nutrition. While they are still quite painful, they are not as bad as they used to be in the past."

Olivia nodded sympathetically, " It is good to have a proper diet...Even I suffer a lot..."

Olivia broke off as she said this. Her mind raced as she tried to recall the last time she had her period. She couldn't remember exactly, but she knew it had been a while. It had definitely been more than a month... Her last period had been before her mother passed away...

As Olivia's mind raced, she tried to reason with herself. It couldn't be possible that she was...pregnant! No no no! they'd been together only one night... One night but they'd done it so many times.. No no no. A few times could not get her pregnant. The more likely explanation was stress. After all, she had been under an immense amount of emotional strain since her mother's passing. Stress could easily disrupt her menstrual cycle.

Even as Olivia tried to calm herself, she could feel a giant 'what if' appearing in her mind.

Chapter 433: Emma

Seb maneuvered the car with ease, his hands gliding over the steering wheel with practiced precision. Despite the smoothness of his actions, his mind was focused elsewhere. he'd been trying his best to ignore the woman next to him, but her actions seemed to be getting bolder with each passing mile.

First, she edged closer to him, trying to get her attention to him. He ignored it. One might say that he was quite used to it. He'd planned to sleep with her tonight, just to get rid of his mounting frustration.

However, her desperation repelled him. Her hand brushed against arm before moving delicately to trace circles on his wrist in open invitation. Carefully, he moved aside his hand, letting her know with his actions that he was not happy with being chased.

Undeterred, she leaned in closer, her breath warm against Seb's ear as she murmured softly, "I want to touch you... so much more, right here, Seb."

He clenched his jaw. Damn it! He'd have accepted such an invitation easily in the past. But now, his body refused to cooperate with him! Taking his silence for invitation, she slowly bent over the console, her hands reaching for the button of his trousers. And yet, he felt nothing stir.

As she would have unzipped him, he caught her wrist, "Let me focus on driving. I have no intention of ending up in a hospital with my pants around my knees."

The woman, he couldn't remember her name, chuckled and withdrew her hand, leaning against the door, "Seb Frost, the day you would lose your focus from getting a head would be the day for an accomplishment... I've heard of your... escapades..."

Seb winced. Why did he think she had a beautiful voice? Her voice was grating against his nerves. And her perfume was cloying. Was he so frustrated that he was willing to sleep with anyone...

"I assure you, my escapades are mostly exaggerated. Unfortunately, by your own kind."

Seb's curt response seemed to catch the woman off guard, her laughter fading into an awkward silence as she shifted uncomfortably in her seat. The tension in the car was palpable, thickening with every passing moment as Seb's gaze remained fixed on the road ahead.

Clearing her throat, the woman attempted to regain her composure, her voice tinged with a hint of uncertainty as she spoke, "Well, Seb, I suppose I should take that as a compliment, then."

Seb merely grunted in response, his expression unreadable as he continued to look at the darkened roads.

Needing to shift the atmosphere, she brought her hands in front of herself, leaning forward so that her assets would be highlighted to the best and asked him coyly, "Where are we headed tonight? Another party or your place after all?"

Seb's grip on the steering wheel tightened, his jaw clenching with frustration at her persistence. Didn't she just get the hint that he had no interest in taking her anywhere else? Or even talking to her.

Apparently not. He needed to be straight. He shot her a pointed look, his voice clipped as he replied, "Why don't you go ahead and enter your address in the GPS?"

"We're going to my home? Ohh... my place is too small for a bigwig like you."

"That's alright. I am only dropping you home."

The woman's expression faltered, a flicker of disappointment crossing her features as she processed Seb's words. "But... I thought..." she trailed off, her voice trailing into uncertainty.

Seb cut her off with a firm shake of his head, his tone leaving no room for argument. "I'm not interested," he stated bluntly, his gaze unwavering as he turned to meet her eyes, not even looking at what she was offering. "I'll drop you off, and that's the end of it."

The woman's shock was palpable, her features contorted in disbelief as she struggled to comprehend Seb's rejection. "But... why?" she stammered, her voice tinged with hurt and confusion. "I thought you wanted..."

Seb interrupted her with a pointed glare, his patience wearing thin as he responded, "I don't owe you an explanation. Now, tell me where you live, and I'll get you there."

The woman fell silent, her gaze falling to her lap as a heavy silence settled over the car. For a moment, the air was thick with unspoken tension, the weight of Seb's words hanging between them.

Finally, the woman spoke, her voice barely above a whisper, "Are you... are you really not going to sleep with me?"

Seb sighed, his frustration mingling with a twinge of regret as he replied, "No, I'm not." He felt like a jerk. With a sigh, he watched her enter her address and spoke, "Look, I did not mean to insult you. I am sorry but I am just not in the right place at the moment. You've been a wonderful companion all these days, accompanying me to the events. I'll have my assistant send you a small token of gratitude tomorrow."

The woman nodded but said nothing, looking at him carefully. It was not often that a man would refuse what she was offering. The gift of course she knew would have been a payment for her.. but he was giving it to her just like that. She felt grateful... and touched.

As he came to a stop, she was even more touched with him coming to escort her out of the car to her door.

Seb turned to leave after dropping off the woman but she caught his sleeve. He'd only looked around when she hugged him tight, "Thank you, Mr Sen. If you ever... I know this might sound foolish but if you ever need me, then please know that I will remember your kindness.."

Seb nodded and gently hugged the back, her manner of speaking now revealing her true young self. "Thank you. Goodbye."

She smiled and waved him back, "Goodbye Mr Seb. Also, my name is Emma.. in case you need me in the future."

Seb laughed at that and sent her a salute as he walked away. The girl had actually guessed that he did not know her name.

Chapter 434: From Bad to Worse.

Seb drove to his place in a mood that was even worst off from when he had dropped his date for tonight. 'SHE' kept appearing on the fringes of his memory. And it was his own darn fault. First he'd gone ahead and slept with her, knocking over the Pandora's box. It wasn't enough that it had loosened, after Mrs B's death, he should have backed off, instead of sticking by her. He had no one to blame but himself for creating new memories to torture himself with. If he had the strength to back away, then he would not be tormented by his memories now.

He'd been with so many women in the past few years, but did he remember anything about their bodies? No. And yet, here he was, always thinking of the way her body had changed from all those years ago... her image was seared into his brain, every curve-she'd filled up a bit, every scar- old and new, every imperfection etched into his mind.

He needed to let go of her the way he had done in the past. But that stupidly Frost part of him wouldn't let go of her. And this was worse. At least in the past, he'd been able to forget her by drinking and fucking. But now neither the alcohol nor the dating was working. He couldn't even bring himself to look at another woman... Maybe he should take a vacation as well. A change of place and pace might help him.

As he weighed his options and pulled up to his house. A glance towards the gate, had his heart skip a beat. There she stood, bathed in the soft glow of the streetlamp. His breath caught in his throat, a whirlwind of emotions swirling within him. Why was Olivia here? And so out of the blue. It was very much unlike her...

Seb's hands gripped the steering wheel with a tightness that matched the knots in his stomach. The streetlights blurred past him as he drove, his mind consumed not by the evening he just had, but by memories of a past he couldn't shake off.

He pulled up to his house, the tires crunching on the gravel of his driveway. As he glanced towards his gate, his heart skipped a beat. There she stood, his ex-girlfriend, bathed in the soft glow of the streetlamp. His breath caught in his throat, a whirlwind of emotions swirling within him.

Without thinking, he hurriedly stepped out of the car, even as his movements were heavy with uncertainty. He approached her cautiously, the gravel shifting under his shoes. She tensed slightly as he drew nearer, and the vulnerability in her eyes tugged at him.

"Hey," he called out softly.

Her gaze met his, and for a moment, he saw the flicker of uncertainty in her eyes. Then, she nodded, a small, hesitant smile on her face. "Hey," she replied, her voice barely above a whisper.

Shaking his head at the awkwardness, he reminded himself that he had promised Mrs B to let go of the past. Promised himself to treat her as an old friend. The way Lucy and the others treated her. Covering

the distance between them, he leaned down and kissed her cheek casually, "How are you doing? I wasn't expecting to see you here. Come on in."

Olivia watched him walk forward as she slowly followed him. He'd been with a woman. The knowledge was like a knife to her gut, though she did not know why. She knew Seb. She knew how he thrived on the physical release. So she shouldn't have been hurt. So what if he smelt of a woman's perfume and there was a lipstick mark on his neck and jaw? At least he had come home alone. She'd been fearing that she would have to witness a scene with him and another woman coming home, already kissing each other. She'd been spared that.

As she stepped into the house, she couldn't help but feel awe at the sheer organized space. It was not what she expected from Seb. "Wow, your place is... immaculate."

Seb grinned and quipped, "I can hear the surprise in your voice. You're wondering how a slob like me has such a clean place. You'd have thought I live in a pigsty. I have gnomes who come to clean this place the moment I go to sleep."

Olivia chuckled at that as she took the glass of water he offered and sat down gingerly on the couch. "I dare not call you a slob... but you are a bit unorganized..."

"I know that. You should see my bedroom." Seb murmured, causing the atmosphere to shift. He grimaced. He'd gone and ruined the casual mood himself as he watched her sip the water.

"So, Miss Olivia Brown, what brings you here?"

He watched as she placed a small bag on the coffee table, her movements hesitant and uncertain.

"Um, Olivia," he began again, his voice tentative. "Is everything okay?"

She glanced up at him briefly, her expression unreadable, before looking away again. "Yeah, everything's fine," she replied, her tone forced and strained.

Seb frowned, sensing that something was amiss, but before he could press further, Olivia spoke up, her voice soft and trembling. "I... I wanted to thank you," she said, her words came out in a rush. "For... for everything. For being there for me when my mom passed away, for... for being a friend when I needed one the most."

"I didn't do much, Livi. There is no need for this." Seb answered quietly.

Olivia shook her head, a sad smile tugging at the corners of her lips. "No, Seb, you did enough," she said softly. "And... and I wanted to give you this." She pointed to the small bag on the table.

"It is a photo album of all of us from childhood. My mom... she kept this as precious memories. She would have wanted you to have it."

Chapter 435: Leaving

Seb frowned as he looked at the bag on the table and then at her, "Why are you giving this to me? You could have kept it. You can take care of it."

Olivia looked away from his gaze, knowing that now might be the toughest part for her, "I know. But... I'm leaving, Seb. I'm leaving the country."

Seb felt as if he'd been punched in the gut, disbelief washing over him like a tidal wave. "Leaving?" he echoed, his voice hoarse with disbelief. "What do you mean leaving? Are you going on a vacation?"

Olivia shook her head, her hands trembling slightly as she clasped them together in her lap. "I need a fresh start, Seb. I've put all my things in storage, and I'm going to travel. Explore the world, you know? And... and then find a place to settle down. There is nothing here to keep me. With mom gone..."

Seb's heart clenched at her words, the realization sinking in that he might not see her for a long time, if ever again. In the past, when his longing for her had been unbearable, he had at least been able to drive down to the cafe. He'd often hear news of her from his brothers. But if she went away and settled somewhere else, creating a family for herself... the feeling of loss seemed to be crushing him... He needed to make her stay.

Even as the thought came to his mind, he shook himself out of the notion. No! It was for the better if she went away. It might give him a chance to have a new beginning as well. All these years, he had been in a limbo...

"What about the cafe?" he asked carefully, glad that his voice came out normal.

Olivia smiled sadly, a wistful expression crossing her features. "I sold it," she admitted quietly.

"How could you do that? You've worked so hard all these years and it was doing so well. To sell it to someone else who might not take care of it..."

"I sold it to Nora." Olivia answered him, shocking him into going quiet. Oh.

"Nora has been looking for a place for her bookstore and she planned to add a cafe and library feature to the place. The cafe is doing well but the floor above mine is empty. So, I asked her to look into it. And she of course liked the place. Her plan is solid so we finalized a deal tonight. I've just returned from meeting her."

Seb sat in stunned silence, processing Olivia's words as they sank in. Nora had indeed made a wise decision. Olivia's cafe was in a good place and he had seen Nora's plan for it so he knew that she would do well and not let Olivia's hard work go down the drain. And yet, in this moment, he was tempted to go and risk wringing her neck!

"I see." He said finally, before continuing, "So it seems you've come to say goodbye as well."

Olivia looked away and nodded. For a moment, she had hoped that he would stop her. Foolish of her.

"It's better than last time," Seb muttered bitterly, getting a surprised glance from her as she stiffened at the barb.

He grimaced. "I'm sorry. That was uncalled for..."

"Was it?" Olivia asked quietly. " You never did say anything about the way I left you in the past."

"And I shouldn't have said anything now, Olivia. The past is better in the past. All the good and the bad parts of it."

Taking a deep breath, he pushed aside his pride and bitterness, focusing instead on the woman standing before him. She was leaving, embarking on a new Chapter of her life, and he couldn't let their unresolved issues tarnish their final moments together.

"I'm sorry, Liv," he murmured, his voice soft with sincerity. "For everything."

Olivia met his gaze, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears. "I'm sorry too, Seb," she whispered, her voice choked with emotion.

Without another word, Seb stood up and opened his arms, Olivia hesitated for a moment before stepping into his embrace, her body trembling with emotion as she wrapped her arms around him. They held each other tightly, clinging as if afraid to let go.

"Take care of yourself, Livi," Seb whispered, pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

"Thank you, Sebby. You take care of yourself as well. Be happy," Olivia replied softly, her voice muffled against his chest.

As they pulled away from each other, Seb offered her a small, sad smile. "Let me drop you home," he said gently. "It's the least I can do."

The drive this time was quiet and peaceful, with each of their minds occupied with thoughts of the past.

Suddenly, a car swerved out of nowhere, cutting in front of them. Seb slammed on the brakes, the tires screeching against the pavement as he swerved to avoid a collision. Olivia instinctively grabbed onto the door handle, her breath catching in her throat as her heart pounded in her chest.

As the car came to a stop, Seb turned to Olivia, his eyes wide with concern. "Are you okay?" he asked, his voice filled with worry.

Olivia nodded shakily; her hand pressed against her stomach. "I-I think so," she replied, her voice trembling slightly.

Seb reached out to touch her arm, his fingers gentle as he searched her face for any signs of pain. They'd been jolted pretty bad... "Let me take you to the hospital, just to be safe."

"No! I'm fine! Just take me home."

Reluctantly, Seb nodded, his heart still racing from the near miss. He shifted the car back into gear and continued driving, his grip on the steering wheel tight as they made their way to Olivia's apartment.

When they finally arrived, Seb helped Olivia out of the car, his hand lingering on her arm for a moment longer than necessary. "Goodbye, Livi."

As she disappeared into her apartment building, Seb watched her go, his heart heavy with regret and a feeling of something that he couldn't name...

Chapter 436: Nostalgia

Seb sat on his couch, slumped, seemingly unaware of everything around him. He had no idea how he had even driven back to his house. A thousand different memories beat inside his head, making it ache. With a heavy sigh, he reached out and lifted the old and slightly weathered album from the coffee table.

His fingers trembled as he flipped through the pages, each faded photograph bringing fresh memories to his mind.

An involuntary chuckle graced his face as he looked at the picture of them all on Halloween. His fingers traced the cutest little witch he had ever seen... she could still remember her screams when he had caught a toad and 'gifted' it to her to make a potion out of it.. He'd been ten...while Olivia had been all of eight..

As he turned the page, a nostalgic smile tugged at his lips, morphing into a full-blown grin at the next picture.. There they were- Erasmí, Demetri, Gabe, Ian, him and Lucien followed by Olivia, in order of their height, standing in the playground, their clothes soaked and their faces smeared with mud. All of them grinning happily while Olivia glared at him for suggesting that they stand according to their height.

She'd had a crush on Demetri at the time and wanted to stand next to him. But he'd forced her to stand next to a snot filled Lucy...The memory flooded back to him like a burst dam, the laughter and camaraderie of that day echoing in his mind.

Sigh! She'd been a fixture in his life for as long as he could remember. He felt a pang of overwhelming sadness at the thought and closed the album and leaned back his head, closing his eyes.

His fingers beat a stacatto on the leather bound album as he considered doing what his heart told him. They couldn't go back to the past but maybe they could have a new beginning...

"No." His eyes snapped open. He'd gone crazy for thinking such thoughts. How did forgetting the past turn into a new beginning for them?

Gosh! All that nostalgia was going driving his brain cells away. She'd broken his trust when he'd needed her the most.. how was he to trust her now? He couldn't bring himself to trust her even though he knew it was foolish of him. The hurt had never gone away. It seemed he needed sleep to replenish his lagging brain cells which were coming up with senseless ideas.

Gently, he placed the album on the coffee table. Tomorrow he would lock away the album along with the memories and continue as usual. The last month and a half had been a roller coaster with Demetri-Nora's wedding, Ian's proposal and then Mrs B's passing away. A little time away from all these things would do him good.

As he stood up to go to his room, his knee bumped against the table, causing the album to fall. Grimacing at the pain that shot through his leg, he bent to pick up the album, his eyes falling on the picture it had opened to. He didn't even know they had a picture of this day...

It was the day he had been the happiest....

"Happy birthday Livi!"

Olivia's eyes sparkled with delight as she leaped into his arms, her laughter filling the air like a melody of pure joy as she wished him, "Happy birthday, Sebby!"

He held her close, twirling her around in a playful dance, the world fading away as he gloated, "I was first this time too, Livi."

She punched him on the arm and complained, "You're too quick in talking! At least this time you should have let me say it to you first!"

"Nah! I am going to be the one to wish you first always! Now come on." His long hair blew in the wind as he caught her wrist and pulled her outside.

"Where are we going?" Olivia asked him, as she hurriedly followed him along. "To take you out on a ride in my new car... Tada!"

As he held the car door open for her, she looked at him a bit suspiciously as she said, "Do you know how to drive? You're just sixteen! I don't want to spend my fourteenth birthday in the hospital!"

"Trust me, Livi! Now come on. Hop in."

With a roar, the engine came to life and the car started to race down the driveway accompanied by Olivia shrieking as she caught the door handle, holding on for dear life.

It was at the end of the drive, that he'd looked at her and realized that she was the one who he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. His lifelong companion. She'd been young and so had she...

She caught him staring at her, and looked at him hesitantly, "What?"

Gently, he caressed her cheek with his finger, smiling at the knowledge that he'd gained, "Livi, I'm going away... tomorrow. Back to the boarding school. Will you..."

"You're going back so soon? Why? I... don't want you to go. There are good schools here also, aren't there? Why can't Master Elijah let you all stay here."

Seb grimaced, "I guess all of us are too much for him to handle. Anyway, its only a matter of time before I'll be back for good. But there is something more important that I need to talk to you about."

Unknowingly, she leaned her face into his hand as he cupped her cheek and he smiled, "You're allowed to date when you turn sixteen, aren't you?"

She nodded her head.

"Then, will you consider dating me when you are eligible? Hmm?"

She'd been shocked. He'd been able to see that even when he was sixteen. He smiled and started to drive back as she held the handle again. Someday she would trust him enough that she wouldn't need to hold onto anything...

As they entered the estate and he turned the car to drop her off home and meet Mrs B, he stopped the car a bit further away. She'd looked at him with her doe like eyes. "Livi, you have two years to give me an answer, hmm? Until then, let me give you your birthday present... Close your eyes."

He'd watched as she quickly closed her eyes and he leaned forward to kiss her cheek. He wanted to kiss her lips but knew she was too young. However, even kissing her cheek, made his heart race and as her eyes snapped open and she blushed, he couldn't help but turn red as well...

Then he'd driven her home and met Mrs B... who had probably taken this picture of him saying goodbye to her.

Chapter 437: Betrayal

The sound of the restless banging on her door woke Olivia up. She sat up quickly disoriented and panicked as she tried to make out what was happening. Last night had been too gut wrenching for her and she had a miserable night, being hounded by the question of what she was doing was right or wrong.

The door continue to bang again and she stood up, slowly rubbing her eyes as she grabbed her silk robe to check who this impatient person was and stumbled towards the door, still half asleep.

As she swung the door open, a rush of cold air greeted her, sending a shiver down her spine. Standing before her was Seb, his figure silhouetted against the harsh glare of the sunlight. Confusion and a hope that she had long buried, unfurled within her, " Seb..."

Has he come here to stop her? To ask her to be with him? It was something she dare not let herself dream of.

"Good morning, Olivia. Won't you invite me inside?"

Even as he said those words, he'd already entered through the door and was walking towards the sitting area. He looked around the empty space and placed the brown bag in his hand on the table in the middle and commented, "I see that you are already packed. Very good, Olivia."

Olivia frowned as she looked at him. There was something different about him. She couldn't point out what it was, but it was there, a certain coldness... She couldn't help but frown, " Is something the matter, Seb?"

Instead of answering her, he walked away and leaned against the wall, " Why are you in a hurry to leave the country, Olivia?"

Olivia paused. There it was again. Something was definitely off in the way he said her name. "I told you last night... I need a break and a new start..."

"So you did. But what is the hurry? You can travel around, take a break, hire someone to handle things in your stead and return when you are ready. You might not like the other places."

Olivia stilled and looked away, " No. I don't want to stay here. I am going to go to a small town away from the hustle and bustle of the city."

Seb stared at her. Haze bore into her with an intensity that made her skin crawl, his eyes narrowing ever so slightly as he studied her with a cold detachment that sent a shiver down her spine. She shifted uncomfortably under his scrutiny, a sudden sense of unease settling over her like a heavy blanket. He'd never seen her like that... What was going on?

"Hmm, I understand. But why the sudden hurry. Why not let us send you off with a farewell party, a night of drinking with friends? Why this urgency to leave?"

Olivia looked away, her gaze snagged by the brown bag that he brought. What did it contain? "There's no need for that. It would only make things more difficult. I think... I think you should leave Seb. We've already said our goodbyes. There is no need for prolonging this... conversation."

Seb's lips curled into a cold, mocking smile as he pushed himself off the wall and took a step closer to her, his presence looming over her like a dark shadow. "There is one small matter that we need to handle though, Olivia..."

Bypassing her, he walked to the coffee table and extended the brown envelope for her to take, "This."

Olivia looked at the bag, her unease growing. "What is in the bag?"

Seb smiled, a smile that did not reach his eyes, "Our unfinished business, Olivia. See for yourself."

With a hesitant breath, she gingerly took the bag from him and opened it, her heart hammering in her chest as she peered inside. Her breath caught in her throat as she saw the contents and the bag fell from her hand... Spilling the pregnancy tests in the bag onto the floor.

A sickening wave of horror washed over her as she looked at them and then at him, "Wh.. What is this?"

Seb's expression remained impassive, his gaze unwavering as he watched her reaction with a chilling detachment. "We had unprotected s*x, Olivia. It's only logical to check before you leave."

Frantically, she shook her head, "No... This... No.."

But Seb's cold stare silenced her protests, his eyes piercing through her with a merciless clarity that left her feeling exposed and vulnerable. She faltered under his scrutiny, her words failing her as she looked at him, "I... didn't... Seb...I..."

"Are you going to come clean? Or do you need me to make my own guesses?"

"Seb... I was going to tell you!"

Seb laughed shortly. "You were going to tell me? When Olivia? When the baby was born? When it went to school? Or college? Or got married? When were you going to tell me that you were pregnant with my child?"

Olivia looked away. She had no answer to that.

Seb pushed away from her angrily. Even as he'd come here, he had held onto the hope that maybe she wasn't pregnant, that her carefulness last night had been a figment of his imagination! Or better yet, that she was pregnant but unaware...

When he felt her touch his arm, and call out his name, he felt like throwing up. "Seb..."

"Don't! Don't you dare take my name, Olivia Brown! I cannot believe how foolish I have been. Even after you betrayed me all those years ago, I fooled myself into believing you!"

Seb's voice trembled with anger and hurt as he turned to face Olivia, his eyes ablaze with a fiery intensity that sent a shiver down her spine.

"You're nothing but a liar and a coward, Olivia. You run away from your problems, leaving a trail of destruction in your wake. And now, you have the audacity to stand there and pretend like you were going to tell me? Don't insult my intelligence."

Olivia recoiled as his words cut through her like a knife, her heart pounding with a mixture of guilt and shame. She opened her mouth to speak, but Seb's glare silenced her, his anger palpable in the charged silence that hung between them.

"I should have known better than to trust you again. But you won't get away with this, Olivia. Not this time."

With a final, scathing look, Seb turned on his heel and stormed towards the door, leaving Olivia standing there- alone.

Chapter 438: Distrust

Olivia sank to the floor, the weight of her emotions pulling her down as tears that she had held back streamed down her cheeks.. It was the first time she had ever felt such a consuming fear of Seb. His eyes, filled with a hatred she couldn't comprehend, bore into her, leaving her feeling defenseless. She wanted to explain herself but he hadn't given her a chance to... What was she supposed to do now? She needed to talk to him. He was misunderstanding her...

She'd never planned to keep the child from him... She just needed time to come to terms with everything that had happened and she would have come clean...

With a deep breath, Olivia pushed herself up from the floor, wiping away the tears that stained her cheeks. Determination fueled her as she reached for her phone, her fingers hovering over the screen before hesitating. Maybe calling him wouldn't be the best approach. If she could meet him and then explain things, he would have calmed down a bit and would definitely listen...it would be more effective in resolving his misunderstanding.

Wiping her tears, she quickly stood up. He would have gone home. She'd go to him and make him listen to her. But before she could even turn the knob, her path was obstructed by the unexpected presence of security guards.

Shock froze Olivia in place as she stared at the impassive faces before her. "Who are you? Why are you here?"

A security guard, a stern expression etched onto his face, stepped forward. "Miss Brown, I am Marcus," he said, his tone matter-of-fact. "Mr. Frost has asked us to ensure your safety. If you need to go anywhere, we can accompany you."

She felt disbelief and unexplicable hurt course through her as she shook her head and closed the door. He'd placed security guards at her door... He thought she was going to run away. They were there not to guard her but to keep an eye on her.

Opening the door, she looked at the angrily, "You all can leave. I am not at any risk."

Marcus remained impassive, unmoved by her order. "I'm sorry, Miss Brown. Mr. Frost's instructions were clear. Until further notice, we are to ensure your safety and remain with you at all times. You need not worry. We can be discreet."

Feeling a surge of frustration, she banged the door closed, feeling petty revenge at closing the door on his face. It wasn't his fault. Grabbing her phone, she dialed Seb, waiting for him to pick up her phone. As she looked at the number on the screen, she felt a surge of an unknown emotion. Why was he so important to her. She had not even called him once in the last seven years! And yet, she remembered his number as if it was yesterday.

The phone continued to ring and he didn't answer. Holding the phone tightly, she tried again, her finger stabbing against the screen with more force than necessary.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the call connected, and Seb's curt "Yes" greeted her.

"What do you mean by placing the guards?" she demanded, her voice trembling with emotion.

"It's obvious, isn't it?" he replied in a clipped voice.

Anger flared within her as she struggled to keep her composure. "I'm not going to run away, Seb."

"You can try, Olivia Brown.", he answered challengingly.

"Call off your people, Seb. We can talk about things out..."

However, his short and cold laugh cut her off, "I have no reason to trust you, Olivia Brown."

The words hit her like a physical blow, leaving her momentarily speechless. She struggled to find her voice, her plea coming out in a desperate whisper.

"Seb, please," she implored, her tone tinged with desperation. "I need you to trust me on this. I'm not going anywhere."

But Seb was firm, as he answered, "I cannot risk that. Not now."

"Please Seb. Just give me a chance to explain."

But as the line fell silent, Olivia knew that her words had fallen on deaf ears. There was a huge wall of distrust between them. A distrust which she had built herself.

"Is there anything else? Or can I disconnect the call?" Seb asked coldly.

"Wait. I want to meet you. Please."

There was a pause on the other end of the line, the tension palpable even through the phone. Finally, Seb sighed heavily. "Fine. Meet me for lunch. Marcus can take you there."

Relief washed over Olivia as she agreed, her heart pounding. At least he would listen to her. With a renewed force, she quickly started to get ready.

With a deep breath, Olivia stood before the mirror. She straightened her posture, smoothing down the fabric of her blouse with trembling hands. Thoughts raced through her mind as she rehearsed the words she would say to Seb of how she feared that he would view this new turn in their relationship. She would explain the past as well.

She owed him that. Once he knew the truth of the past, he would definitely let go of the anger she held towards her. She would lay her heart bare to him today and hope he would give her this one final chance.

Once again, she opened the door to the guards and nodded at the man who had introduced himself to her, "I am ready to go and see, Mr. Frost."

The guard nodded and escorted her to a car sitting outside the building. As she looked around, she realized that there were many more guards present than she had anticipated. He really did distrust her... With a bitter smile, she sat into the car carefully and leaned back her head against the head rest. She needed to keep a clear head in the case of Seb's anger that she was going to face. Her hand caressed her stomach. Even if things did not turn out to what she was thinking, maybe his discovering that she was pregnant was for the best. They would have to clear the past for the future of their baby.

Chapter 439: Cold

Seb stood with his back to his assistant, gazing out of the expansive floor-to-ceiling window of his office. Beyond the glass, the city sprawled in a blur of motion, a stark contrast to the stillness that enveloped the room. His jaw clenched as he listened to the assistant's report.

"Mr. Frost, Miss Olivia has left her house. She is coming here with the security team," the assistant relayed.

Seb nodded, a flicker of anticipation igniting in his eyes. "Good," he replied tonelessly. "Relay the next set of instructions to the team and you know what to do once she is here."

"Yes, sir," the assistant replied, his voice tinged with uncertainty.

Hearing the hesitance in his tone, Seb turned to face him, his expression unreadable. "Is there a problem?" he inquired, his voice sharp.

The assistant shifted uncomfortably, his gaze flickering between Seb and the window. "Mr. Frost, just to confirm that I am not making a mistake," he began, his voice faltering slightly. "You really want me to do all those things..."

Seb's jaw tightened, a flash of impatience crossing his features. "Are you having trouble understanding simple instructions?" he snapped, his frustration palpable. "I already made myself clear."

The assistant swallowed hard, his hesitation palpable. "I know, sir. But this is Miss Brown..."

The assistant wanted to continue but looking at his boss' dark face, he dared not say the words. No one knew but he did. Seb Frost had always protected Miss Brown. There were so many dangers from competitors pulling dirty tricks to licensing problems with the cafe, Seb had always protected her from the shadows. And yet today... He shuddered to think what Miss Olivia had done to make Seb Frost turn into her enemy.

Seb heard the assistant leave and sighed. He knew of course what the man wanted to say. But those words were useless. Today should have been the happiest day of his life. Knowing he was going to become a father. And yet, all he could do was feel fear. Fear of what would have happened if he not felt suspicious over her reaction.

If that car had not overtaken them, and he hadn't remembered Olivia's protective action of guarding her belly, he would have remained clueless for no one knew how long. Just like the past... when everyone but him had known that she had left him for...

He was not foolish to give her a chance again. She'd made it clear with her actions that she did not care for him. So he was not going continue his own foolishness. Any care he had for her was now gone. His only concern now was his yet to be born child.

Another unreasonable layer of anger welled inside him as he thought of her taking away his child. Would she have forever avoided them all? Or would she have found someone else to marry and then let that man be the father of his child?

Even though there was no comparison between Arabelle and Olivia, he finally realized what Gabe had gone through. Every moment, his foolish heart urged him to trust her to give her another chance, only to have that chance thrown back in his face.

What did he do to make her treat him like this? Did he ever give her a chance to think that he wouldn't take care of her? Or their child? He'd been hurt in the past and yet, he'd been willing to forgive her, only to be hurt again.

Did she plan this? The errant thought entered his mind. And much as he did not want to believe that she would deliberately be so cruel, he could not help but wonder. She'd been the one who'd come to him. She'd been the one to ask him to make love to her without protection, assuring him that she was safe...

She'd known that Mrs B would be gone and she would be the only one left in this world. Did she do this so that she would still have a family? Even as these questions beat at his mind, his heart rebelled against what he was thinking about her. He'd always loved her. He did not want to believe that she would do this.

But she never loved you. She said that to you, didn't she? It is you who has always convinced himself that her gaze towards you holds love...

"No!" He shouted to himself, wanting to ignore the voice in his head. But it had been the truth. He had probably been deluding himself like Gabe. It was why she felt it was alright to take everything from him and give nothing in return.

He hardened his heart. Not anymore. Now he would take what was rightfully his. Whether she liked it or not.

The phone on his desk rang and he pressed the button. His assistant's voice broke through, "Miss Brown is here, Sir."

"Good."

He watched as she was led into the place by the guards and smiled. Good. She was already shaken. She probably hadn't thought that he would invite her here instead of his house or the Frost Industries headquarters. What he was about to do... it was good to keep her off balance.

"Seb," she began, her voice trembling slightly as she met his eyes. "I need to explain..."

But he cut her off with a curt gesture, his jaw clenched in a steely resolve. "Sit," he commanded. He did not need her fake words. The time to come clean was gone.

He looked at her directly and questioned, "Have you been to the hospital yet?"

She shook her head in negative and he nodded.

Reaching across the table, he picked up the two files in front of him and placed them before her," Take a look."

"What is this?" She asked, not picking up any of the files.

"You can read, Olivia. Don't waste my time and yours. Go ahead and read."

He watched as her hands trembled and she picked up the file. The emotion that he felt on seeing her pale was enough to give him a bit of satisfaction of vindication.

Chapter 440: A Declaration of War

Seb watched intently as Olivia's hands shook, her fingers tracing the edges of the file. He maintained his cold stare, his resolve unyielding, as she flipped through the few pages of the first file. There wasn't much to read in the first file... It was a simple and clear cut document outlining the handing over of the custody of their unborn child/ children to him while she would have visitation rights.

He knew the moment she reached the clause that highlighted his stance as she looked up at him in disbelief. He discerned the tremor in her lips, the flicker of uncertainty in her eyes as she struggled to find her voice," What is the meaning of this?"

Seb raised his eyebrows and simply shrugged his shoulders. She understood well enough. He simply pushed forward the next file. He watched as she picked it up, the hope in her eyes that this agreement might be different than the previous one. It was different, but how acceptable to her, it remained to be seen.

Unable to sit still as she read this thicker proposal, Seb stood up and walked to the window, looking outside. He had no interest in seeing her expression when she realized that this was a marriage contract, complete with a pre-nuptial agreement for the next eighteen years... till their child was an adult. She must be feeling appalled at the thought of marrying him. After all, neither of the documents were quite fair to her and were made in his favour.

Or his child's favour, to be exact. After all he was not going to put his child's future at risk, just because it was it's mother's decision to not live with its father.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded, her tone laced with a mixture of anger and desperation.

Seb's lips curled into a cold, humorless smile. "Are you going to keep repeating that question? I think both the contracts are quite clear. I can call a lawyer to come and explain it to you word for word. Or I can give you a direct answer- the documents mean you have no other option," he replied icily, his voice cutting through the air like a knife. "Choose one and sign!"

Olivia shivered. Whatever it was that she had thought, she could not have predicted this. He had planned out everything in a couple of hours. It was all so cold and emotionless...

Her hands clenched into fists in her lap, her nails digging into her palms as she struggled to maintain her composure. "I will not," she spat defiantly, her voiced ringing through the room like a challenge. Did he really think that just because she had come to him to resolve matters he could force her into something like this.

However, she watched as his expression remained unchanged. And yet, his eyes seemed to light up in a way that scared her. Who was this man? Seb had never been like this...

His unwavering gaze bore down on her as he stated matter-of-factly, his tone brooking no argument. "You have no choice."

She stood up. She was going to call out his bluff. If he thought that she would believe him to be so ruthless, then he had another think coming.

As she made to leave, his voice stopped her in her tracks, his words like a thunderclap in the stillness of the room.

"If you walk out that door, I will take you to court," his voice dripping with venom. "And I will make sure you never see our child again once its born."

She turned to look at him, hissing, "You wouldn't dare!"

His derisive laughter hurt her ears as he snapped, "Try me, Olivia."

She shook her head, and tried to reason with him, "Seb, please there are other ways. We can do co parenting without it changing into some kind of a contract. Marriage or giving up the child to you is not a solution..."

"I have already made the two ways clear. I am not looking for any other solution. Unless you would like to not give birth to my child." Seb questioned.

"It is our child, Seb! Ours! Not yours!"

"And I know that. Hence the second contract!"

"A contract! Is that all it is?! It is a marriage contract, Seb! For the next eighteen years of my life! I am not willing to get into a cold marriage!"

"And i refuse to let my child call another man a father just because you decide to marry someone else in the future..."

He stopped and stood up, walking around the desk slowly. She stepped back as he walked close to her, until her back was against the door... "it will definitely not be a cold marriage, Olivia... don't worry about that..I'll make sure that the heat between us doesn't disappear..."

He leaned down, close to her face, gently holding her jaw..

Olivia felt her heart race as she looked into his eyes. They were still cold..but the way he touched her made her feel as if she was on fire. Slowly he blew over her ear, "Make no mistake, ours will be a real marriage... and I'll make sure to keep you hot..."

Olivia looked away and gulped. She needed to get her head straight. Raising her chin, she glared at him, "There will be no marriage, Sen. I'll... I'll ask Demon for help. He won't let you do this..." Her voice trembled at the end as she looked into his eyes. Demon was her only hope.

Hope that Demon's name would make him back off. Or hope that... if needed she would be able to go to him...and ask for help.

He smiled, "Do you really think my brothers would support you over me?" he countered, his tone dripping with sarcasm. "You're deluding yourself if you believe that."

"It's not delusion, Seb. I'll call Demetri right now!"

Seb stepped back and walked back to his chair, "Go ahead, Olivia. Make the call. While you are at it, we can discuss how you cheated me last time when you took the money from Elijah Frost to dump me and leave. Until now, they have been neutral because I have kept the truth from them. But this is a war, Olivia. One I won't lose."

Olivia felt herself shake as he continued to talk, "And then we will have him know your recent actions too. How you used his wife to make a profit and sold your business, business that you made from selling my love and betraying me, to run away with my child. Are you still going to go to Demon? Go ahead. The door is right behind you."

Olivia gulped, "Seb...please... I never..."

Finally, Seb stood up, "Olivia, it's already afternoon. The Civil Affairs Bureau will close in an hour. The two contracts are in front of you. If you choose the first one, then we'll proceed from there. If you choose the second one...there is a dress in the adjacent room. I'll be waiting outside."

Once outside the office, Seb marched into the elevator to the penthouse. It was only as the door closed behind him that he slumped and leaned against the door, exhaling softly.

He just hoped that Olivia had been scared enough that she would make the choice, she needed to make.

If Olivia really called Demon, he knew he was done for. He would then definitely have a war on his hand. Demetri would never let her be forced, regardless of whether he was right or not in the past.

An hour later, he walked back to his office, with his heart threatening to fall out of his chest. He didn't know what she would choose and he did not know what he wanted her to choose.

His breath caught as he looked at her. She did not know he had returned. The sun shone on her, highlighting her beauty, making her look ethereal, her long hair tied up neatly while her white sheath dress made her look like an angel.

Maybe he made a sound, he didn't know, but he noticed the way she stiffened, as she felt him approach. Ignoring the resistance in her body language, he reached out, his hand trembling slightly, and gently pulled the pin from her hair, letting her hair fall over her shoulders.

She whipped her head, to look at him and stared. Her moist eyes caught him off guard, and he quickly looked away, walking to his desk. Hurriedly, he looked at the contract, her signature on the marriage contract making him feel a surge of satisfaction.

"Seb...this, what you are doing... please think again...it is irreversible.."

Seb sighed. "Let's not wait anymore Olivia. I've made my decision and you've made yours obviously. We need to go to the bureau and then the hospital..."

She hesitated but Seb simply took her wrist and led her out of the office. Now was not the time to hesitate.