

## Benefits 531

### Chapter 531: Tears

Gabe felt a hint of concern when the girl sent him a lost look, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears. He watched as she tried to maintain her composure but seemed to be failing miserably, as her tears started to fall. Gabe felt his heart thud at her look and he instinctively moved to wipe her tears, before realizing what he was about to do. This girl was a stranger...

Finally, she seemed to realise the same thing too and looked away hurriedly and spoke in a trembling voice, " Please excuse me."

Without waiting for a response, she hurried past him and into the back room. Once safely out of sight, she leaned against the wall and closed her eyes, letting the tears fall freely, failing to realize that she was still visible to him in the mirror on the side.

Gabe watched in concern, not the least bit worried that he was probably intruding her privacy. He watched as the real estate agent he had been speaking to quickly walked to her and engulfed her in a hug and Autumn started to cry in earnest.

Feeling like an intruder, he placed his visiting card on the table and walked out of the office without another word. There was no need to observe someone else's pain specially when it seemed to be making him so uncomfortable that he had to physically suppress the urge to console the girl with the pretty eyes.

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It was quite a while later that Autumn's tears finally subsided. Gently, Bianca helped Autumn into a chair and helped her sit. Finally, when she had calmed down, Bianca questioned her, " Now tell me... what is wrong? Did you have a fight with Pierce? Or did that old Mrs Pearl say something to you?"

"Pierce wants to marry me. He wants to elope."

Autumn watched as her friends's mouth fell open and she stared. "He wants to elope? But why? Did that wicked witch not give her approval?Why did she invite you over then?"

Autumn sighed and looked at Bianca. This time not correcting her about calling Aunty Peral a wicked witch. Carefully she explained, "Oh, She gave her approval alright. But she had conditions." Even as she said this, Autumn could feel anger rising within her again, making her regret that she had silently walked away from that kitchen instead of giving her a piece of her mind.

"If I want to marry her dear son, and 'force' him to adopt my sister, then I need to put my house deed in his name before the marriage. And secondly, I should sign a pre nuptial agreement, with conditions stating clearly that I will not have any claim to any of his property that he has acquired before marriage or after. So, if we ever decide to part ways, then I will not just be penniless but also homeless."

Bianca listened intently, her expression a mix of shock and indignation as she processed the information. "That's... that's outrageous," she exclaimed, her voice laced with disbelief. "How could anyone ask such things of you? Especially Pierce, knowing your situation with your sister. I hope you told the woman where she could shove that condition!"

Autumn shook her head. "I was too shocked to say anything.. And scared that Pierce was in this. But..."

"You mean Pierce had no idea that his mom was trying to steal from you?"

Autumn nodded, "He knows his parents are not happy about his decision. But because his mom had invited me over, he thought that they had come around. After speaking to his mother, I went to him. He didn't know... But he said that we should elope. It is the weekend now so Monday morning, we are supposed to meet at the local courthouse and get married. He said he will move into my home and we can continue without interference from his parents."

Bianca stared as Autumn almost choked on her own voice. "That is a good thing, isn't it, Autumn? If you show the judge that the two of you are married then it is better than just being engaged, doesn't it? He has never publicly acknowledged you as his fiancée or even his girlfriend due to his parent's pressure. Now, at a time like this, a marriage certificate would definitely be helpful. When your stepfather tries to discredit you, this will be in your favour."

Autumn nodded but then shook her head, "I know it would be good. But I never wanted to do something like this. I don't want Pierce to... be against his parents."

Bianca sighed. "Is this about the rumors that..that wicked step father of yours spread few years ago? That is all in the past, Autumn. Those who know you...they would never believe it."

Autumn gave a bitter smile. " Won't they? There are so many of my mother's friends who had watched me grown up? But did they forget about those rumors? Did they come to give me their condolences? No. They went to that man, even though they were divorced. Those rumors have been the bane of my existence, Bianca. They're going to be with me for as long as I live here. Make me a pariah. But I don't want to add to it by... making Pierce elope with me."

"But you are not making Pierce do anything, Autumn. You are only trying to do what is right. And as your boyfriend, he is doing the right thing too. You deserve all the happiness in th world, Autumn. And if your fiance is willing to give you that? That is all that matters. So stop crying and thinking of all the bad stuff. If you are going to elope on Monday then the least we can do is get you a pretty dress. That way, the two of you can have some nice engagement photos and rub them in that old witch's nose."

"Now, smile, my pretty Autumn. You even scared away my customer. At least I should get a smile in return for that!"

#### Chapter 532: A Meeting

Gabe sighed inwardly as he looked at the faces of those who stood in the small meeting room. Apart from the big-eyed girl, all the employees seemed to be in their middle age to the older age. For a moment, his eyes rested on her and he wondered how she was doing after yesterday. "Whatever her problem was, had it been resolved? From her countenance it seemed unlikely. Maybe he should..." Gabe shook his head. "He went off tangent! A first one for him.

He reminded himself he was thinking about the employees...It was without a doubt because of the embezzlement that the previous manager and management had done, which had cost this beautiful place to lose out.

From what he understood, B town had always depended on tourism for its survial and with the decline of the biggest resort in the place, the people had probably been forced to move towards the cities to look for work. And the older ones who'd been left behind? They were now looking at him with a mix of hostility and hope, wondering if he would throw them out or keep them on.

Gabe cleared his throat, breaking the silence that had settled over the room. "Hi everyone. I think most of you already know me by face or name but for those of you who don't. I am Gabriel, but you can call me Gabe. We won't waste much time today as many of you are eager to go home and the remaining

ready to begin work. I will be working with you all for the next year, at the end of which, we are gearing up for a big event that will breathe life back into this place."

"In the meantime, we will begin evaluating the performances of all the employees. I have no plans on firing anyone.. so all of you can relax. But those who are found to be lacking in terms of training or skills, may be asked to get some for them to continue. The training will be provided by us and if that need arises, my office door is always open to discussions."

"The Frost Industries has always treated it's people like a huge family that you all are now a part of so welcome and I hope, we can work well in the future. That is all for now everyone. I will be meeting each of you personally over the next few days so any questions you might have, will be addressed there. For now, if you have any urgent queries, you can question my assistant- Jack Goodman here. Good day everyone."

Hurriedly, Gabe finished the address, leaving the people gobsmacked and lost. They had expected something long winded. Not this

Jack intercepted Gabe as he walked out with a questioning look, " Don't tell me you forgot that YOU were supposed to have a question and answer session with them? Why am I going there now?"

"Because I have some work. Come on. Don't keep the people waiting. Answer everything honestly."

Jack shook his head and wondered if something was wrong with the water here in B-town. Since the day Boss had stepped foot here, he was behaving too oddly...

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Autumn could feel the world spin. She maintained her balance carefully, trying to keep her eyes open and pay attention to what the manager was saying. She'd already met the man twice and both the times... had not been favourable to her. But if she fell asleep while he was talking... that would probably be the death of her existing 'career' in the resort, let alone having a hope of getting a better position.

However, as much as she tried to keep her attention, she felt slightly hopeless. She could not understand a word he was saying over the ringing in her ears and almost blacked out even as she swayed on her feet.. It was a good thing she had chosen to stand on the back.

"I'll just close my eyes for a minute. Maybe he'll think I am blinking really slowly... if he looks over..." she whispered to herself.

As Autumn's eyelids fluttered shut, her knees buckled beneath her, sending her teetering towards the ground.

Just as she would have collapsed, a strong arm shot out from beside her, wrapping around her waist and pulling her back against a solid chest.

Gabe, who had just re-entered the room from behind, caught Autumn just in time. He felt his heart race as he watched her eyes roll back. He'd been right. She had been about to faint. Thankfully, he'd noticed. As he felt her weight against him, he instinctively tightened his grip, preventing her from falling to the floor.

Noticing all eyes focused forward, he quickly maneuvered her limp form into his arms, cradling her gently against his chest and walked towards his office, closing the door firmly behind him.

Gently, he placed her on the couch before grabbing a bottle of juice. As he placed the straw near her lips, he could see her coming to and gently suck on the sweet liquid instinctively. Her lips touching his fingers holding the straw, made him feel odd but he ignored the feeling and reminded himself that he needed to concentrate on something much more important.

Finally, she stirred and let out a small moan, trying to open her eyes. He leaned close and brushed away a strand hair which had fallen over her face and murmured softly, "Autumn? Can you hear me?"

Slowly, her eyelids fluttered open, revealing eyes that were bleary with confusion. She blinked once, twice, before her gaze finally focused on his face hovering above her. And then, she screamed...

Gabe winced at the sound and hurriedly stepped back but the scream almost cost him his hearing as his ear drums protested the last sound. He was tempted to cover her mouth and stop her, but that

momentary fear he saw in her eyes stopped him. The scream was a reaction of true fear and if he covered her mouth...

Hurriedly, he stood up and walked further away, thanking the heavens that his door was closed and sound proof. Or else everyone would wonder what he was doing...

#### Chapter 533: Luck

Autumn opened her eyes to see a man's face hovering over her and felt her body freeze from fear. Instinctively wanting to fight, she screamed out loud even as she tried to move her limbs in order to fight the incoming threat... It took her a few moments to realise that no one was trying to restrain her...

Panting heavily, she lay there and stared up at Gabriel Frost who was now standing further away from her, with a pack of juice in his hand.. It was him... even as her brain felt the relief, she tried to calm herself down, repeating in her mind, "You are safe Autumn. This man is not a threat... He is gay..."

That helped calm her a bit and she was finally able to breathe freely, the agonizing fear of finding him so close to her like that, subsiding. It was then that everything came back to her. She'd been standing in the meeting room, trying to listen to him so that she would not make a bad impression.. And then she'd felt everything black out...

Autumn closed her eyes and moaned. Why was everything going wrong these days. She wanted to make a good impression on this man and she kept getting things worst. Could she pretend to faint again? Maybe he would leave her and then she would be able to slink away from here and bury herself in some hole.

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As the girl closed her eyes, Gabe's mouth kicked up in amusement. She was as transparent as an X-Ray, showing every thought on her face. While he did not like the fear that first appeared in her eyes and what that told about her past, he could see the exact moment that she came to the conclusion that he wasn't a threat.

It was almost like watching a drama to practice showing emotions. And when she closed her eyes in mortification and, she looked as cute as a mischievous little kitten. It made him want to laugh. He watched as she tried to pretend being unconscious and sighed. Too cute.

"Miss Autumn. Please drink this." Walking close to her, he placed the pack of juice onto the coffee table before stepping back. He watched as she opened her eyes and glanced from him to the juice box.

"I...I'm so sorry."

"Sorry for fainting? I don't think you could have done that on purpose or stopped it from happening. So what are you sorry for?"

Autumn's head snapped up at that. The man was laughing at her. She was sure of it. But as she looked at his face, it seemed normal... "I meant for troubling you..."

"It's no trouble, Miss Autumn. But please do not faint on me.. I believe your blood sugar was low, hence this happened. Please finish the juice."

Autumn took the juice but looked at it doubtfully. It was opened. And that made her wary. She'd drummed into herself to not take anything that wasn't sealed so...she couldn't take it. But refusing it would be insulting wouldn't it. He was simply trying to help. In fact, she'd already taken a few sips but she couldn't take it now...

Unexpectedly, before she could decide what to do, Gabriel Frost placed a sealed pack in front of her and picked up the open juice and drank from it directly... did he not care that he was using her straw? Seeing him drink so easily, she decided- maybe he didn't care.

It was foolish of her but the thought of him drinking from her straw made her blush. Hurriedly, she grabbed her own juice and finished it.

"I.. Thank you for this. I'll leave now! I must return to work! Mrs Murry will be waiting to handover the cleaning duties."

Quickly she scrambled to her feet, her cheeks burning with embarrassment as she hastily made her way towards the door. With each step, she could feel Gabriel's eyes on her, and the desire to escape intensified. She needed to get out of here.

And just as she had reached the door, his voice sounded, "Stop right there, Miss Autumn."

She froze, her hand hovering inches away from the door handle. Slowly, she turned around to face Gabriel, her heart pounding in her chest. Shi! She had almost escaped too! If only he'd been a few seconds later she would have pretended to not have heard him and run away...

Why did this man suddenly look so scary? "Miss Autumn. You are not returning to work tonight. You just fainted a few minutes ago!"

"But I need to work.. the cleaning..."

"Will be handled by Mrs Murry tonight. I'll speak to her directly. But you, young lady are going home."

Autumn straightened. She did not like that tone. With furrowed brows, she tried to insist, "No. I am perfectly fine now. Mrs Murry can go home! I have to work."

"Miss Autumn, I am giving you a paid leave for tonight. You fell sick, literally. I won't dock your pay. So. Go. Home. Now."

Gabriel's lips twitched as he watched her expression to his order. Miss Autumn was a rebel. He could see she wanted to snap back at him but was trying to curb it because he was her boss. He felt a sudden urge to see how far he could push her until she snapped at him... However, the next minute, he dropped the idea. Why was he being so juvenile?

Autumn shook her head stubbornly, her hands clenched into fists at her sides as she tried to stay calm. "I'll be fine, really. I just need to finish my shift."

"Miss Autumn, you forget I am your boss. And I just ordered you to go home and return tomorrow. So, you have two choices, either you do as you are told or you go to work your shift now and leave with your termination letter in the morning."

Autumn frowned! Gabriel Frost really was a dictator. What a jerk!



## Chapter 534: Intruder

Autumn walked out of the resort slowly. Even if the man was sending her home, at least he was paying. Maybe grabbing a night of rest would help turn around her rotten luck and everything would start changing for the better.

Her sister was sleeping over at the neighbour's house. Maybe she could go fetch her. They'd wake up together in the morning and she'd even be able to make something delicious and healthy for her in the morning instead of feeding her those sugary cereal because she was so tired.

After her interaction with Gabriel Frost today she didn't think that she had a chance anytime soon of getting any sort of better work. Should she start looking for work elsewhere? But she doubted that she'd get such good pay. There was also the matter of all those rumors..

Nah! It would be better to endure Gabriel's dictatorial ways than leave this job. With her head lowered, she kicked a pebble lying on the street and kicked it, watching in satisfaction as it landed farther away on the sidewalk.

"Are you imagining that is my head?" a voice sounded from behind.

She jumped in fright and whipped around to see Gabriel Frost walking towards her. "What.. what are you doing here?"

"I thought I'd walk you home." Gabe answered as he shrugged. "Make sure you reached safely."

"There is no need for that. I can go home alone. You don't have to walk with me," Autumn squeaked and watched as his lips kicked up in a smirk. This time, he was definitely laughing at her. She was sure. It was there on his face. He looked beautiful when he smiled...was the weird thought that came to her head when she saw him.

The man seemed to be aware of the effect he had on women and she watched as he shrugged those broad shoulders again... There should be a law against shoulders like that...

"I knew you would say that, Miss Autumn. Which is why I didn't ask you. And I will not insist that I must walk with you. But if I let you go alone and something were to happen, I would not be able to sleep peacefully. So, for the sake of my own sweet sleep, I planned to follow you home, see that you've walked in safely and then return. But I don't want to scare you that you are being stalked so I decided to make my presence known."

Autumn stared at the man suspiciously. Was he really so easy going and responsible or was this some kind of an act? She couldn't be sure. And she did not have the energy to find out. But she made a mental note to be wary of this man in the future. Her instincts warned her that he was lethal.

She started to walk slowly again but then felt odd. Was he staring at her from behind? Was he...

She hesitated for a moment, feeling conflicted. She'd never had anyone walk her home. Not even Pierce. B town was mostly a safe place, unless you counted the monsters at home... so no one felt the need. But somehow, as she felt him walk behind her, she felt her senses heighten. It made her feel protected.... There had never been any danger, she was sure of it but this was a warm feeling.

Suddenly she stopped in her tracks and turned around. Despite her better judgement, she looked at him and said, "Since you insist on seeing me home, just walk beside me. Having you behind me feels wrong..."

Gabriel smiled and was beside her in two large strides, "As you say Miss Autumn."

She sighed, "You can call me Autumn. Miss Autumn makes me feel as if I'm in school."

"Okay, Autumn. And you can call me Gabe."

Autumn nodded and continued to walk slowly, when she heard him say, "Say it."

"Huh?" She looked at him in confusion. Woah! This man was also handsome from this angle...

"I said, say my name." Gabriel ordered her.

She frowned, "What kind of a request is this?"

"Well, you haven't taken my name even once. Not Mr Frost, not Mr Gabriel.. nothing. Unless we count you calling me 'jerk'. And that is not my name. So Autumn, what are you going to call me?" Gabe asked. However, even as he said this, he did not understand his own motives behind it. Why should it bother him if she did not call him by his name?

Autumn wanted to shake her head. What a kid! Was he pouting because she didn't call him by his name? It wasn't a big deal. But as she opened her mouth, she suddenly felt that it was too intimate... however, he was still looking at her challengingly and there was no way she would back down.

"Gabe." she spoke his name hurriedly and quickly turned to walk away hurriedly while Gabe kept up with her easily.

Thankfully, she reached quickly and stopped. Pointing to the small dark house behind her, she said, "This is it. Thank you. I'll go inside now and you can go back..."

Gabe nodded, "Goodbye, then Autumn. I'll see you tomorrow."

As Autumn turned to walk away, Gabe looked at the dark house and suddenly frowned. Quickly, he grabbed her wrist and asked urgently, "Autumn. Do you live alone?"

Autumn frowned but something in his tone made her wary. And she nodded. She didn't need to tell him about her sister... "Why?"

"Let's move away from here. Call 911. There is an intruder in your house."

Autumn felt her heart drop in her stomach. An intruder? How could he say that? How did he know? She tried to look at her house carefully but could not find anything amiss. Silently, he pointed to the upper floor and that was when she saw a shadow moving there...

Someone was up there! In her mother's room. Uncaring of the consequences, she raced towards her house, intending to catch this person.

## Chapter 535: Intruder (1)

Watching the girl run towards the danger, Gabe could only shake his head! What the!!! He wanted to call her out but that might alert the intruder to their presence, putting her in more danger.

Cursing under his breath, he quickly followed in her wake. However, despite his best effort, he found himself hindered by the darkness and the unfamiliar layout of the house, his progress slowed by the obstacles that loomed in his path. He'd barely made it to the base of the steps when he saw her shadowy figure disappearing upstairs.

He'd reached halfway, when she heard the sounds of scuffling begin and a man's loud groan, followed by more sounds. Finally, his heart pounding in fear... he saw them.

In the doorway of the room, Autumn struggled against the intruder's grasp, her face contorted with fear and determination as the man tried to choke her. Gabe's blood ran cold as he watched the scene unfold before him, his instincts kicking into overdrive. The man was not trying to scare her but actually kill her.

Without a moment's hesitation, he lunged forward, his body moving on pure instinct as he closed the distance between them in a matter of seconds. With a swift, practiced motion, he delivered a powerful punch to the intruder's side, the force of it sending the man sprawling onto his back with a grunt of pain.

As she crumpled to the ground, Gabe rushed to her side, "Are you okay?", he asked with concern evident in his voice and helped her get steady on her feet.

Autumn nodded, her breath coming in ragged gasps as she clung to him for support. "I... I think so," she whispered, her eyes wide with shock as she glanced at the intruder lying unconscious on the floor.

Gabe's jaw tightened with the need to give her a piece of his mind for being foolish but instead he ordered her, "Stay here. And call the police." He noticed when she hesitated so he simply dialed the number and handed her the phone on speaker mode, and listened to her detail the incident.

Once the dispatch assured her that they were sending a car, he quickly scanned the man, who lay on the ground, moaning in pain. With practised ease, he tied him up with the makeshift restraints of the bedsheet before checking the man's pockets for any items that might have been stolen.

But as he surveyed the room, he realized that something was off about this. A normal burglar would have run away when Autumn tried to catch him, instead of trying to hurt her. And, even as his mind processed these words, his gaze scanned the room again and that is when he noticed. A small jewelry box sitting on the dresser, its contents scattered haphazardly around it. And despite the chaos, the precious jewellery remained untouched. Why?

He glanced at Autumn who was leaning against the door and walked to her slowly. "Autumn? Do you have any enemies? Someone who might want to hurt you?"

Even as he asked the question, he felt ridiculous. What would a young girl working as a housekeeper in a resort be doing to gain enemies. However, she looked at him and nodded hesitantly, "My stepfather. I know you're going to think that I may be exaggerating since he is not my biological parent but it is the truth.."

Gabe frowned at that. Why would he think she was exaggerating? "Why?" He'd knew the things people were capable of. Nora was an example. He was pretty sure Nora would have given an arm and leg if only someone told her that Lara was not her real mother. So someone wanting to hurt another human, regardless of their relation was nothing new to him.

Walking back to the man who was silently lying on the floor, he kicked the man's ribs, making him groan. Squatting, he caught the man's chin and questioned him directly, "What did you come here for?"

The man trembled as he looked into the menacing eyes staring at him and gulped. "I came to steal valuables."

Gabe narrowed his eyes. The man was not a good liar. "You can choose to tell me the truth or I can make sure that you are never able to talk again..."

While Autumn could not see Gabe's expression, she too felt a chill down her spine as she heard the tone. It felt ominous. And it seemed to work too because the man closed his eyes and started to shout in earnest, "I came to rob valuables. Nothing else nothing else."

Gabe frowned. So this man's intention was not to kill. That was clear from his words. But he did not come here for valuable but for 'something' else. Just then the wail of siren broke through the quiet night

and he watched the burglar almost sigh in relief. What kind of a criminal sighed when they saw the police? One who was sure that he would be safe from their clutches.

Grabbing the man's hair, he pulled hard and questioned in a small voice, "What did you come here for? Tell me or by the time those officers come up, you will be unable to stand."

The man started to tremble in earnest and mumbled something that only Gabe heard. Eyes narrowed, he let the man go and shot Autumn a look. The arrival of the police car seemed to be making her even more nervous.

Leaving her be for now, he walked to the window and watched as two men jumped off the police car and raced into the house, with no precautions whatsoever. What the!! Were they even trained? Even though she had informed the police that the burglar was down, they should have taken precaution.

He winced as they stepped harshly on the steps. Were they humans or elephants? Why were they making such a ruckus? It was only as they appeared in the doorway did the two men raise their guns. But instead of moving to catch the burglar, they raised the gun towards Autumn? They seemed to have not realized that there was someone else in the room.

#### Chapter 536: Anger

Autumn straightened and stared at the officer who advanced on her, his gun still pointed at her. He stopped to see the man on the floor, groaning and smirked, "Do you know that this man can press charges against you? What were you thinking, Autumn? Hitting someone?"

Hearing the words, Gabe stiffened. What in the world? He was about to move when Autumn answered the officer in an incredulous tone, "He is lying on the floor in my house. He tried to kill me and you think he has the right to press charges? Do you not understand what self defence is?"

The officer instead ridiculed, "Self defence? You seem fine to me? But this gentleman looks anything but.. Also, it is your word against his. Who do you think the judge will believe? Did you bring him into your house to seduce him and blackmail him? And when he refused to pay you, you hit him and called the police?"

Gabe was done with. Before the officer could spout anymore nonsense, he spoke up, "Enough!" His voice rang out in the small room, cutting through the tension like a knife. The officer's smirk faltered, taken aback by Gabe's sudden appearance as he whirled around to see the man appear out of nowhere.

The other, younger officer who had been standing still until now, also shook up at the man's appearance and raised his gun to him. But Gabe was unbothered as he advanced on the first officer, "Your assumptions are not only unfounded but deeply offensive. Autumn is a victim here, and your blatant disregard for her safety is appalling."

"Who are you?"

"I am the witness here. And Autumn is not the one who hit this man. I did."

"Then I will have to arrest you." The officer started but did not advance towards him while Gabe laughed, "Really! Is the man on the floor a police officer or something? Look officer, I don't know what the procedure is. But considering the fact that this is Autumn's home, and she is the one who made the complaint, you should be arresting the guy on the floor, reading him his rights etc and asking Autumn to co operate with your investigation."

There was a silence that followed Gabe's announcement while the two stood still. Finally, the younger one seemed to come to his senses and moved to make the arrest. The older officer, however, only stared at Gabe and asked softly, "Who are you? You are not from here."

Gabe smiled, "I have recently moved to B-town."

"And why are you here in her house?"

"Because I spotted the burglar from outside. And followed her to apprehend the burglar." Gabe answered calmly, still not liking this officer.

The officer seemed to have finally realized that it would not be easy to intimidate Gabe so he nodded, "Alright, let's get this sorted out. You'll need to come with us for questioning." Saying so, the older man pulled out the handcuffs strapped to his waist and walked forward, his intentions clear.

"I will be following you, officer. Rest assured. But if you think that you can put me in cuffs, then you can think again. I am well aware of my Civil rights. So, before you try to put those on me.. I'd like to know the reason."

That gave him a pause as he stared at the man. Until he finally nodded and then turned to Autumn," You! You come with me."

"No." Gabe spoke again, sharply this time.

"Are you interfering with police work?"

"No. I am not. I am only saying that 'the victim'," Gabe stressed on the word and continued, "Needs medical attention first! She is bleeding and has bruises on her neck.. which need to be taken care of by a medical professional. The medics are already on the way and once they have documented her injuries, she will come to the station to file an official complaint."

The officers, unable to do anything, left with the burglar while Gabe stared at the girl. What kind of hatred did she earn? and why?

Autumn? Would you like to call someone for help? Or support?"

Autumn nodded and looked for her cell phone. "I'll call my fiance. I... thank you for everything just now."

Gabe nodded. Not saying anymore. Relieved that at least the girl was not alone in all this. He'd been envisioning things like her being an outcast or something.

What Gabe did not know was that his guess was indeed close to the truth. As the nurse documented her injuries, he felt even more angered. That fiance of hers was not answering his phone! What kind of a man did not answer his fiance's call in the middle of the night?

Tired of her seeing her desperate attempts, Gabe finally sighed, " Autumn, lets go. I have to go to the polics station as it is. I'll take you."

"But that would be too bothersome. I'm dropping Pierce a message and I'm sure he'll come as soon as he sees it..."



"Then you be with him when he comes. Until then...I'll be with you in the police station..."

Autumn opened her mouth to refuse but then thought the better of it. Maybe it would be safer to have Gabriel Frost with him. Even if he was some distant cousin to the Frosts, they would definitely help him if he was in trouble, right? And he seemed to know his right too.

After the series of many events that had happened in this short time, Autumn realized that she trusted Gabriel Frost to a certain extent. Maybe it was his se\*xual orientation or something else, but she was grateful for his support.

As they started to walk towards the police station, Gabe couldn't shake off the nagging feeling of uncertainty. Silently, he mulled over his decision to involve himself in Autumn's predicament, wondering if he had overstepped his bounds and why he was so concerned about a girl he had met less than a few days.

#### Chapter 537: Marriage

Autumn stood outside the civil services bureau with a frown on her face, clutching her identification documents tightly to her chest. Pierce had not contacted her all weekend, even after she had left him messages regarding the burglary. The only reply she had received was that he was busy and she should meet him outside the courthouse today. What was he so busy with?

She knew of course his extended family was over for a visit but did he not know that the police would not be helpful to her? Thankfully, Gabe Frost had been with her. If he had not insisted on sending her home and then escorting her, she would have come to a burgled home the next morning or worse reached like she had in the middle of the robbery and been unable to handle him. She'd never been more grateful for someone's insistence on supporting her. Gabe Frost had turned out to be like an angel. Just like his name.

With his intimidating presence, those officers had not dared to say or do anything unethical after the taunting at her home. It was a relief, to say the least. They had taken down her statement and his. Assured him that they would make sure that the man didn't escape. And even promised to send a patrol car at regular intervals to make sure something like that did not happen again. It had been a long while since she had felt that safe. She had not felt that even with Pierce!

She felt bad for thinking about Pierce like this. But then thought about it. Maybe it was because Pierce was young like her that he had not yet cultivated that sort of a persona. Gabe Frost was a man with self assurance. His age and world experience made him an expert in handling people so it was wrong to compare the two when Pierce had only grown up here, pampered and doted on by his parents.

Shaking her head at the trajectory of her thoughts, she smoothed down her simple white sheath dress and sighed. Where was Pierce now? Was he going to be late today as well? She'd already taken the application form like he'd asked but... she had not been able to fill it. He should fill it... She was simply too nervous about everything. For once, she wanted to lean on someone else, instead of trying to do it herself. Just for this. This wedding.

The Wedding...And this was another thought that scared her. Until now, she had been able to hide her secret from Pierce... about her fear of intimacy. She'd always claimed that they would go all the way only after they were married. But today when they were wedded, she didn't know if she would be able to overcome her fear. He'd been so patient until now. Would he continue to be patient once he discovered this fear? Would he understand?

It wasn't like she didn't want to be close to him. She liked being in his arms. She liked his kisses. She even liked it when his hands caressed her body... and she liked touching him... It was only when they usually started to get rid of their clothes that the scary thoughts started to intrude. Autumn shuddered. No. She wouldn't think about such things anymore. She would give herself to him whole heartedly. And if she felt fear, she would simply hide it. They were going to be a family after all.

A glance at her watch told her that another thirty minutes had passed and she couldn't help but frown. It seemed Bianca was late as well. She tried to curb her irritation. She should have been used to it by now. These two people could never be on time. But that didn't mean that she wanted them to be late today as well. It was Pierce's idea to elope. And Bianca's idea for her to dress up in white.

And yet, here she was. She could feel the gazes of the people as they passed her by. Thankfully, the courthouse was a bit further from the town. Or else, she would have already met a few of those taunting faces.

At least with this marriage, she would have more leverage to argue her case and try and win the kiddo's custody. The lawyer had assured her that since the girl had been in her care since their mother's passing away, the court would naturally favour her. But it would be good to have reassurance. Fingers crossed, she would be able to win her and save her from everything.

Picking up her phone, she called Pierce again, only for it to remain unanswered. Next, she tried Bianca, but her phone was switched off. She felt her stomach clench and wondered if she should go and grab something to eat. She had not eaten anything since the morning and it wouldn't be good if a repeat of what had happened that night happened again. But what if Pierce came here and she was gone? What if thought that she had not waited for him. What if something had gone wrong?

As all sorts of 'what if' questions hounded her, Autumn wondered if she should go back and look for Pierce. Gosh! It was such a mess. Finally, she closed her eyes and calmed herself. She would wait here for some more time before going back.

Just then, she received a call. Eagerly, she took out her phone. He must be calling her to let her know that he was late. However, it wasn't Pierce who called but her lawyer..

Apprehensive, she answered the call as the man on the other side told her, " Autumn. I have some bad news. He has sued you."

Autumn felt the world go still. " What do you mean he has sued me? Has he filed for custody?"

"Not just that. He is claiming that you've kept his daughter from him illegally... That means, he is trying to charge you criminally as well. This is much more complicated than I can handle. You better start looking for a new experienced lawyer as soon as possible. I am sorry."

#### Chapter 538: A Visitor

Gabe sat in his new office and sighed as he worked through the mountain load of files. Someone had tried to maintain things in order but it seemed they too had fallen short. At least this person's effort was to be applauded or else his life would have been even more difficult.

He glared at his cell phone that was ringing and declined the call for the nth time! One more time! If Ian called him one more time, he was going to make sure that he punched the man the next time he met him. What had he said? You need to lessen your workload! You've become a workaholic...! Lessen his workload, his a\*\*! Never had his files ever been so disorderly.

A knock on his door had him look up in relief as Jack entered, followed by the man who had been here when he had first arrived. He smiled, " Mr Norman. Have a seat."

The older man nodded and sat ramrod straight across from him. Gabe raised an eyebrow. Did he detect a hint of hostility from the man's gaze?

Ignoring the tension in the room, Gabe shifted his focus to the matter at hand. "So, Mr. Norman, I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me today. I wanted to touch base about the current state of affairs and get a better understanding of how things are being managed here. It seems, other than being on the reception, you have been managing everything else as well. Would you like to tell me why?"

The man nodded and answered, "Its not that difficult. We are a town of old folks. This resort was our main source of income and the only reason our children would stay here. The previous manager did us dirty but I hoped that Frost Industries would be able to pull us out. So, until the details were all signed, someone had to keep things running. I have nothing else to do so I chose to pick up this matter."

Gabe nodded at that, mentally making a note to reward this man at least monetarily. "I appreciate your efforts, Mr. Norman. It's clear that you've been doing your best under difficult circumstances. Is there anyone else who has been involved in managing the office in recent months? Or have you been managing all these by yourself?"

The man seemed to relax for a moment. So, he'd been on the defensive. He looked at him directly and nodded, "Yes. An old man like me. How could I have done it myself? I had help. In fact, without her, I would not have been able to do anything. I don't understand all these invoices and online bill payments and then logging in the entries. She has done all this."

Gabe nodded. Now they were getting somewhere. It seemed Gabe had found his Deputy Manager. Whoever the person was that had been doing this, had done well. It meant that not only were they talented and hard working but also trust worthy. He could train this person for the next year so that when he left, they'd be able to oversee the running of the resort smoothly.

"Mr Norman. Please do let me know who this person is. I'd like a word with them as well." It also reflected well that the person had not come to claim rewards for the work done

"You fired her." Mr Norman answered, this time the hostility evident.

Gabe frowned. He fired her? But he hadn't fired anyone. He'd made it clear he was not going to fire anyone...

"Mr Norman. I am sure you are mistaken. I have not fired anyone."

"But Autumn has not come to work in two days. And she does not miss work. She left your office and...

Gabe was stunned. "Miss Autumn did all the work?" he asked in surprise.

"Of course. She is a fine student! She even won a scholarship to go the Ford University in the capital. But she had to come back due to her family's circumstances. And here she could only find a job as a housekeeper. She had hoped to ask you about having an administrative position but you fired her!"

"Mr Norman! First, you are mistaken. I have not fired anyone. Miss Autumn was sick that day and I have asked her to take a leave. She will be returning tonight. And if you say that really has done all this work, then I will appoint her according to her talent. Please trust me."

Mr Norman, who had been ready to argue for Autumn snapped his mouth shut at that. He had not expected that. Autumn was sick. He should have called her and checked on her. The poor kid. He gave a keen glance to the man sitting in front of him. It seemed his research was correct. The Frost were all honest people. Even the poor ones of the family. Good.

"Then I will take your leave. If you need any more information, you can ask Autumn. Thank you, Mr Frost. I look forward to working with you."

Gabe watched as the older man stood up and left and shook his head. What a funny man. Hostile one minute, Jovial and friendly the next.

"Autumn..."The girl was turning out to be an enigma. So, she was deserving of the credit for all this good work. But she seemed to be...

He picked up his phone," Jacks... I want all the information on an employees here. Miss Autumn."

Jack paused at that. "Miss Autumn? The girl who thinks you are gay?"

Gabe smiled at that. "Yes. That is her. I think she is going to be your mentee in the coming few days..."

Jack frowned at that... So.. Miss Autumn had been the one to organise the paperwork. "Alright. I'll get all the details to you.. Gabe.."

"Hmm?"

"Why do you sound so happy about the fact that she is the one who did all this?"

Gabe shrugged and answered, "Do I? I'm just happy that I have found someone trustworthy.."

Chapter 539: Not Trustworthy

"Autumn is not trustworthy, sir." Gabe looked up from his file to see Jack standing there with a frown on his face. Sigh! He hated this face on the kid. It looked like the world was going to come to an end. Rubbing his forehead, he mumbled, "What did you say?"

"Autumn Savoy is not trustworthy."

Gabe suppressed the urge to groan aloud. Jack was still stuck there? That had been yesterday...no... it had been early this morning. With another sigh, he threw down his pen on the table and looked at Jack, waiting for the explanation to continue. It didn't.

"Such a long winded explanation, Jack?" Gabe remarked sarcastically.

Jack frowned and shook his head, "The explanation is a bit weird."

"Stop beating around the bush. Tell me."

"Actually, from her work ethic and recommendation letters from college professors, she really is ideal for this position, despite her not meeting the educational requirements. But the people here in B-town. They treat her as a pariah."

"They do?" Gabe asked smoothly, remembering the way the officer had spoken to her that night. So, his hunch had been correct.

"Yes, Boss. And it seems really odd, sir. But she was actually a well-loved child during her high school, having won many awards and recommendations on school and state level. She was doing well until she..."

Jack paused and Gabe suddenly felt impatient. Why did he need to know about Autumn's past? "Are you narrating a story, Jack? Just give me the damn investigation report. I don't need you to stop at cliffhangers."

Jack grimaced. "All was fine until she tried to seduce her step father." He spoke hurriedly.

Gabe coughed. What? This was unexpected. He stared at Jack's red face and realized that he'd heard him correctly. So, he stared at Jack, until he was given an explanation.

Finding himself under scrutiny, Jack shuffled on his feet and continued, "Those are the rumors, Sir. When she was around eighteen, her mother and step father separated. It is said because Mrs Savoy was worried about her daughter's unhealthy attraction towards her husband that the couple separated. And Mrs Savoy was pregnant at the time. Her then husband was forced to sign away his rights by his wife, whom he loved dearly."

"Anyway, after the divorce, many people boycotted her, blaming her for being vicious and causing her parents to separate. Some older men also alleged that she tried to seduce them... which caused her more problems until finally she chose to leave the town and go to university, ahead of her class. Of course, her mother tried to discredit the rumors by insisting that these were all lies, but nothing helped.

Miss Autumn returned a few months ago now, when her mother passed away in a sudden accident. However, people in small towns have long term memories. No one was willing to hire her and she could only do this job while she took care of her younger sister. Many people are of the opinion that she is not fit to raise the child and should give the custody of the child to the father.. i.e, her step father."

"I see. Anything else?" Gabe asked, ready to return to his work.

"Nothing else. Then should I cancel the interview with Miss Savoy tomorrow?"

"Jack. Since when have I paid attention to someone's personal life? If I believed rumors then you would be...Her personal life has nothing to do with her capability to work as an assistant manager. So, I'm going to officially conduct an interview with her."

Jack nodded earnestly, reminded of his own past and grimaced. He really should not have been so judgemental. Miss Autumn had certainly not looked like a seductress when they met previously.

"Alright, then Sir, I'll stop the investigation and contact Miss Autumn for a meeting tomorrow."

Gabe humphed when Jack continued to stand there, however. His assistant would really test the patience of a saint! "Jack.. what is it?"

"I was just wondering if your visit to the courthouse went well, this afternoon. You didn't give me the file so I don't know if you were able to register the papers for the Trust..."

Gabe stopped. He'd forgotten about that. "No.. I'll get the papers stamped tomorrow. I got side tracked today."

Jack frowned. Sidetracked? What could sidetrack the man from setting up the Arabelle Trust?

"Did something happen?"

"Jack, you nag like a spouse. I am not your husband, kid. Go nag him."

That caused the kid to pout. "I was only concerned, sir."



"I know, Jack. Go. Let me finish my work. I need to go early today."

"Go early today? Where? There is nothing in your schedule. Did you fix a meeting? Let me know and I'll add update your schedule and then arrange a follow up later."

Gabe shook his head. Expecting Jack to stop nagging was like expecting the sun to rise from the west. Ever since Jack had taken upon himself to look after him, the kid had become a pain... Jack seemed to think that he was incapable of caring for himself. Considering the madness he'd shown during Ara... during his time with his wife... he couldn't entirely blame Jack.

"It is not a work related meeting, Jack. So, I won't need you to arrange a follow up. You can go now."

Of course, Jack did not go. He stood there, with the same expression on his face until Gabe narrowed his eyes and made a spot on decision. "Jack.. I have a date tonight."

"A Date?" Finally, the kid's expression changed but it didn't look much better to Gabe. It now looked as if Jake was going to faint from shock. Thus, he decided to add something more to keep Jack, off balance.  
" A date, Jack. With my wife."

A squeak. That was the only sound Jack made when he heard this. Perversely, Gabe felt like grinning. So this is what Demetri had felt like when he'd had their reactions over Nora? What fun.

"And that reminds me... My marriage certificate is right here on the table. Can you update the HR department at Frost Industries to update my information, please? I think I should leave early for my date..."

With that, Gabe left the office whistling happily.

## Chapter 540: Crazy

Jack paced his office and stared at the file on his table as if it were a snake. Just then, he received a notification on his laptop and hurried to his chair. Thankfully, all the Frosts appeared on the screen. He'd sent them an SOS call and they'd answered. He looked at their concerned faces and felt a glimmer of hope. Maybe they would be able to resolve this mess.

Sitting on his chair with a thump he looked at the camera and announced hurriedly, "Boss has definitely lost his sanity."

Sebastian Frost chuckled at that and shook his head, "Jack. Your boss was never sane. What is wrong with him this time?"

"I don't know." Jack muttered under his breath and then looked up as Ian asked impatiently, "Did you send us an urgent message for this? To tell us that he is cray cray?"

Jack sent another glance at the file behind his laptop and then shook his head, "He's being more than the usual crazy..."

"What did he do, Jack? Stop being so overdramatic and tell us." Demetri sighed, not wanting to waste his time on Jack's dramatics.

Scared of angering the Demon, he quickly muttered, "Recently, Boss seemed different. I mean it hasn't been a week since he's come here, but he has been behaving oddly. The other day, he was talking about finding a girlfriend. And then he was out all night on Friday after leaving in the middle of a speech. Then, this morning, he seemed too happy!"

Jack waited expectantly as he finished his rant. But none of the Frost brothers gave a reaction to that. They'd asked him to give them updates about the Boss but now that he was, they could not be bothered? What was wrong with them.

When he continued to stare at their faces on the screen, Lucien finally asked, "So, him being too happy is what makes you think that he is not sane anymore?"

Jack sighed. Why did these people not understand. Fine. He would throw the file at them and then see. With a determined shake of his head, he grabbed the file and waved it in front of the camera, "This is the reason I am saying that he has gone insane."

"Seriously, Jack! Just come out with it! What does the file have now? It's not like we have X ray vision and can read it through the hard casing. Just spit everything out!"

"Fine, this morning, the boss was relatively normal. He went about doing his work, even though he seemed a bit too cheery. Then, in the afternoon, he was supposed to go to the courthouse to register the trust and the shelter details that he is establishing in the memort of Mrs Arabelle."

The name Arabelle seemed to somber their mood and he continued," He came back later in the afternoon, and seemed a little distracted and focused on finishing his pending work. I thought nothing of it, of course. But then later, I asked him to give me the paperwork, to file it, he said, he didn't do it because he was side tracked."

Jack waited after that announcement. Now these people understood the seriousness of it! It was impossible to side track Gabe if he had decided on something. "And then, instead of offering an explanation, he said that he had a date tonight! A date."

"But that is a good thing, Jack. If he is willing to go on a date..." Ian tried to speak but was cut off when Jack interrupted," That is not it. He said he had a date with his wife!"

Finally, after making the announcement of the news that was almost killing him, he glanced in triumph at the Frost brothers on the screen and frowned. Did the internet disconnect? Their faces were all frozen on the screen? It was only when they made several exclamations a few minutes later that he realized he'd shocked them into stillness!

"Jack, did you just say he had a date with his wife?"

"Yes."

"He's dating a ghost now? Or a spirit? Or an apparition?" Lucien asked slowly...

Jack looked at the man and continued dejectedly," I don't think he meant Arabelle. He.. said this file has his marriage certificate and I should update the human resources department about his 'new' status."

Another moment of stillness. This time, they brothers exchanged a glance and Jack grimaced. He knew that they could talk like this without a word, but he would rather like some clue on what the Boss was thinking.

While he was thinking all this, Seb leaned towards the camera, as if he wanted to peep into the file in his hand. He clutched the file tighter in his hand, feeling foolish. It wasn't as if he could take it through the computer.

"So?" Seb asked quietly and Jack could only repeat it in confusion, "So?" What did he mean by so? Did he not care that the boss had apparently gone crazy!

Seb cast him an impatient glance, "So? Who did Gabe marry?"

"I don't know." Jack answered, the confusion still evident on his face until Ian burst out, "I swear, Jack, if you were my assistant, I'd be bald by now! Open the darn file and see, whose name is on the certificate. If you've heard of the name or the person on the so called certificate or Gabe pulled a fast one on you!"

"Oh." It didn't strike him that the boss could be pranking him. Feeling a bit reassured, he opened the file quickly, only to be shocked once again. It was not a prank. There, in bold ink was the court stamp with today's date and the boss' signature. The name of the boss' new wife was...

Meanwhile, Ian, Seb, Lucien and Demetri exchanged glances. They wanted to know too! "Speak up the name of the girl, Jack!"

"Autumn." The sense of anticipation that had been built suddenly deflated. "So he was pranking you. He's gone and married a season? He was just pulling your leg..."

"No no! Autumn is a girl. Her name is Autumn Savoy... now Autumn Frost..."