

Benefits 581

Chapter 581: Shoulders

As Gabe realized that the night he believed to have had peaceful sleep, had not been so peaceful after all, he went still. Not having memory of something like this was dangerous... And yet, as he frowned, he realized that he did have a faint memory of someone near him, comforting him... He'd just dismissed it as his own fantastical imagination.

But what if he had done something that night to Autumn? No.. he needed to warn her that she should keep away from him, especially when he was in the grip on a nightmare. He wouldn't have any control over himself otherwise...

Sitting close to him, Autumn could feel the stillness inside of him and realized that she'd probably made him uncomfortable after mentioning that night. She'd wondered if he remembered but now she knew... She looked at his clenched fingers on the edge of the swing and gently placed her hand over his, wanting to comfort him.

Gabe looked up in surprise as he felt her hold his hand and sighed. He needed to warn her now... "In the future.. Autumn, in the future if you ever see me having a nightmare, just go away, okay? Don't come near me."

She shot him a look, feeling hurt. Why couldn't she soothe him when he was allowed to do that for her? Clenching her jaw, she shook her head stubbornly, "I won't." Gabe looked at her in surprise as she repeated, "I won't go away and leave you with a nightmare." She felt him staring at her and quickly explained herself, "I want to take care of you the way you do me..."

This time, his stare made her feel ridiculous... for having said those words... though there was nothing she could do about it. However, as much as she wanted to look away and apologize for being presumptuous, she forced herself to look at him as he explained, "You don't understand, Autumn, I can hurt you..."

She looked into his eyes and for the first time realized that she did not know anything about this man other than his kindness and his patience with her and Arabelle. And yet... the trust was implicit. "I know you won't hurt me. Those are just bad dreams..." She didn't say that he'd pulled her to him. That might upset him more...

He gave her a smile then and shook his head, " See, you're too innocent. You know I can hurt anyone I want to. I've done it in front of you and even then you believe in me."

She nodded. " I know and that is why I believe..So, I'm sure you won't hurt me."

Gabe sighed, " You don't understand..."

"I do, Gabe. Trust me, I understand. I know you won't hurt me."

Gabe felt his heart clench as he looked at the surety in her eyes. It made him ache. If only 'she' had held that... Unable to stop himself, he cupped her face, his thumb caressing her cheek, " You're too sweet..." As he was about to withdraw his hand, she caught his wrist, "Gabe."

He looked at her hand holding his and sighed again. He needed to get away. This would be a bad time to be close to her... when he was at his weakest, and she seemed to be offering him the peace he craved...however, before he could gather his composure, she spoke up, " You don't have to face your nightmares alone... You have me."

A bitter smile graced his face at that. Dam* it... He was losing this out... This wasn't fair! He could fight the most seductive of women but how was he to fight the innocence? He needed her to run inside and lock the door against him... His eyes narrowed as he has an idea...To achieve that end, he tugged at the wrist she was holding and pulled, making her go off balance. With his other arm, he cupped her waist and lifted her so that she was now on his thigh.

He smiled when he felt her tremble and gasp at their position. Now she would run away. Scared. However, she proved him wrong. Because within a moment, her trembling stopped and her hand landed on his shoulder, supporting herself as she continued to look at him expectantly, as if waiting for him to make the next move.

"Your shoulders are too slender to be carrying the weight of my nightmares and monsters, Autumn," he said, his voice a low, strained whisper. He caressed her face this time, his thumb tracing the line of her jaw, feeling the softness of her skin. Even her hand, only placed on his shoulder felt burning to him.

Autumn took a deep breath, her chest rising and falling against his, making him realize just how attracted to this girl he was. "Maybe not forever," she replied, her voice soft but firm. "But for some time... Maybe I could lend them to you."

The words proved to be his undoing. When had he ever had someone say to him that he could borrow their shoulder to lean on? Closing his eyes in resignation, he murmured, "Alright, Autumn. You win. Let me borrow your shoulder for a while."

His arm around her waist tightened and he pulled her close so that there was no space between their bodies and placed his head on her shoulder, sighing deeply as he closed his eyes. Even her scent was soothing to him.

Autumn felt her heart race. Thankfully, he'd placed his head on the right side, or else he would have been able to hear her heart racing. She'd never been this close to anyone and she could feel herself going hot...

She felt him shudder beneath her, his breath falling on her neck in short wisps. Feeling guilty about her own emerging feelings for him, she tried to focus on consoling him. Unable to stop herself, she started to gently rub his back, trying to soothe him the way she would do Arabelle. His hair tickled her face so she gently tried to smooth it back. He had such silky beautiful hair...

Chapter 582: Shoulders (2)

As she caressed his hair, unknowingly, Autumn's hands started an exploration of their own. So that she moved from moving his hair to gently caressing his back.

Gabe froze when he felt her caress her back and tried to compose his own feelings. However, this closeness was not helping him. He moved back and looked up at her face, determined to put some distance between them. However, the moment he looked up at that face...his thoughts of moving away from her disappeared.

He cupped her face, his eyes focused on her thin lips... as he rubbed their slight pinkness, feeling the softness... "Autumn... I want to kiss you..." It was a declaration as well as a question for permission. A warning. That he wanted her and he would kiss her if she did not save herself.

Autumn felt the warning. Knew what he was telling her... And yet, instead of paying heed, she turned her head and kissed his thumb, rubbing her lips against the slight roughness there.

That was the end of it... Gabe looked at her lips one last time before sealing her lips with her.. He didn't close his eyes as he would have, worried that she might be in too deep. But Autumn had already surrendered herself to the kiss. She wanted it too. And so she took it. When he placed his lips against hers, she was the one who traced his lips first with her tongue...

She felt him pull her closer as he groaned her name, and she wanted to call out his name too... as soon as she found her voice... He deepened the kiss and as his tongue explored hers, she felt a rush of more running through her.. She needed him closer... She shifted on his thigh, trying to get close to him even more.. but then, she felt his hardness and against her leg and stiffened...the passion and attraction disappearing as fear coursed through her.

Gabe too, realized within a moment when she wasn't 'in' the kiss anymore. Gently, he bit her lip, to distract her again and moved back... She looked like a scared little bunny... which had jumped into the fire but was now afraid... He smiled, " Go, Autumn..., get some sleep..."

He'd succeeded in scaring her off... just not the way he wanted...His own heart hammered as she still did not move and even tried to bravely ask about him, " You..."

He smiled and nodded, "I'm gonna go sleep now too. So don't worry... And Autumn.." As she would have walked away, he caught her wrist and gently placed a kiss there, " Thank you for that night and tonight..."

"Its okay..."

Autumn raced to her bed and quickly bundled herself under the covers. What was she thinking. She had wanted to comfort him and instead she had jumped headfirst into muddy waters. She touched her lips and could still feel his taste... and her heart was hammering even now.. She'd lost her sanity tonight probably...

Forcing herself to not think about it, she closed her eyes and tried to sleep...

A little while later, she felt the door to her room open and groggily opened her eyes.. It was Gabe.. She saw him walk closer to the bed and sat up, her heart hammering.. " What is it? Did you need

something?" Her voice almost squeaked but as she waited for him, she tried to tell herself that all was okay... He probably couldn't sleep...

And yet, his next words, shocked her to the core, "I need you, Autumn. Come to me."

It was like the Pied piper's call to the children. Forgetting her feeling of being scared, she walked to him and hugged him, her hand around his waist as she placed her head on his chest, near his heart. She felt him shudder and then his arms held her. They were so strong and safe...

"I'm here for you," she murmured and raised her face up to his, waiting for his kiss. But it never came. She opened her eyes in confusion and looked at him shake his head, "You do it..."

She rose on tiptoes and immediately placed her lips against his. She didn't want to be coy. She wanted him... so if he wanted her to kiss him, she would do it...

He picked her up then, and she caught him, her legs around her waist as he moved towards the bed, taking her with him. She felt scared for a moment.. of having him over her... but instead of putting her on the bed, he sat himself down so that she was on his lap and then, even as she tried to get closer, he moved back on the bed... until she was lying on top of him...

She broke the kiss then... and straightened... she was straddling his stomach... It was such an intimate position that she felt herself blush.. Her heart hammered in her body, ready to jump out and her eyes were fixed on the buttons of his shirt.. She wanted to feel his chest. She needed to open the buttons..

With trembling fingers she struggled to open them, cursing when her fingers felt like jelly. Why did they have to be so messy... Cursing under her breath, she felt him laugh and she looked at him aggrieved...

"Wake up.. You can't do that.."

She frowned and shook her head, "Why can't I do that? I want to feel you..."

"Because... as he moved up to whisper something in her ear...

Autumn felt herself being jostled and found herself on the floor...

It took her a few moments to open her eyes after the shock... and as she sat up from the floor, rubbing her arm and the side of her head, she came to the shocking realization... that she had been dreaming about him...

She stared at her empty room and closed door, and patted the side of her chest... She'd just had a dream about undressing Gabe Frost.... She needed to check if she had fever...

Chapter 583: What Could Have Happened

"Do you have a fever?" Autumn almost jumped when Gabe's hand touched her forehead, her already red face, feeling all the more hotter. She watched him frown and jumped away, shaking her head, "I don't have fever. It's just too hot here."

"It's not that hot and you are redder than a tomato. You sure, you're okay?" Gabe asked in concern as he stared at her face, even though he'd moved away to go back to whipping the eggs that he'd been doing...

Looking away, Autumn rushed to the side and grabbed the vegetables, "I'll get the side dishes prepared..." With a deep breath, she stared at the carrot and ordered herself to get things under control.. It was just a dream. Gabe did not know that she'd almost ripped off his clothes in there... but if she continued to be red like this, then he might guess something was wrong.

She sent a look his way from under her lashes and then shook her head. Looking at him working here in the kitchen was what had brought back the dream from the night, making her go red. Suddenly, his broad shoulders and the way his long fingers held the whisk, were all a constant distraction. Maybe he was right. She just had fever... Hence she was getting all these hot flashes. She could almost feel the heat radiating off her own skin as the memory of her dream played over and over in her mind. That replay needed to stop too! It was not her favourite television series that needed to be watched on repeat.

Narrowing her eyes with a frown, she cursed herself for being constantly distracted by him and chopped the vegetables... with more vigor than necessary. The sound of the knife hitting the cutting board, helped her concentrate though she could still feel him sending glances her way, which kept distracting her. The kitchen had never felt this small before...

Finally, after much effort, Autumn succeeded in focusing on the vegetables only, paying no attention to Gabe and his overwhelming presence.

She was so lost in her thoughts that she didn't notice Gabe moving closer until he was right behind her, his chest against her back. She froze, her breath catching in her throat. She could feel his warmth before she even turned her head and saw him, the air around her suddenly thickening.

Gabe reached over her, his arm brushing against her shoulder as he grabbed a spatula from the counter. She almost jumped from the unexpected contact, her pulse quickening. Before she could react, she felt his other hand on her waist, a gentle, touch but hot against her skin as he patted her, as if she were a filly that needed to be calmed and murmured, "Hey, it's just me..."

His voice was low, close to her ear, and it took everything in her to not turn and face him. She felt the brush of his unshaved stubble against her ear and even that felt too much...

Her mind went blank for a moment, every nerve in her body focused on the spot where his hand rested on her waist and the feeling against her face. It was a casual touch, but it felt anything but casual to her. It was both comforting and electrifying, making her acutely aware of how close he was.

Gabe moved away as quickly as he had approached, placing a pan on the stove, as he said, "I'll do the vegetables, Autumn." Autumn let out a breath she didn't realize she was holding. She felt a strange mix of disappointment and relief when his hand left her waist. She shook her head slightly, trying to clear her thoughts and nodded, "Okay.. I'll go do that," rushing out of the kitchen...

Gabe watched her leave with a glint in his eyes, a small knowing smile on his face. He knew the reaction... She was attracted to him. Her flushed cheeks, the way she stammered and fled—it was clear she felt the same pull towards him as he did towards her. He turned back to the stove, but his mind was on Autumn.

He hadn't meant to get so close to her just now. It really had been only to get the spatula. But once he had... He had almost not wanted to move away from her. The moment he'd felt her warmth against him, inhaled her scent that reminded him of his favorite cherry dessert, he'd been tempted to linger, to push just a bit further and see her reaction. His touch on her waist had been unnecessary, but he'd done it to tease her, to see her flustered and wanting. She was so soft... he'd almost pinched her a bit there... Last evening's kiss had stirred his need for her and his resolve for patience was suddenly challenged. He could remember the feel of her against him, the way her breath had hitched when their lips met.

And her reaction to him was not helping... It was an aphrodisiac on its own. Seeing her blush, look away and stammer around him. He wanted to pull her to him and tease her some more, wanting to see how she would react. He cast another look at the door where she had disappeared.

Outside Arabelle's door, Autumn took in a deep breath. She needed to calm down. But the memory of his hand on her waist, his breath against her ear—it was all too vivid. She could still feel the heat of his body, the roughness of his stubble. Why was she suddenly so hyper aware of him. Was it because of the kiss. Yes. That had to be it. Before that, she had not been so muddle headed about it! It was almost as if the kiss had fried all her brain cells. She needed to get a grip and not let herself be overwhelmed by something so... 'basic' like lust...

And yet, even as she accepted this, a small part of her could not help but wonder if her past had not scared her, intruding yesterday, what could have happened...

Chapter 584: Romance In Books

She pouted as she stared up at the book that was just out of her reach. Why? Why did it have to be placed on the shelf so high? Her fingers And that too in such a mess. If she hadn't seen it, then this classic book would have gone to waste without being read, gathering dust here in the old library. Who would've thought that the snooty Elijah Frost would have an entire section of old romance books in his library. The old coot!

Demetri Frost sat on the chair, the file on his desk forgotten as he stared at Nora who mumbling to herself as she looked at the book and smiled slyly. He had purposely placed that book high up there, knowing that she had her eyes on that book next. He'd hoped that she would call for his help, but he had to accept that this was good too. In fact this was even better. He would get to be her hero eventually and meanwhile, he could enjoy the view.

He watched as she rose onto her tiptoes again, her fingers splayed out in a desperate attempt to grasp the spine. The effort caused her t-shirt to ride up, revealing a sliver of smooth, bare skin just above the waistband of her jeans. His gaze lingered on that, the soft curve catching his attention... He wanted to bite there, a small suckle...

She dropped back onto her heels with a soft huff, clearly frustrated and muttered something under her breath, her determination not yet waning. Probably cursing his grandfather. He turned his eyes upwards for a moment and apologized for that...before turning back to admire his wife again who was now jumping to catch the book.

Maybe he should clear his throat and make her look here. Why not ask him for it? What was his tall height for if for not serving his wife?

With a small jump, she managed to brush her fingers against the book's spine. A triumphant smile flickered across her face, much to his amusement. Sigh! Will she ever ask for help?

"Almost there," she muttered to herself, glancing back at the book with renewed resolve.

However, in the next moment, his amusement shifted to concern as he noticed the precarious arrangement of the books in the next row. They were haphazardly stacked, leaning towards the edge, and would certainly topple if she pulled too hard on the book she wanted. Darn it! Why didn't he check that first? He stood up. If she didn't ask for his help, he's just do it for her...

As he walked around the desk, he watched as she bent her knees slightly, readying herself for a more substantial leap. The scene seemed to slow down as he realized what was about to happen.

"Nora, wait—" he began, but she was already in mid-air, her fingers clutching the book's spine. With a decisive tug, the book came free, but it set off a domino life reaction...

Demetri sprang into action as he raced towards her, calling her name urgently.

Nora turned her head just in time to see the impending avalanche of books. Her eyes widened in alarm, but before she could react, Demetri was there. He moved swiftly, placing himself between her and the falling books, his body shielding her from the onslaught coming her way. The books pelted down, thudding against his back, shoulders, and arms.

"Are you okay?" Nora asked, wide eyed, even as the books fell onto the floor, her eyes wide with concern.

His mouth kicked up, in a smile as he nodded his head, "Uh huh."

"I didn't think the books would come crashing down like that... Sorry..."

"I noticed. You were too busy trying to get the book."

"Yes.. I'm sorry. My hero..." Nora spoke with a sigh, her eyes twinkling.

Demetri grinned, and winked at her, "Thank you, my kitten."

Nora giggled at that and then moved onto her tiptoes, to kiss him on the cheek, "This is your reward..." And as his heart melted all over again, she slightly bit his chin and whispered, "I know you placed the book there. So you can handle the mess!"

Demetri laughed as he watched her shake the book she'd been trying to get, in front of his face and strut away, calling behind her, "You handle the rest of the books."

"I'll handle them alright..." Before she could move further away, Nora's wrist was caught and she found herself in Demetri's arms, as he nuzzled her neck, "I want a reward for that as well."

"You're too greedy, Demon."

He nuzzled her neck and placed a kiss where her neck met her shoulders, whispering, "Only for you, Nora." His hand slipped under the T-shirt, gently caressing the skin that he'd just been seeing, his fingers tracing the softness.

Nora's breath caught in her throat as she felt the heat radiating from his body, the warmth of his hand on her skin. She swallowed hard, her heart beating faster.

"Demetri..." she began, her voice trailing off as she searched for the right words.

He leaned in closer, rubbing his nose against her neck, "Yes, Nora?" he prompted, his voice barely above a whisper.

"What are you doing?"

"Enjoying the benefits of being a hero..." he murmured, making her giggle.

"You're a villain, I think..." she whispered breathlessly.

"Maybe I'm a bit of both," Demetri claimed, his lips brushing against her ear. He tightened his hold on her, his fingers tracing delicate patterns on her stomach.

Nora's retort was lost as her body responded to his touch, her breathing growing shallow. She closed her eyes, losing herself in the moment, in the feel of him against her. It was always like this...

"Demetri..."

Just as she was about to succumb completely to the intoxicating sensations, the shrill ring of a phone pierced through the air, shattering the spell they were under. They both froze, the sound so out of place in their intimate moment.

Demetri groaned softly, his forehead resting against Nora's shoulder. "Of course," he muttered; the irritation clear in his voice.

Chapter 585: A Discovery

"Well, well, what are you doing here?" Gabe looked up in surprise as the door to his office opened and Demon stood there, a playful grin on his face.

"What? Not happy to see your favorite brother?" Demetri teased, leaning casually against the doorframe as he looked around casually.

"Uh huh... You're not my favourite. And, I don't know if I should be happy or worried. After all you are The Demon. What if you're here to drag me into hell?"

"Oh please? Hell is not the place for you. You'd bore the people there with your Mr Goody Two Shoes Attitude."

"Is that so? And I suppose they'd find your devil-may-care charm irresistible?"

"Naturally," Demetri replied with a smirk. "They practically roll out the red carpet every time I visit."

"Then why don't you go there and enjoy the hospitality there? Why come here?"

"Someone's being a little grumpy today," Demetri said, raising an eyebrow. "Didn't get your morning coffee?"

Gabe thought back to the frustration he had been suffering from not getting something else and scowled, "As if coffee could make me like this. So, I know for a fact that you are not here to check on the work here. You trust me too much. You are also not here for fishing about Autumn, since it's already done by the girls. So it's either something good or something really bad that brought you here. And, since you are trying to downplay it and wasting your words in trying to deflect it, it's probably something bad..."

"Stop being smart and just play along, can't you?" Demetri muttered in irritation as he stared at Gabe with a sigh.

"You'd be bored with that. So, what brings you here? Is it something related to Autumn? Your sources found something?" Gabe asked once again but did not receive an answer, only a smirk that had him frowning.

"You look better than before. Not like a hermit crab anymore."

Gabe stilled, feeling Demetri analysing him. It made him feel defensive. Demetri had a habit of doing that. Of looking at a person as if he could peep inside and see to the soul. In the past that never bothered him but today... it made him want to hide.

"What? Are you saying that Autumn is good for me?"

"I didn't say anything. Those are your words."

"Demon Frost. I will..." Gabe tried to threaten Demon but was cut off before he could utter any.

"Keep the threats to yourself. They won't work on me, Gabe. What I am saying is, that you look better. I don't really care if it is because of Autumn or not. But, the fact that you are thinking of her instead of Arabelle all the time, tells me a lot. And that you're doing so naturally, means she is on your mind a lot."

Gabe stilled. It was true. He'd been thinking of Autumn a lot. Even when he'd been talking that night, Autumn had been on his mind...Arabelle seemed like a distant nightmare, not some wound that was always painful and festering. And he'd been thinking of Autumn just now. What she was probably doing at the moment, if she was okay... He hadn't noticed that Autumn was on his mind but Demon had already done that. Was this a good thing? Or Not?

Demetri stared at his brother carefully. He was right. Gabe really was letting Arabelle go and that was good. Especially after what Nora had told him, about Autumn probably falling for Gabe... It wouldn't be good if his brother lost the love of a good woman just because he was blind and foolish. Good. Now that he had opened Gabe's eyes, it was time to distract him from over analysing his feelings. That would be detrimental. A nudge was enough

"Are you still thinking about Autumn. Focus Gabe. You know I have some bad news.

That caught his attention. And Gabe stared at Demon. Demon sighed. "You've been looking at the case and investigating Savoy's past."

"Yes. If he has tried to abuse Autumn, then he's probably targeted other women with children too. I'm looking into his past relationships to see if there has been a pattern. But until now, there has been nothing...."

Demetri nodded," That is because you missed one aspect of the man. He preys on those who he believes are helpless. Autumn and her mother were both dependent on him. After all, he'd manipulated them into taking his name so both were probably vulnerable and he must have believed that he wouldn't have to face any repercussions."

Gabe stilled, his mind working quickly. He had not expected backlash from Autumn probably because his other victims had been too helpless to expose him or too scared.

"What did you find?"

Without a word, Demetri opened his phone and placed it in front of Gabe. As Gabe glanced through the file, he felt his anger shooting through the roof, as he hissed, "That son of a bi*tch! I'll kill him! That... no.. killing him would be too easy! Demetri, get those people... I need to dirty my hands a bit... but..."

"Calm down, Gabe."

Calm down? How can I stay calm after seeing this? I knew this guy was a monster. But this is worse than that. I know for a fact that you can't be as calm as you're looking. Aren't you angry?"

"Of course, I am. Reading that thing made me sick. But there's more in there, Gabe. Something much more worrisome. Look through the entire thing."

"I feel like throwing up. This makes me sick. Can't we just bury him alive? Or burn him like Eras did that woman."

"We can. But not without tying the loose ends." Demetri answered quietly.

Gabe stilled, realizing what Demetri's agreement meant. Things must be really bad for him to react like this when he had no connection to Autumn or her little sister. His face tightened as he scrolled through and his heart ached when he finally reached the end... Burying this man alive was not enough. No form of torture was enough.

Chapter 586: The Frosts

Autumn stared at Gabe, then shifted her gaze to Demetri Frost, and back to Gabe again. She could sense Gabe Frost's anger, though she wasn't sure how she knew it—it was just there, palpable and undeniable.

And because she could, she was sure that his brother could feel it too. And yet, the man seemed unbothered by it. Actually, he seemed to be almost enjoying it...

She looked at Demetri and then at Gabe again until Demetri spoke up, making her jump, "You're going to have a crick in your neck if you keep doing that."

Autumn jumped as she realized that she was being observed too. She gave an embarrassed smile and was about to race out of there, as soon as she thought up of an excuse, when Demon Frost asked, "So, Miss Autumn, what do you like about Gabe?"

Her eyes widened at the unexpected question. What did she like about Gabe? Everything was the word that slid into her mind. She gulped, panic rising. She couldn't say that. She glanced at Gabe, whose intense gaze was suddenly fixed on her seemingly demanding an answer. Flustered, she blurted out, "Nothing."

The room fell silent for a heartbeat. Demetri raised an eyebrow, a smirk playing at his lips. "Nothing, huh? I guess there really is nothing likable about him..."

Gabe's eyes on the other hand were now trained on her, "Is that so?"

Autumn's heart pounded in her chest. "I mean—" she stammered, desperately trying to backtrack. "Not nothing. Just... everything."

Demetri laughed at that, "Well, that's quite a turnaround. Gabe, you are intimidating her into saying that she likes you. Really Gabe, how despicable can you be?"

Autumn knew it was time to escape! If she sat here, she would be 'bullied' by these two men!! "I'll just go get some coffee..."

Before she could make her escape, Gabe caught her and pulled her into his arms, so that she was sitting on his lap. Quickly, he placed a small peck on her cheek and asked, "Everything, huh? That sounds more like it."

Autumn felt heat rise to her cheeks, caught between the playful banter of the brothers and the intensity of Gabe's gaze. She managed a nervous smile and pointed towards the kitchen, "That coffee..."

He let her go and she raced away, wondering if she'd stepped into some kind of a parallel universe. She and Gabe were together just for Arabelle. So, why were they acting like this. It wasn't as if Gabe's family did not know the truth...

Gabe watched Autumn run away with a glint in his eyes. He wouldn't say this out loud, but he was totally please with Autumn's answer. Meanwhile Demetri was watching Gabe, his own face showing a satisfied look as well. Autumn Frost was going to prove to be a worthy addition to the family.

"You're staring at her like you want to eat her up? Stop staring at the poor girl. Give her a break."

Gabe shook his head, chuckling. "You're just jealous."

"Jealous? Of what? Your brooding charm? Oh please. My Nora doesn't feel the need to escape me..." Demetri retorted, crossing his arms.

"She wasn't escaping me. It is you..."

"Keep telling yourself that, brother. But, I'm glad you have her."

"I don't have her..." But Gabe trailed off. He liked the idea of having her by his side.. And that confused him.

Demetri raised an eyebrow, noticing Gabe's expression. "Oh really? Because it seems to me like you want more than just a partnership for the little girl's sake."

Gabe ran a hand through his hair, frustration and confusion etched on his face. "It's complicated, Demetri. We're only in this for Arabelle. This wasn't part of the plan. I accept that I'm attracted to her physically..."

Demetri shook his head, clapping Gabe on the shoulder. "Plans change, Gabe. Sometimes for the better. You know, for someone so smart, you can be pretty dense. You get short sighted..."

"Just... keep away from this, Demon..."

"I am always keeping away from these matters, Gabe. And it is my biggest regret..."

Gabe stilled at this. Looking at Demetri, the seriousness in his voice shaking him.

"Why are you looking at me like that? I've stayed away from the Arabelle matter because of you. If I had intervened the way I wanted to then would you be suffering like this? Would you have been married to that woman?"

"You couldn't have stopped me, Demetri. So don't blame yourself..."

"I could have, Gabe. I should have stopped you from marrying that bi*ch..."

Gabe's eyes darkened. "Demetri, leave it. We'd both made our choices."

Demetri clenched his fists. It was this thought that had never left him. "I just don't want you to make another mistake, Gabe. This thing with Autumn, it's different. Just remember that. Don't let your past ruin it."

Before Gabe could respond, Autumn walked back into the room, holding a tray with three mugs of coffee. She cleared her throat, sensing the tension in the air. "Uh, coffee's ready," she said, looking between the brothers oddly.

Gabe and Demetri both turned to her, their expressions softening slightly.

"Thanks, Autumn," Gabe said, his voice steady. He took a mug from the tray and handed one to Demetri who accepted the mug with a nod, but his eyes remained on Gabe. "We'll talk later," he muttered before taking a sip of his coffee. "For now miss Autumn, where is this little sister that I've heard so much about? I'd like to meet her."

"She's at school." Autumn answered with a smile, "I'm gonna go get her now."

"Why don't I go with you. I'll meet her and then leave directly." Demetri said.

"You can just go. There is no need to trouble Arabelle."

"No one asked you, Gabby the crabby. I'm going with Autumn and then leaving." Demetri answered, making his intentions clear to Gabe...who sat back quietly.

Gabe sighed. After what Demetri had discovered, he knew he would have to soon reveal many things to Autumn which might end up hurting her... Demetri was giving him a small reprieve to organise these thoughts.

Chapter 587: Demetri

Gabe sighed as he washed the dishes and heard Arabelle prattle on about Demetri. Autumn had already left for work, and since Arabelle was with him, she'd been talking continuously about Demetri...much to his exasperation. While he was amused that his brother had left such an impression on Arabelle, he couldn't help but feel a twinge of jealousy. It reminded of the time 'that' Arabelle had talked about Demetri nonstop as well. It had bothered him then but he'd been confident that he could handle it.

But this little Arabelle. Like hell he was going to lose this little sister to that Demon. Drying his hands on a dish towel, he placed them on his hips and turned to Arabelle, teasing, "Demetri this, Demetri that. You know, Miss Arabelle, there are other interesting people in this house too."

Arabelle giggled, her eyes twinkling with merriment. "Oh, Mr Gabriel, don't be jealous. Demetri just has so many fascinating stories. But you will always be my favourite... Even though you did get lost in your own neighborhood once..."

Gabe stopped and stared at the little girl.. That backstabber Demon! He had many fascinating stories to tell about him!

"Did Demon tell you that?"

Arabelle nodded," Yes! He said you got lost because you were being chased by a little dog and trying to escape."

Gabe frowned," Little dog! Did that Demon tell you how pointy the little dog's teeth were? And that my brothers and him and put the little dog's favourite treat in my pocket?"

Arabelle's eyes widened with surprise, and she burst into laughter. "No way! He didn't tell me that part!"

Gabe crossed his arms and leaned against the counter, a playful smirk on his face. "Of course he didn't. He conveniently left out the part where he and the others brothers set me up. They thought it would be hilarious to watch me run around with that tiny terror nipping at my heels."

Arabelle's laughter turned into giggles as she pictured the scene, before hopping out from her chair and quickly hugging his legs, surprising him, "That must have been so scary for you."

Gabe felt his heart melt. There were so many times he'd told this story, much to everyone's amusement but this little girl had laughed and yet had the big heart to worry about him. Children loved too purely.

He shrugged, feeling oddly touched and trying to feign nonchalance. "It was... character building. Taught me to always check my pockets before trusting my brothers. And I got my revenge a few weeks later."

Arabelle pulled back slightly and looked up at him, her eyes wide with curiosity. "Revenge? What did you do?"

"You see, all us boys, we used to sleep together in a big room with bunk beds. And I was on one of the lower beds... So... one night, when they were all sleeping, I might have placed some slime on the floor, and the ladders... and used a few hairy spider toys that looked too real..."

Arabelle gasped, her hands covering her mouth. "What happened then?"

"Then they woke up... and screamed the house down.. Should've seen them jumping and falling about...."

Arabelle clutched her stomach as she laughed loudly, imagining a small Gabe and the others, falling all over like bowling pins.

"All of you were so naughty."

Gabe smiled, "That we were. Our grandfather claimed that we were the ones responsible for his hair turning grey too soon."

"Really?"

"Nah! I think he was just lying to us, since his hair was greying even before we were born. He just wanted to blame us."

Arabelle giggled at that while Gabe picked her up, quickly carrying her upstairs, "And now, Miss Arabelle, it is time to sleep."

Arabelle hugged his neck as she laughed and Gabe quickly placed her on the bed, tucking her in, "Come, Princess. Into bed with you..."

As Arabelle held her blanket, she stared up at him and pouted, "Are you trying to get out of telling me a story?"

"How could this servant dare to do that! So, what story would the princess like to hear today? About the brave young princess who fought a lion? Or the one who fought dragons?"

"The one who fought bad men! Like Autumn."

As Gabe settled into the chair next to Arabelle's bed, he began weaving the story with a gentle, soothing voice.

"So, this little princess named Summer was just as brave and kind-hearted as your sister."

Arabelle giggled. "Even her name is a season... like Autumn's..."

Gabe widened his eyes... "You are right about that! I hadn't even caught onto this! So, On a magical but scary night, the kingdom was in danger. Bad men, who wanted to steal the kingdom's treasure, had

sneaked into the castle. They'd put everyone in the castle to sleep with a special medicine. But little Summer had not eaten her vegetables that night so she was saved from falling under."

Arabelle nodded," Yes! Vegetables are so boring! She was so smart."

Gabe rolled his eyes," Well you cannot escape the veggies, Arabelle. But lets get back to Summer for now... Summer, with her sharp mind and fearless heart, decided she wouldn't let the thieves win."

Arabelle's eyes widened with excitement, her grip on the blanket tightening. "What did she do?"

"She thought hard and fast. She was only one girl. How was she supposed to fight the bad people and win? And then she remembered... she had a special weapon that her aunt had left her. That could help her win..."

"Just like our Aunt left a weapon for Autumn to fight bad people?"

Gabe's paused at that. "A weapon for Autumn? Your Aunt left something for Autumn?"

Arabelle frowned and nodded," Yes. Autumn's weapon. That Aunt J left for her when she moved to that far away place... But Gabe what happened next?"

Aunt J had left for Autumn? Aunt J had to be Mrs Jenkins...But why did Autumn not know this? He pushed the thought aside for now, focusing back on the story. He'd ask Autumn about it when she returned. "Yes, just like that. So, Summer's special weapon was a magical amulet that could summon the spirits of the ancient guardians of the kingdom."

Chapter 588: A Shock

Autumn sighed as she finished another night of being on duty. If there was one thing she wanted to do, it was to have some nepotism. There should be some benefit of being the Resort head's wife. If only she could change her timings and get a morning shift. But then she shook her head. That saying about humans being greedy was true. Just last month she'd been over the moon about having a secure job and now she already wanted more.

"Tsk tsk." She reprimanded herself as she walked out of the resort, excited at the next part of her day. It was time for her training with Gabe. Over the past few days, she'd become better at the training and started to enjoy it.

As she walked towards the house, however, she suddenly felt an itch at the back of her neck. Her eyes widened. Someone was following her. She could feel it. Carefully, she tried to look around, wondering if she'd be able to catch the person this time.

She quickened her pace, a small plan already forming in her head. She was well aware of this path and ways to get away from here. It was what Gabe had told her. To always look around for places in case of an emergency.

Rounding a corner, she ducked behind a thick hedge, heart pounding in her chest. For a while, there was silence and she wondered if maybe she had been mistaken. But then she heard it, the faint sound of footsteps...

Holding her breath, she strained to listen, trying to pinpoint the direction the sound was coming from. And then, she finally saw the person, walking hurriedly, probably trying to trace her. After all, she'd changed her path too suddenly and this was not the way home.

She wondered if maybe she should not confront this person. Let them look for her. Even as she was contemplating this, the person stopped not far away and took out his phone, making a call, "Sir, we've lost her. I think she knows I was following her. She changed the route and went in another direction than what you had given me. What should I do?"

Autumn stilled. So, someone knew the exact route she took and they had asked this person to look for her? And then, the man continued the conversation, "But the trap was set there? You want me to chase her here and call my people over? That could cause some commotion..."

Autumn gulped. They were planning to trap her? There must be others waiting near the house then? What was she supposed to do now? She tried to think quickly. She would have to wait for this man to call his mates from wherever they were and then escape him before they could come over...Only then would she be able to reach home safely..

She waited for him to make the call and just as he finished the call, she steeled her nerves and stood up.

"Were you looking for me?"

"Who... who are you?" he stammered, clearly caught off guard by Autumn's bold approach. But of course, she knew he'd recognised her.

"I asked you the question," Autumn spoke, stepping closer but keeping a safe distance. "Why were you following me?"

The man hesitated, clearly torn between his instructions to get to her and the unexpected confrontation without anyone backing him up.. "Look, lady, I don't want any trouble. I was just doing what I was told. You can just come with me and we can do this the painless way."

"Who told you to follow me?"

He glanced over his shoulder, waiting for the backup to arrive any moment, and felt braver. " It doesn't matter who told me. What matters is that you just saved me the time to look for you. So, you better come with me. Once my people are here, things won't be so pretty."

"Oh, they're not going to be pretty now."

With a quick move, Autumn slipped a knife from her back pocket and slashed it at the person, even before he could realize what was happening. And then, as he clutched his bleeding wrist, screaming in pain, she grabbed his cell phone from the ground and made a run for it. Enough time had passed for those people to have left for here. She would now go around the house...

Autumn's heart raced as she sprinted away from the man she had just incapacitated. Time was short and she knew that he would soon come after her, viciously this time.

Behind her, Autumn heard shouts and the pounding of footsteps as the man's accomplices probably reached him and were now prepping to follow her. She dared not to look back and turn around. Thankfully, she'd decided to take a longer turn instead of trying to hurry home when she realized that she was being followed. Or else, she would have fallen directly into their trap.

It was only when she reached the house, and saw Gabe standing there that she dared to slow down. He was waiting outside. Panting, she faintly called out his name and almost fell when he turned to her quickly.

She saw his eyes widen in shock as he saw her, standing at the end of the lane, covered in blood, her breath ragged from the sprint. Without hesitation, he rushed to her and took her inside, slamming the door shut behind her.

She felt him tremble, or maybe it was her, as he asked urgently, "What happened? Are you hurt? Why are you covered in blood?"

Autumn shook her head, trying to catch her breath. "I'm fine. It's not my blood. It's... it's his." She managed to say between gasps, holding up the phone she had taken.

Gabe glanced at the phone briefly, then looked back at her with concern etched across his face. "Who's phone is this? Did someone attack you? Are you hurt anywhere?"

"They were waiting for me, Gabe." her voice trembled even as she tried to control herself. "Someone was following me from the resort. They knew my route. They were going to trap me..."

Chapter 589: Enemies of Enemies

Gabe held her gently as he realized that she was trembling over, even as she slowly recounted everything that had happened. He was glad that she had chosen to take a different route, however, it also made him worried. He needed to move her to a day duty, which would not require her to leave the resort alone eventually or at least at a better time.

Finally, when she had calmed down, and changed her clothes, they decided to check the phone.

"It's locked.." Autumn murmured as she looked at the phone in disappointment. She'd hoped that she would be able to find the number of who ordered the attack on her and then...

"It won't be locked for long. I've already ask Lucifer to hack into it."

Autumn frowned, "Lucifer?"

"My little brother..."

"Ah okay.. He can hack into phones?" Autumn asked concerned. As far as she was aware, hacking was not legal...

Gabe smiled and caught her hand, stopping the way she kept cracking her fingers out of nervousness. She looked down at their intertwined fingers and blinked. That felt too natural... but then, she realized Gabe was still talking and focused on what he was saying, "He can practically hack into anything. Being the youngest, he was too sheltered so he turned to living on the edge by learning how to hack. Almost got caught a few times before Demon decided to throw him into the office lest he be thrown behind bars."

"But he still continues to hack?"

"Yep. And we tend to shamelessly use his skills..." As he said that, the phone in front of them suddenly powered off and restarted. Autumn widened her eyes at that... That was quick...

Once the phone was back on, Gabe navigated through it swiftly. "Let's see what we've got here."

The call log showed calls to and from a few numbers, but no names or saved contacts. Gabe quickly went out the last two numbers to Lucien to track, since they were apparently of the person who had paid the stalker to set up the trap and the last call had been the people who were in cahoots with him.

He then moved to the messages and felt a chill down his spine... There were two messages from the same number. The first one detailed her name and usual route as well as her picture. The second one was from an hour ago... Just when she had left work... And that is exactly what it said, "She's left. Do your job. And get that thing."

"Get that thing?" Autumn frowned as she repeated the words. What thing? Did that mean they wanted to not harm her but take something from her?

"What can they want?", she asked herself in confusion.

However, it was Gabe that answered, "I think they wanted the figurine that we are looking for as well. You know I've suspected that the burglary attempt was also for that..."

"But I don't have the figurine."

"I think you do, Autumn. Think hard." Gabe spoke softly as she turned to look at him in confusion.

"What do you mean? I don't have the figurine. Do you think I would have been hiding it if I did have it? When the hearing for the case is in a week? Do I look that foolish to you?"

"I don't think you are foolish at all. Just unaware."

Autumn frowned at that. Was he trying to say that she did not even know she had the figurine? She'd already looked through her mother's belongings a few times! What was she supposed to do now.

She opened her mouth to let him know what she thought of his claim but he beat her to it, "I know you've looked everywhere. But you haven't looked in one place."

"You think you know my house better than me? I've already looked everywhere..."

"Not among the things that Mrs Jenkins gave you."

Autumn frowned at that, "Mrs Jenkins? She didn't give me anything.."

"She gave you something to store for her, didn't she? According to Arabelle, Mrs J wanted you to stow somethings for her so she had you book a storage locker and pre pay for it for about a decade?"

Autumn widened her eyes and nodded, " Yes. She gave me a lot of knick knacks. I remember peeping inside when she claimed that I could use those things to fight monsters. I thought she was losing her head so I simply booked a locker and..."

"The figurine could be inside that locker?"

Autumn's heart raced as she processed Gabe's words. Could the figurine really be hidden among the items Mrs. Jenkins had given her? She had almost forgotten about the storage locker, dismissing the old woman's cryptic remarks at the time. But now, it seemed like a plausible lead.

"There is only one way of finding out, Autumn."

Autumn nodded and stood up, determinedly, " Then I'll go get the keys."

Just then, Gabe's phone beeped with a message and as he read it, he cursed and stopped Autumn, " I think, we might need to go to the police station first."

"The Police station? For registering this attempt to hurt me? You know they are all under that Gregory Savoy's hold so it will be of no use... If this number belongs to him, he will simply make things disappear..."

"Its not his number. Its someone else's."

"I don't have any other enemies..."

"It seems like you do. It is your old friend Bianca's number..."

Autumn's eyes widened in shock. "Bianca? But why is she doing this? I have nothing to do with Pierce and she is married to him like she wanted..."

"The only way to get an answer for that is to let the police question her..."

Autumn shook her head, " No... I want to ask her myself. Can we do that?"

Gabe frowned. " We can. But then this phone would be kind of useless. It would give her a hint and..."

"I don't care. I want to ask her..."

Gabe nodded. "Then lets' go and ask her."

Chapter 590: A Confrontation

"Bianca."

Bianca looked up from her phone to see Autumn standing there in front of her. She sighed, exasperation evident in her tone. "What is it? Are you here to beg for Pierce? I've already told you—"

"Pierce is history as far as I'm concerned," Autumn snapped, cutting her off. She moved to sit opposite Bianca, her eyes never leaving her face. "I'm here to find out why you want to harm me. What do you want from me? Why are you doing this to me?"

"Doing this? What have I done? I only took Pierce from you and I don't like you. As for what I want from you. I wish I could take everything away from you. You were always the smart one in school and outside, the teacher's pet. You always had to outshine everyone. Your perfect grades, your perfect attitude— everything about you was infuriating. I want to see you suffer forever. I've had enough of you. My biggest achievement is taking Pierce away from you."

Autumn frowned. She needed to make Bianca blurt out why she had planned the attack this morning. Why was she talking about the past. And just how good an actress had Bianca become that she'd not even shown a flicker of fear when she came to stand before her? Something was definitely up. She needed a confession from Bianca and a lead. "You wanted to hurt me over such trivial things?"

Autumn frowned and decided she would need to use the big guns. She made a show of reaching into her bag and pulled out the small phone, tossing it onto the table. And yet, Bianca was not scared or even perturbed by it. Did the perpetrator not tell her that he'd lost his phone? But she had to have known she was okay and not hurt.

Before Bianca could say anything, the waitress arrived with a cup of coffee, placing it in the middle. Bianca's eyes flickered to the cup, and a subtle smirk appeared on her lips as she moved her hands towards the phone, "What is this? Why are you showing me a phone?"

However, before she could pick the phone, her hand changed directions and in a swift motion, she overturned the cup, sending hot coffee spilling across the table and almost on Autumn's hand.

Autumn gasped and jumped back, narrowly avoiding the scalding liquid, even as a few drops scalded her. Her eyes blazed with anger. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

Bianca leaned back in her chair, a satisfied smile playing on her lips. "Consider it a warning, Autumn. Stay out of my way. If you think you can come and play these games with me then you are wrong. I don't know whose phone this is and I don't want to know."

She then proceeded to pretend nothing had happened and gestured to the waitress as she ignored Autumn, "Excuse me, can you clear this mess and bring me another coffee?"

"That phone has messages from your number, Bianca. Telling someone to harm me. Do you think you can get away with something like that?"

"Messages? From my phone? What are you talking about? I lost my phone a few days ago. I don't know who would have stolen it and used it to cause harm. I've already reported the loss to the police. Feel free to go and check."

Finally it was there. The triumphant look on Bianca's face finally broke through. It didn't matter to her that she had not succeeded. What mattered that Autumn had not succeeded. With a saccharine sweet smile, she told Autumn, "You're out of your depth, Autumn."

Autumn was about to respond when the waitress returned with another cup of coffee, and placed it on the table again as Bianca told the waitress, "Can't you get rid of this woman?"

The waitress stood awkwardly for a moment before turning to Autumn who simply waved her away, "No need to worry. I'm about to leave." She then turned to Bianca and leaned in, her voice low and

menacing," Just because you think you have everything planned, doesn't mean I can't prove what you've done and have you punished. You won't get away with this, Bianca. Not this time."

Without breaking eye contact, Autumn reached for the phone on the table and then as she grabbed the device, she copied Bianca and deliberately upended the coffee cup, sending the hot liquid spilling over Bianca's hand, much more successfully than Bianca had.

Bianca screamed, jerking her hand away and knocking her chair back in the process. The coffee scalded her skin, and she clutched her hand in pain, glaring at Autumn with pure hatred. "You bi*ch! You'll pay for this!"

Autumn straightened up slowly, her expression cold and unyielding. "Consider it a warning, Bianca. I'm not going to let you hurt me or anyone close to me ever again. This is far from over. And I don't care what it is that you want, the next time I feel any threat, I will come looking for you."

"Look all you want! But you will never find that thing! I know what it is! And I will make sure it never reaches you!" Bianca hisses as her eyes flashed with rage as she held her burning hand.

The people around them started to murmur and Autumn ignored them all as she turned and walked out of the cafe with her head held high. She knew there would be rumors flying tomorrow, about how she was vicious and had probably lost her sanity. But right now, she was not the least bit bothered by it.

This wasn't just about her anymore. Nothing was allowed to stop her from keeping Arabelle safe. If it meant harming Bianca, then so be it. She was prepared to do whatever it took to make that happen. Even hurt Bianca or herself. It was only as she stepped out that she allowed her shoulders to sag and walk towards Gabe who was still standing there waiting for her.