

Benefits 631

Chapter 631: Arabelle

Autumn stared at the small usb stick as if it were a time bomb. When she'd taken the box out to return it to Mrs Winthrope, she had not imagined that it would contain a note and this small thing.

The woman had blessed their marriage indeed. Autumn shook her head. Good thing that Gabe had not seen the note. He would have gone ballistic.

May the chains of your love bind you forever to the ghosts of the past. May your days be filled with shadows and your nights with whispers of the lies you have told. You are undeserving of happiness, and this union is nothing but a farce. I curse you to never find peace, as you have brought none to those around you. As for your wife... she will rue the day she tangled her fate with yours.

Autumn's heart pounded in her chest as she re-read the spiteful words. She felt a chill run down her spine. She could actually feel the venom dripping out of the note. And now, on one hand she wanted to take a look at the contents of the USB but on the other, she was totally scared.

With trembling hands, she plugged the USB stick into her laptop. As the screen lit up, she cursed herself under her breath. Curiosity always killed the cat and yet she could not curb it.. A video file automatically began to play, making her stare at the screen intently.

A young couple appeared on the screen, laughing and carefree. In fact it was not even a couple but young kids, at most ten years old. The boy had a mischievous smile and beside him was a girl, her dark hair cascading down her back as they danced, hands holding each other. Despite the laughter, the girl seemed to hold herself aloof, while the young Gabe seemed to be intent on letting her look at him. It took Autumn a moment, but then she realized that the girl in the picture was probably Arabelle Winthrope, Gabe's first and only love.

She paused the video, staring intently at the frozen girl. She was beautiful. So beautiful that Autumn could even understand why Gabe fell for her even as a young boy.

She pressed play again and the scene shifted to a sunny picnic, where Gabe's voice rang out, "I love you, Arabelle!" The girl rolled her eyes and shook her head at him, her expression cool and indifferent. Yet, Gabe was undeterred, running to hold her hand, his love evident in every gesture.

Autumn paused. She knew he loved her. And yet, she felt herself tear up. He declared that love so freely to this woman who was undeserving of him. While on the other hand, she would never hear those words from him. Slowly, she rewinded the video, playing it once again as she heard him shout, "I love you..."

Blaming herself to be all kinds of foolish that she was crying over someone else's past, she wiped her tears and hurriedly played the video again. This time, she was determined to not stop until the end.

And that is how she tortured herself. As more and more videos started to play, from their engagement party to a small wedding ceremony in some kind of a farm and then other pictures. As they went on, Autumn also saw the change in the girl... reminding her of what Gabe had said, that Arabelle had been sick in the head. She saw the strain then, in her eyes. Sometimes she would be looking at Gabe as if the sun set and rose on him but at others, there would be a vindictiveness there...

However, her attention was repeatedly stuck to Gabe... He seemed to be an empty shell of a person. The originally bright and shining eyes had dulled and were constantly reflecting sadness. It made her ache for him even as her resolve firmed. She would love him forever. Until he would forget this time of pain... Already she knew there was a difference in him.

In the past, he would usually only smile when he was interacting with her little sister. But now, he was laughing more and was more at ease. She'd bring the old Gabe back.

As the last video ended, however, a message appeared on the screen, that shook her to the very core:

"You promised to stay with Arabelle forever, and you broke that promise. She never left."

Autumn's breath caught in her throat as the next video began. It was footage of a hospital room. There, lying in a bed with her eyes closed, was Arabelle. Her head and arms covered in bandages.

Autumn's hand flew to her mouth as the implication hit her like a tidal wave. The wife Gabe believed to be dead was alive.

She replayed the video, hoping she had misinterpreted something, but there was no mistake. The final frame zoomed in on Arabelle's face, her chest rising and falling with each breath.

Autumn's mind raced. How could this be? Why didn't Gabe know? And what did this mean for their future? She stared at the screen, her thoughts a whirl of confusion and fear.

Should she tell Gabe the truth, knowing it would reopen old wounds and possibly destroy their relationship? Or should she keep this secret, protecting him from the pain of the past but living with the guilt of her silence? She could do that. She could pretend she'd never seen this USB.

She had no idea what to do. She loved Gabe deeply and wanted to see him happy, but this revelation threatened to unravel everything. He had a right to know everything. To know that the woman he'd loved so deeply had not left this world.. But wouldn't that mean pushing him back into those muddy waters that harmed him in the past.

Autumn leaned back in her chair. Trembling, she hugged herself, trying to think of what to do...

Chapter 632: Jittery

Autumn was a mess. Nothing seemed to be going her way today since she'd seen that video. First, she'd spilled hot coffee all over herself, scalding her arm and ruining her favorite shirt. Then, as she hurried to clean up the mess, she'd slipped on the wet floor, landing with a painful thud that left her a** bruised and sore.

"Of course, why not," she mumbled to herself, fighting back tears. "What else can go wrong today? If a dead person can return from the dead then this is nothing..."

Wiping her tears, she changed her clothes and returned to the kitchen, wanting to eat something. She was hungry. But there was no prepared food in the kitchen the way Gabe usually left for her.

Her eyes teared up again. She's gotten so used to having Gabe in the kitchen, always leaving some food for her that she had no idea what she wanted to eat. But now, with his not so dead wife back in the picture, Gabe would divorce her and go to the woman he loved...

Autumn leaned against the counter, her thoughts swirling in a chaotic mess. She glanced at the USB drive on the table, wondering why this was happening. She picked it up, her fingers trembling. She needed to return this. She could pretend that she'd never seen the contents of the thing.

She felt a lump in her throat as she considered her options. Gabe deserved to know, but how could she be the one to deliver such devastating news? Yes that had to be it. She would not be the one to do it and she'd simply pretend that she had never known if Elena indeed chose to expose it.

That was another thing that worried her. The woman's motive in keeping her daughter hidden all this while and then revealing it now was malicious. She wanted to hurt Gabe and any relationship he might have.

As her head continued to be spin with these thoughts, she heard the main door opening. A glance at the watch told her that she'd been sitting here for hours on end. Pushing the USB stick into her pocket, she quickly hurried to the stove. She hadn't yet reached a decision so she could not tell Gabe...

Autumn took a deep breath, trying to steady herself. Her heart pounded in her chest as his footsteps grew closer. She quickly wiped her face, trying to erase any evidence of her tears.

She knew the moment he entered the kitchen and tried to look busy. Grabbing a pot, she started to fill it with water. He walked up behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist. "Hey, lover. You're cooking tonight?" he murmured; his breath warm against her neck.

As Gabe would have nuzzled her, she winced at his touch, and Gabe immediately stiffened. He turned her around, his eyes narrowing as he took in her puffy eyes and red cheeks. "Autumn, what's the matter? Has something happened?" he asked, his voice filled with concern.

Thoughts of something bad having happened to her or little Arabelle made him worried. Had Savoy made an appearance. But Autumn's security detail had not reported anything unusual to him.

Worried, he reached for her arm, and she winced again. His eyes darkened as he carefully looked at her arm. With precision, he took her hand in his and rolled up her sleeve, revealing the red, scalded skin.

"Damn it, Autumn," he muttered, his voice low and angry, but not at her. He quickly unbuttoned her blouse and pushed it off her shoulder to get a better look at the burn. Without another word, he moved to the medicine cabinet, and grabbed an ointment and a soft cloth.

He took her hand and gently pushed her into a chair. "Sit," he commanded softly, his tone leaving no room for argument. As he knelt beside her, applying the ointment with a tender touch, he looked up at her, "How did this happen? Is this why you are crying?"

Autumn swallowed hard, her throat tight as she suddenly felt thankful for having had a bad time. At least Gabe wouldn't question her too much now. "I... I spilled coffee," she said, her voice barely above a whisper. "And then I slipped. It's been a bad day."

Gabe carefully pulled her into his arms, sighing deeply as he felt her tremble, feeling his concern deepen. Something else was on her mind. "You should have called me," he said gently, his fingers carefully applying the ointment to her burn. "I would've come home right away."

"It's not a big deal. Just a clumsy day, Gabe. I'll go and make something for dinner."

Gabe pushed her back into the chair as he loosened his tie. "Sit, I'll do it. You... take a break. Sit back and relax."

Autumn shook her head. She needed to get used to doing things herself. After all, Gabe would soon return to Arabelle and then she would be left all alone.

"NO! I'll do it myself. You... you go and take a rest. I've already placed the pasta to boil."

Gabe glanced at the pot of water on the stove... There was no pasta in it. And for that matter, the burner was off too. He frowned, realization dawning. Autumn wasn't just having a bad day; something was seriously bothering her.

He leaned against the counter, crossing his arms. "Autumn, what's really going on?" he asked, his voice soft but firm. "This isn't just about a clumsy day."

Autumn felt the weight of his gaze, and she knew she couldn't keep the truth hidden, no matter how much she wanted to hide it. And wasn't it better to keep it hidden?

Taking a deep breath, she looked up at him, her eyes filled with a mix of fear and determination. "It's Arabelle," she whispered.

Gabe paused and shot her a look. "Arabelle? What about her?"

"She is back..."

Gabe sighed, "I know..."

Chapter 633: You Know

Autumn felt her world spin as his words echoed in her head. He knew about Arabelle? But...

"How do you know?"

Gabe shook his head, confused about why she was worried so much..." Seb called me. Autumn, I know you're worried about Arabelle but she is going to be fine at Seb's place, you know that too."

Autumn blinked. He thought she was talking about little Arabelle.. not his ex wife. She shook her head, "I'm not talking about that. I... I'm talking about the woman you love."

Gabe stilled then and Autumn noticed the subtle change in him. He'd been leaning against the counter casually until now, but now there was something defensive in his position. "Autumn... She is not..."

Gabe thought back to the conversation he'd had in Ian. After a lot of thinking, he'd come to a decision to come clean to Autumn. He'd been thinking how to bring that up with Autumn but now that she'd raised the topic herself, he was grateful.

The first thing he wanted to tell her was that Arabelle was not the woman he loved. She hadn't been for a long time. He'd slowly come to accept that. It wasn't that he'd fallen out of love... just that his heart no longer yearned for her or ached for her. So that love had mellowed...

However, before he could say all this, Autumn blurted out in a single breath, "Arabelle is alive."

Gabe frowned, wondering if he had heard wrongly. "What did you say?"

Autumn felt her heart ache, misinterpreting his question. "I know it is unbelievable but it is the truth. Arabelle is alive..."

Gabe felt as if the ground had been pulled out from under him. "What do you mean she's alive?" he asked, his voice a mixture of shock and disbelief.

Autumn took a deep breath, steadying herself. "I found this today," she said, holding out the USB stick once more. "It's from Elena. The wedding gift that she'd given. There's a few videos on it..."

Gabe's eyes hardened as he took the USB from her. Bringing out his laptop, he plugged the USB inside and started to play the videos.

Autumn looked away. She did not have the heart to look at them again. They were too hurtful. She made to walk away, but instead, her hand was caught by Gabe who pulled her close, making her sit on his thigh. She wanted to say something but his eyes were focused on the screen. She leaned her head against his chest, closing her eyes. Maybe this was her chance to say goodbye.

Gabe watched the videos in silence, his jaw clenched, eyes narrowed as Arabelle's face filled the screen. Autumn could feel the tension radiating from him, his body rigid beneath her. She dared not look at the screen, instead focusing on the steady rhythm of his heartbeat.

When the final video ended, showing Arabelle in a hospital, Gabe shut the laptop with a decisive snap. Autumn braced herself for his reaction, her heart pounding in her chest. Would he run away right away to confront Elena Winthrope and get Arabelle back? Or would he wait and try to find more about Arabelle?

She tried to decipher his expression, but it was as if a mask had fallen over his features, hiding his true emotions, making him unreadable

"What do you think of this?" he finally asked, much to her surprise.

Autumn blinked, taken aback. "What do I think?" she echoed, her voice trembling. She searched his eyes, desperate for any sign of his true feelings. "Gabe, I... I don't know. It's shocking. I understand that you would want to go to her..."

His eyes met hers then and she looked away, trying to hide the pain she was feeling. It would have been so much better if he'd just run away after seeing that. Sitting like this, calmly discussing something like this, made her feel even more antsy...

Suddenly, Gabe leaned in, his lips brushing against hers in a soft, tender kiss that had her eyes widening in disbelief. "Is this the reason why you've been tensed all day?"

"Aren't you shocked? Your wife is alive... Gabe."

Gabe smiled, his hand cupping her face, "I know. And she is right here sitting on my thigh. I am going to kiss her sweet lips now..." With that, he kissed her again, this time deepening the kiss slowly. Her hands clutched at his shoulder, pushing the confusion and questions aside.

Finally, when he broke the kiss, he looked into her eyes, "Autumn... to me, Arabelle is dead. The woman I loved and cared for has already gone away. I don't know if this woman in the pen drive is really Arabelle or something that Elena has cooked up to trouble us...and I do not care. Elena has left this as a bait... one which we are not going to take."

When he felt her continue to look at him, he finally sighed and revealed a secret that he'd kept to himself.... "That day... when Arabelle died... I could have saved her."

Autumn was shocked, her eyes widening as she heard this. How was that possible. But Gabe was not looking at her, his gaze far away...

"Our car was hanging over the edge and I could feel her hand slipping from mine. All I had to do was hang on to her. Another few moments... and the people would have reached us for rescue...But as I looked at her, the madness in her eyes... the desperation in them to finish off her misery...I stopped trying.."

Autumn was shocked at the words. She could hear the guilt in his voice and the hurt. It must have killed him to let her go, to let her fall to her death.

Gabe looked at her then, letting her see the pain in his eyes, "I don't know if I was right or not in what I did. But that day, Arabelle died along with the boy you just saw in the videos. The one who looked at her as if she was the star and the moon. That boy who loved her desperately died with her. So... this Arabelle.. I don't care if she is the same person or not..."

Chapter 634: Surprise...

"Most people throw surprise birthday parties or retirement parties," Erasmi sighed into the phone.

"Only you would think of throwing a surprise wedding. What is wrong with your head, Gabe Frost?"

"Nothing is wrong with me. Because I'm not most people, I can throw a surprise wedding," Gabe replied.

"Now, come on, ask Ava and let me know. I don't want to overshadow her day with our news."

"I'll ask," Erasmi said, sounding doubtful. "But I don't think she'd mind. The only reason she's even excited about our wedding is because Caius is."

"Still, I would like her approval, Eras. And if she is even a bit uncomfortable with it, then we can simply plan it for another day."

"Fine. Fine. I'll ask her and let you know. But you're going to be on a tight schedule to make arrangements."

Gabe grinned at that. "I've already made the arrangement. Just work on the permission. And tell Ava not to let the girl gang know. Otherwise they are going to want to put in their inputs and then take the credit for the surprise."

Eras chuckled at that, "Uh huh. Don't worry. I'll ask Ava to keep this a secret and then later I will quote these words in front of everyone so that they can give you an earful."

Gabe chuckled, "Ha! They will be too busy oohing and aahing over the two brides to do anything else."

Disconnecting the call, Gabe then turned to check the other details on his phone, wondering if he was missing out on something. The wedding dress that Autumn had admired in the bridal shop had given him an idea.

Even though he'd bought the dress spur of the moment, he'd thought to hide it until she may be found someone else and decided to get married. But her confession to him had changed everything. Instead of giving her her 'dream' wedding dress, he'd decided to give her an entire dream wedding.

He could still vividly remember the way her eyes had lit up when she first saw the dress. It was a moment he cherished, a glimpse into her deepest desires. From that day on, he knew he wanted to be the one to fulfill those dreams. It wasn't just about the dress; it was about giving her the happiness she deserved. He wanted Autumn to feel like the most special person in the world, because to him, she was.

The only flaw in his plan was that he'd needed a suitable place where everyone would be gathered. That is when he'd thought of Eras' wedding. The entire family would be there. So, as long as Ava did not mind, genuinely did not mind, then they would hold a ceremony after Ava and Eras' reception...

"You are grinning at the food as if it is going to jump into your mouth because it looks."

Gabe looked up, still smiling, to see Autumn standing there with a curious expression.

He shook his head, laughing softly, and pulled her close to him, letting her sit on his lap as he kissed her. He loved the little surprised sound she always made when ever he did this. As if she was never expecting him to kiss her..."I'm just happy to see you."

Autumn rolled her eyes, "I don't know about you, but little Gabe here definitely is." To make a point, Autumn wiggled her a** on his lap, making him groan and catch her lips in a kiss again.

As their lips slowly parted, he rubbed her lower lip with his thumb, his eyes on her as he sighed, "I want you..." Leaning his forehead against hers, he looked into her eyes. Would they ever fail to mesmerize him.

Autumn blushed and looked away, "We were just together..."

"That's what I'm saying. I want you every minute..."

With a sigh, Gabe closed the little distance between them and kissed her again, wanting to feel her. He didn't know why he felt like this with Autumn. It was probably the way she gave herself to him, fully and trustingly.

"That's what I'm saying. I want you every minute," Gabe murmured, his voice a husky whisper.

With a sigh, he closed the distance between them and kissed her again, his need for her palpable. He didn't understand why he felt this way with Autumn. It was probably the way she gave herself to him, fully and trustingly, as if there was no one else in the world for her but him.

After a moment, Autumn pulled back, her cheeks flushed, her eyes dewy. "I really should get going, Gabe. I promised Nora I'd be there on time."

"Sigh! Can't you cancel on her?"

"She said you'd say that. And warned me if I try to cancel on her then she will come home to kidnap me..."

Gabe groaned. Knowing Nora, she would definitely do just that.

With an adorable look of protest, Gabe complained, "Fine fine. But tonight, you have to go on a date with me."

Autumn nodded, "Okay. Tonight is date night."

With a grin, Gabe let go of Autumn, kissing her one last time, "Come back soon. I'm going to miss you.."

Autumn giggled and kissed him back, "You talk as if I'm going away for a long time. I'll be back, before you know it..."

"And I'll be here, waiting for you... In fact, I will come pick you up so you wait there for me. Evening? Wait alright? That was, I won't have to be far away from you for the time it would take for you to come back and we'd have more time together to do the things we like..."

As Gabe waggled his eyebrows suggestively, Autumn shook her head before nodding at him with a wink as she walked towards the door, "Then I'll wait for the evening so you can come to me soon."

As Autumn waved to him with a large smile before leaving, she could not have imagined that this might be the last time she saw him...

Chapter 635: Missing

Autumn sighed and rubbed her arms as she waited for Gabe to come. He'd texted her he'd be there at six, but it was already seven. She glanced at her phone, considering if she should call him. "Where are you, Gabe?" she murmured to herself. She paced back and forth, the unease growing stronger. "Maybe he got stuck in traffic... or something came up at work. But he would've texted, right?"

Finally, feeling a bit worried, she decided to call him. "Come on, Gabe, pick up," she muttered under her breath as she pressed the call button. His phone was unreachable. "Great, just great," she mumbled, frustration lacing her voice. Anxiety began to creep in, and she bit her lip, staring at the screen in frustration. "Why was his phone off? This wasn't like him..."

As she started to worry about him, all sorts of unsavoury thoughts troubling her, she felt a hand on her shoulder. She almost jumped out of her skin then.

Turning quickly, she let out a deep breath as she saw Nora standing there, looking at her questioningly.

"What are you doing here? I thought you left an hour ago," Nora said, concern evident in her eyes.

Autumn let out a shaky breath. "I was supposed to meet Gabe, but he's late. Maybe he got stuck in a meeting or traffic. I've been waiting for him."

Nora frowned, surprised. "Gabe is late? That is not like him. And he didn't inform you he'd be late?"

"I know," Autumn replied, anxiety creeping back in. "His phone is unreachable, too."

Nora pulled out her own phone and dialed Gabe's number, but it remained unavailable. "This is strange," she said, her brow furrowing. "Let's wait a little longer and see if he shows up. Let me ask Demon..."

Immediately, she called Demetri who answered on the first ring, "Yes, my kitten."

"Demetri, is Gabe with you?"

"Gabe? No. He is not. He must be with Autumn. What's up? You need to ask him something?"

Nora shook her head, "Nah. He was supposed to have picked Autumn up an hour ago but he hasn't come until now and his phone is unreachable."

Nora didn't have to say more as Demetri understood. Gabe had multiple enemies within and outside the industry so and he was never careless. Quietly, "I'll ask the security and cameras."

While the two women waited, Nora dragged Autumn back into the now closed store.

A little while later, Demetri, Lucien, Seb and Ian arrived at the store, their expressions grim. Autumn's heart sank further at the sight of their worried faces.

"Did you find him? Do you know where he is? Is he alright?"

Demetri shook his head, his jaw set tight. "Gabe left the office in the morning, but security lost track of him soon after."

"Lost track? How could that happen? Aren't they always trailing him?"

Ian shook his head, "Not Gabe. He is good at losing the security or anyone following. And he... used to do that in the past, when... anyways, due to his habit of going off grid for a few hours, the security detail was not yet worried, so they didn't inform us."

Lucien placed his laptop, the screen already running, "Don't worry, we're already trying to trace his car from the security cameras all over the city. We'll find him quickly."

Autumn felt her knees weaken as she realized that Gabe had been missing for several hours probably...

"Autumn, did Gabe tell you about any plans that he might have for the afternoon?"

Autumn shook her head. "As far as I know, he was supposed to be at the office and then come here to pick me up.."

She saw them exchange looks and wondered what could be. However, Lucien then said something that had her head snapping up, "I've started to scan the surroundings around Elena's house as well, in case she's up to no good again."

The words had her reel in shock. Elena Winthrope. The woman who had left them news of Arabelle being alive as a wedding present. Could it be that Gabe had reconsidered his decision. He'd taken the USB from her, assuring her that he would definitely return it to Elena.

But what if instead of only returning the USB, he'd gone to see her? Nora seemed to have noticed her expression and placed a gentle hand on top of hers, "Autumn, have you remembered something?"

Autumn turned stricken eyes towards Nora, her face pale as she nodded. She felt everyone turn to look at her, waiting for her to speak up, but there seemed to be a lump in her throat, not letting the words past.

With great difficulty, she spoke the name, "Arabelle. His wife..."

She could actually feel them stiffen as they exchanged glances. "What about Arabelle? Autumn?" Demetri asked her softly.

Autumn shook her head, "Arabelle is alive. She did not die. Gabe discovered this yesterday."

"What do you mean, Autumn? Arabelle is alive? That is impossible..." Ian denied but Autumn shook her head, "Elena left a USB with us. It showed Arabelle in some kind of a hospital..."

As the entire story came tumbling out, about how Gabe had reassured her that he would never go back to Arabelle, she looked up to see the skeptical looks on their faces.

With great courage, Autumn bowed her head and asked, "You guys, don't think that he would have gone to her, right?"

However, as she watched the brothers keep quiet and avoid her gaze, she felt her heart shaking...and she clenched her hands, trying to pray in her heart that this was some misunderstanding, and it wasn't true...but their expressions showed what she already knew- Arabelle was Gabe's kryptonite, his only weakness.

And then, as she watched, she heard Lucien curse vividly as he glanced at his brothers, turning the screen of his laptop towards them... where it showed Gabe's car entering the ornate gates of Elena Winthrop's mansion...

Chapter 636: Thoughts

Autumn sat in the silent house, staring outside with a worried heart. She had insisted on coming back alone, but now she was regretting it as her thoughts tormented her. Initially, her concern had been that something terrible had happened to Gabe, fearing it had been orchestrated by Savoy or perhaps even Elena. But everything changed when she saw the surveillance video of Gabe driving into that woman's house. The sight of it caused something inside her to shrivel.

Now, she was scared for an entirely different reason. What if she lost Gabe to that woman? The thought gnawed at her, and she felt a profound sense of dread. The only thing that gave her a sliver of hope was seeing Gabe leave the mansion after a few minutes, apparently alone. However, the tension on his face had been evident both times he appeared on the footage.

Even so, the expressions on everyone's faces only made her fears multiply. Ian and Demetri had both reassured her that if Arabelle was indeed alive, Gabe would not return to her if he had assured Autumn otherwise. Yet, she had seen the doubt in their eyes, a flicker of uncertainty that they couldn't fully hide. Worse still, there was sympathy directed toward her, an unspoken acknowledgment of the precariousness of her situation.

As she looked around the kitchen, she couldn't help but wonder if her love was even strong enough to hold him.

Unexpectedly, the ringing of the doorbell broke her reverie. She stood up hurriedly and raced toward the door, her heart pounding with the hope that it might be Gabe. However, it wasn't Gabe who stood there but Nora and Isabella, their faces etched with concern.

"We got soup. You haven't eaten in hours." Nora said briskly as she placed the container on the table.

Suddenly, Autumn felt like crumbling. She knew Nora and Isabella had come to take care of her, yet she couldn't shake off the feeling that it was out of pity. She didn't want their pity; she wanted to be strong. She was strong!

"I'm fine. I'm not hungry. You can go," she said, trying to muster as much firmness as she could.

"No, we can't go," Isabelle answered briskly, her tone leaving no room for argument. She walked into the kitchen with purposeful steps, followed closely by Nora.

"I don't need your sympathy," Autumn snapped, her voice sharper than she intended. She immediately regretted it, but the fear and frustration were overwhelming her and she had no idea what to say or do anymore. Couldn't she catch a break just once?

Isabella shrugged off her outburst with a calm demeanor, making her feel even more guilty, as she said, "We're not here out of sympathy, Autumn. We may not be sisters by blood, but we are sisters. The Frosty sisters, Okay? And we're worried about you. As we should be since your husband is missing."

Nora nodded in agreement. "We're taking care of you because we care about you, and also because Gabe would blame us if we didn't make sure you were okay. And that man keeps grudges, okay? I don't want to have him take revenge on me later on because I failed to take care of you..."

At the mention of Gabe, Autumn's resolve crumbled. Tears welled up in her eyes, and she broke down. "Is he going to return? I doubt that," she sobbed, her fears spilling out in a torrent of anguish.

Nora and Isabella exchanged a glance before Nora scoffed, "Of course he's going to return. What are you thinking? No wonder you look pale. Nothing is going to happen to him, alright?"

"You know I don't mean that he is in any danger."

Nora paused, inhaling softly, "Sweety, if you think that Gabe has gone back to Arabelle, then you are so wrong that even the wrongest wrong would be right when compared."

"There is no word as wrongest wrong," Isabella added while Autumn looked at the two of them.

"I know you're trying to console me but..."

"Actually, we don't give out false assurances. Whatever danger Gabe is in, he is not going back to Arabelle."

"How can you be sure? Even Demetri and Ian, I could see were not sure."

Nora sighed. "Because we know Gabe. He's not the type to go back on his word. And if he said he's not going back to her, then he won't. Trust us on this."

As they plated the soup and bread, placing it in front of Autumn, Nora continued, "Actually, I think it is a good thing Arabelle is alive." Feeling Autumn's gaze on her, she continued, "See, it is difficult to compete with a ghost but so much easier to compete with a person. But more than that, Arabelle's return will help you understand how much Gabe loves you."

"Gabe doesn't love me." Autumn replied automatically but this time, she saw both the women shaking their heads at her.

"This is even more wrong." Nora added but this time it was Isabella who explained, "Autumn, he loves you. He just hasn't acknowledged that to himself or you."

"Let me break down things for you. What does a man in love do? He will be protective and caring for a woman. But Gabe was always that. So we can't count that. The next best thing is what he does otherwise. He always wants to include you in everything and have you by his side. Family dinners, going out and even those boring work events. Gabe makes sure you're by his side. He goes out of his way to make sure you're happy." Isabella said making Autumn realize that everything she said was true.

And then Nora continued, "Also, his eyes are always on you. Do you want proof? Here." She then extended her phone to Autumn where she'd clicked some candid pics of Gabe looking in a far away direction and everytime it was her he was looking at."

As Autumn stared at it, Nora nudged her with the soup bowl and said, "So, trust your love and trust Gabe. He may be a hard headed, stubborn and foolish a**... but he is yours..."

Chapter 637: Missing

A Few Hours Ago:

His grip on the steering wheel had made his knuckles white as he drove his car out of the woman's house. Honestly, he was sick and tired of these games that Arabelle had played and Elena Winthrop insisted on playing. The audacity of that woman! She actually dared to try and contact Autumn and lead her on behind his back.

That woman really did think that she could control him because of Arabelle. Thankfully, he had Autumn now. So he was not that same blindly foolish Gabe.

He sighed and thought back to the conversation that he'd just had with that infuriating woman. At least he'd learnt something of importance.

Just looking at her smug face had made him want to turn back and leave, instead of the reason he was here. And then she'd said, "I was expecting you. Though I thought you'd respond sooner." As if she knew him too well to know what he would do next.

Gabe had kept his expression neutral, refusing to give her the satisfaction of knowing how much she irked him. Without a word, he reached into his pocket, pulled out the USB, placing it on the table between them.

Her eyes had flicked to the small device, and he watched the hint of triumph in her gaze. "My patience is at an end, Elena," he said, his voice cold and measured. "I won't take kindly to any more attempts to you trying to interfere."

Elena's confident facade faltered momentarily. "Have you even watched the contents of the USB?" she had asked, a touch of confusion in her voice.

He felt the satisfaction then. She had expected him to come running for Arabelle. With a simple nod, he answered, "Yes." and watched the disbelief on her face as she scrutinized him with eyes narrowed, "Did you watch all the way?"

"Of course, I did."

She paused then, stepping back. Cocking her head, she asked, "And yet you are not here looking for her? Your beloved wife?"

Gabe's jaw tightened, and he looked Elena straight in the eyes. "As far as I'm concerned, she is dead."

Elena's eyes widened in shock. "You don't love her anymore?"

"I will always love her in my heart," Gabe answered steadily. "But to me, she is dead. So, I will not look for someone who is dead."

Elena stared at him, stunned and speechless for a moment. The triumph and smugness drained from her face, replaced by a mixture of confusion and realization. "You... you really mean that, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," Gabe replied firmly.

A bitter laugh erupted from Elena, her eyes glinting with a manic edge. "So, the saying that the Frosts love for life is just a bunch of hoax. You're all full of lies! The reason you can't be bothered is because you're in love with your new wife. Typical man behavior, lusting after the new while forgetting the old!"

"Elena—" Gabe began, but she cut him off, her voice rising with each word.

"You've forgotten about Arabelle and moved on, haven't you? It's disgusting. Arabelle was foolish to believe you would only ever love her. You Frost men are all the same, pretending to be devoted.

Her rant grew more hysterical as she paced the room, hurling insults as Gabe stood there unmoved. Finally grabbing a small, locked diary from a nearby shelf, she hurled it at him. Gabe caught the leather-bound book instinctively as she continued to shout,"

"She left this for you," Elena spat. "But of course, you wouldn't bother to check it."

Gabe glanced at the diary but made no move to open it. He could feel Elena's eyes boring into him, her bitterness palpable. But he paid it no attention, simply warning her, "I've said my piece, Elena. Don't contact Autumn or me again, or you'll regret it."

"You'll be the one who will live with the regret. The regret of being so cavalier about my daughter's death, Gabe," she hissed. "Especially when your new wife is gone with her stepfather..." She trailed off, a cruel smile curling her lips as she let the sentence hang, unfinished and ominous.

Gabe didn't bother responding. He turned on his heel and walked out of the house, slamming the door behind him. The chill of Elena's final words sent a shiver down his spine, but he forced himself to stay focused as he climbed into his car and drove away.

Gabe sighed as he slowed down the car. So, their doubts were confirmed. Elena had indeed been involved in the matter with Gregory Savoy. He glanced at the locked diary, tempted to open it. And yet it felt wrong to open it. As if it would be cheating on Autumn. He wouldn't do it unless Autumn was around and only if she wanted it.

The hesitation in opening this diary made him realise his shift in loyalties and he sighed. They still needed to bring this to a permanent solution.

Suddenly, he felt something off with the car. He pressed the brake pedal, but the car didn't slow down. His heart skipped a beat, and he pressed harder, but the car continued to speed forward.

"What the—" Gabe muttered, his hands tightening on the steering wheel. He glanced down, seeing that the brake pedal was completely unresponsive.

He shifted gears, hoping to slow the car down, but it had little effect. The car continued to speed along the winding road, and he could see a curve up ahead, knowing that once he was on the main road, then there was a possibility of him running into some other car.

With no other option, Gabe tried the emergency brake. The car skidded slightly, but it wasn't enough to stop the momentum. He fought to keep the car on the road, but the steering suddenly felt sluggish, almost as if it had been tampered with as well.

Spying an underbush in the near distance, he braced himself for the impact as the car veered suddenly.. He tried to hold on, but the force of the impact threw him forward.

Pain exploded in his head as he was thrown against the steering wheel. The airbags deployed, cushioning the blow, but the force still left him dazed. The car finally came to a halt, the engine sputtering and then falling silent.

Gabe's vision blurred, and he struggled to stay conscious. Blood trickled down his forehead, and every breath sent a sharp pain through his chest. He tried to move, but his body felt heavy, unresponsive.

As darkness began to close in, Gabe's last coherent thought was of Autumn.

Chapter 638: Accident

The Frost brothers stood around the wreckage of Gabe's car, their expressions a mix of concern and anger. It was the early hours of the morning, and they had finally received information about Gabe's car. As they raced to get here, however, the scene they met with was not one that made them calm down.

Gabe's car was totaled. The front end was smashed in, the hood crumpled like a piece of paper, and the windshield shattered into countless pieces. The driver's side door was nearly ripped off, and the airbags had deployed, now deflated and stained with blood. Broken glass and twisted metal littered the ground, painting a horrific picture.

Lucien's eyes scanned the twisted metal. "How could this have happened?" he muttered, kicking a piece of debris away from the car. "Gabe's always so careful."

Meanwhile, Seb was already kneeling beside the car, examining the brake lines and steering column with a growing sense of dread. "It's not just an accident," he said grimly. "Someone tampered with the car. The brake lines are cut, and the steering's been messed with. Whoever did it, knew that Gabe would take this road. It was why it had been blocked once he entered. Ian, do you know where they took Gabe to and how he is doing?"

Ian shot a worried look to the brothers and muttered, "Things are worse than we have imagined. The police doesn't know where Gabe is."

The caused curses to explode as they questioned Ian, what he meant by it. Ian sighed and with another worried glance at the ruined car, spoke up, "According to the police, the accident happened late afternoon yesterday. However, this road was closed off to the public around that time as well. Apparently, someone had complained of seeing some wild animals so they were going to investigate. They discovered the car only an hour ago... And it was empty."

The brothers exchanged anxious glances, the unspoken fear that Gabe might not have survived hanging heavily in the air. Each of them felt a cold knot of dread in their stomachs, but none dared to voice their darkest thoughts as they thought of what to do next.

It was Lucien who finally spoke up, "There is a possibility that Gabe was unconscious. So he could not have walked out of here. Or he would have asked for help. Maybe someone found him and took him to the hospital."

"We need to find him. If someone took him, then he's still alive. We have to believe that." Seb spoke with determination in his voice. They were not willing to lose their brother...

"Lucy, search the hospitals and clinics nearby and Seb, you can check to look for any CCTV footage. You know it doesn't matter if it's the public footage or from some private sources. We have to trace his steps somehow." Demetri ordered before turning to Ian, "You check in with the girls and update them. I'll go and see Elena."

As Seb and Lucien hurried off to their respective tasks, Demetri and Ian stayed behind, the tension between them palpable.

"You think this is still Elena's work?" Ian asked softly, doubt in his voice.

"I don't know. She is smart enough to know that if Gabe left her place and got into a car crash, we would come after her without barrier. She has enough sense to not do something like this. But... it happened there... whether she has knowledge of it or not. So, I need to go and see her..."

Ian nodded before casting a troubled glance at the car, "There's something else. The police found a diary on the car's floor.. It belongs to Arabelle. They've taken it into evidence for now..."

"You think we should confront Elena?" Ian asked worriedly, not wanting to tip the scale and let her know if her plan had been successful or not.

"That is the only lead we have for now, Ian. Even if it's Savoy, he is linked to Elena for now..."

"Then, don't go there alone. There is nothing to say if that woman has lost her mind. She's already messed with Gabe, there is nothing to say that she won't try to do something to you."

"Eras is going to be reaching there. He left last night after finding out Gabe is missing. I'll ask him to see me there, directly. You inform the girls and keep up with the police."

Ian sighed and nodded to Demetri, casting one last glance at the car that had been alright until yesterday. There was one thing he did not understand though. Why did Gabe ditch security? Especially at a time like this, when Gabe knew that Elena was also on the move and that Savoy was underground... And why did Gabe not make the emergency call to them?

According to the police, Gabe had probably discovered that the brakes had been tampered with and had tried to do some damage control. All their cars were equipped with emergency call features so all Gabe had to do was order the car to make a call.. Or the accident should have activated it. So, whoever had tampered with the car had also probably messed with those things as well.

But, Gabe had stayed at Elena's house for only a few minutes. So, that person needed to have had full knowledge of the car and an expertise to do these things so quickly. Which meant they were prepared and lying in wait...

Just then, a police officer approached him, a serious expression on his face and started to talk in hushed tones.

As he heard the officer talk, Ian knew at least one of his questions had been answered and his expression shifting from confusion to ruthless.

He nodded several times, asked a few brief questions before finally turning back towards his car as he thanked the officer, "Alright, thank you, officer. I'll need to go handle this. Keep me updated on anything else you find."

Chapter 639: Fear

As expected, Erasmi had already reached Elena's house before Demetri. He stood by the front gate, surveying the surroundings with a keen eye. As Demetri approached, Erasmi greeted him with a nod, noting the tension in his twin's demeanor. "What did you find?" Erasmi asked.

As Erasmi listened, he heard the frustration and worry there and sighed, "Demetri, you stay outside. I'll go in."

Demetri's brow furrowed, and he shook his head vehemently. "No, Erasmi. This involves both of us. We need to handle it together."

Erasmi's expression hardened slightly. "Demetri, you know I can handle Elena better than you. She's more likely to crack if I'm the one questioning her."

"I don't care. In fact, I can handle her as well as you. I'm not going to stand out here while you go in alone. We don't know what she might do."

"Demon. You can't be as ruthless as I can. It's not in your nature. Right now, we need someone who can push her to the edge if necessary and strike the fear of God into her. She probably knows what I did to Lara and the others so she will fear me when I say it. That's why it's better for you to stay out here and keep watch."

"And what if something goes wrong in there? What if she tries to hurt you? Lara was a different matter for you as well as for us. That does not make you cold blooded enough to handle Elena."

Erasmi gave a small, grim smile. "That's a risk I'm willing to take. I need you to trust me on this. Besides, if things go south, I need someone reliable on the outside to back me up. and you know, who could be more reliable than you?"

Finally, Demetri exhaled sharply and nodded. "Fine. But don't take any unnecessary risks. If you need help, you call me immediately."

Erasmi's smile widened, a hint of relief in his eyes that Demetri had not argued too much. "I will."

Erasmi walked to the door slowly, as if he were on a prowl with no worry in the world.

Elena was not expecting to see someone from the Frost family standing there so early in the morning. Her eyes widened in surprise and a hint of something unrecognisable. She tightened her robe around her and blocked the door, "What are you doing here, Demon?"

Erasmi's gaze was cold and unyielding. He stepped forward, blocking her view of the outside even as he made it so that Elena would be forced to step back. "Look carefully, Aunt Elena. Do you really think I'm Demon?"

If there was one person who scared her among the Frost brothers then it was Erasmi Frost. The Frost men may be ruthless but they were known for being above board in everything they did. She thought them to be foolish for these so called principles but that was also the reason that made her fearless when handling these people.

But Erasmi Frost was different. The fact that he had risen from the dead was scary enough but then the first thing he had done to extract revenge was to burn down the people who were responsible for his state.

And then he'd even escaped punishment from the law, which made him all the more formidable.

Her expression shifted from careless confusion to alarm as she took in the intensity in Erasmi's eyes, the set of his jaw and the way he stressed the word, 'aunt.' "Erasmi," she whispered, her voice trembling. "What's going on?"

Erasmi smiled, but that seemed to make him look even more dangerous as he leaned in closer, his voice a low, menacing growl. "I'm here because you have a lot of questions to answer. You're going to tell me everything you know about the situation—now."

Elena's hand gripped the door frame, her knuckles whitening. She glanced around nervously, as if trying to gauge whether she had any chance of escaping or seeking help. But she knew there was none. She gulped.

"What situation? If you're talking about Gabe..."

She paused as his eyes sharpened and gulped. Trembling, she cleared her throat, and started again, "Gabe came here and I just gave him the diary that Arabelle had left him. Nothing else! I'd held it back because I wanted to torment him. Erasmi, you of all people, know what it is to want revenge! That was my only daughter that Gabe let go of to die? So, I did not wish to share my daughter's words with him! So what?"

Erasmi's eyes narrowed, and he took another step closer, his voice dropping to an icy whisper. "I have very little patience, and even less sympathy for you, aunty. And I want to know what you did to Gabe's car. Who are your accomplices? The more you tell me now, the better it will be for you. Lie or withhold information, and you'll find out just how ruthless I can be."

Elena's fear was palpable as she backed away from Erasmi, her breath coming in shallow gasps. "Accomplices? What are you talking about?" she asked, her voice trembling.

Erasmi's expression grew colder, his patience wearing thin. "Don't play games with me, Elena. You know exactly what I'm referring to. Gabe's car—there was tampering which caused an accident. I want names. Who helped you with that?"

Elena's face flushed, a mix of terror and confusion as her voice rose slowly. "I—I don't know what you mean. I didn't touch Gabe's car. I swear! I don't know anyone who would be involved. I... I only gave Gabe the diary. I had no part in any car tampering. You have to believe me. In fact, I never want to kill him! I want him to live so that he can suffer with the guilt of what he has done to my Arabelle!"

At this point, Erasmi gave a final, piercing look to the woman before turning on his heel and walking out the door. "Elena is not directly involved in the tampering, but she knows who is. She will definitely contact that person."

Erasmi and Demetri looked at each other then. ' We'll be prepared when she does."

Chapter 640: An Officer

"How is he doing? Is he seriously injured. How did the accident happen? Have the found anything?" Autumn's voice trembled with urgency as Ian walked through the door, his expression grim. She had already heard about Gabe's accident. Her heart was filled with a mix of guilt and anxiety. She felt a pang of self-reproach for assuming Gabe had abandoned her for that woman when, in reality, he might be in danger.

Ian shook his head, as he looked at her with sympathy. "No, Autumn, not yet. The police are investigating. They think someone tampered with his car."

Her legs felt weak even as she tried to stand straight," Then, what about his injuries? Is he doing alright? Can we go see him?"

Ian shook his head and gently nudged Autumn towards the chair as the girls all looked at him with worry. With a sigh, he broke the news," Gabe is missing."

The room fell into a stunned silence, the gravity of Ian's words sinking in before everyone erupted askign simultaneously how he'd gone missing and what was going on.

"Missing? How... how is that possible?" Autumn asked, feeling as if her brain was lagging now.

Ian ran a hand through his hair, looking troubled. "The police found his car wrecked on the side of the road. The brakes had been deliberately tampered with. There was no sign of Gabe at the scene."

His words shook as he tried to speak more. Ian knew now was not the time to break down but this was not something easy to do. He needed to reassure Autumn and the others that they'd find Gabe but he needed to believe that first. And as the blood splattered seat and air bag, flashed in front of his eyes repeatedly, he was losing confidence. Gabe was too injured to have gone somewhere and what the police officer had told him...did not reassure him.

He felt Isabella's hand slip into his and gripped it tightly. As he turned his head to look at her, the calmness in her eyes gave him strength. He couldn't afford to break down now. Not when his priority should have been to look for that person...

Ian ran his other hand through his hair, even as his hand holding Isabella's tightened in a crushing hold," All we know was that Gabe was injured and had possibly lost consciousness. He should not have been able to walk out of that car wreck without help. Lucy and the police are already scouring the local hospitals, clinics and shelters, in case any good samaritan had been able to help him out."

Autumn nodded and quickly started to move around, "Alright. I'll go and join Lucy in looking for Gabe."

Ian quickly moved to stop her, "You can't do that."

Autumn clenched her fists, fighting back tears. "I need to help. I can't just sit here. I've been sitting here since last evening and I cannot do that anymore! I'll go and look for him as well."

"Not right now, Autumn! I'll take you to the police station soon. They will be the first to receive the news. But you need to..." Ian took a deep breath and spoke, "Autumn, just freshen up and I'll take you there. When we find Gabe and he looks at you disheveled like that, he will fret."

Autumn shook her head, "But, I don't want to..."

Ian cast a pleading glance at Nora who had been quiet until now but then moved at his signal. "It will take a few minutes. Just rush there and come back, Autumn."

Finally, Autumn nodded and returned to the room. As soon as she was out of ear shot, Nora turned to Ian, "What are you not saying?"

Ian closed his eyes and took out the picture on his phone, showing it to Isabella and Nora.

"The police thinks that Gabe has been kidnapped."

"What?"

It wasn't Isabella or Nora who asked the question but Autumn, who was now standing near her door.

The three people exchanged horrified looks before Nora asked, "You didn't go to get fresh?"

Autumn shook her head, her eyes fixed on the phone in Ian's hand as she said, "I knew Ian was hiding something."

With a sigh, Ian explained, "The thing is, we couldn't understand any reason for Gabe to ditch security. But then..." Ian inhaled sharply and continued, "We believe there was someone who was trailing him and the security. That was the person Gabe was trying to get rid of. And that person probably followed Gabe and tampered with the car. He could also be the one who took Gabe away after the accident."

Autumn frowned and walked towards them, "So the police don't even know if he is hospitalized or kidnapped? If he is okay or if he is..."

Her voice trailed off as she took the phone from Ian's hand and her eyes widened in shock as she recognized the person in the photo. "This person was following Gabe?"

Ian's eyes sharpened as he recognized the tone, "You know this person?"

Autumn nodded her head, rubbing her arms to ward off the sudden chill she was feeling, "That's the junior police officer who warned Gabe about Gregory Savoy being alive... and about Bianca's death. He was the one who said that the senior officers wanted to close the case because they were being blackmailed and did not want to blow up another shi* storm."

Ian's eyes narrowed. "Are you sure?"

Autumn nodded vigorously. "Yes, I'm sure. He came to the house twice. And both times, he spoke to Gabe alone. In fact, Gabe had even wondered why this man was going over and above, endangering his own job, by warning us repeatedly."

Ian nodded and quickly spoke up, "Autumn, if what you're saying is true, then we have a lead. We need to tell the police. Let's go there and talk directly..."

Even as they raced out, Autumn couldn't help but worry. What if they were too late?