

## Benefits 651

### Chapter 651: Autumn's Fear

Autumn sat in Gabe's room, staring silently at his unconscious form. It had been three long days since the accident, and though the swelling in his brain had finally decreased, the doctors remained uncertain about his recovery. The constant beeping of the machines monitoring his vital signs provided little comfort.

With a heavy sigh, she looked down at the diary in her hands. The police had given it to her, explaining that it was something that had survived the car crash. She knew it belonged to Arabelle...

She was torn, knowing that reading Arabelle's diary could reveal much about Gabe's past and his late wife, but also feeling that it might be an intrusion into something deeply private. What if he did not like it? What could be so important that Elena would pass it onto him now? The questions swirled in her mind, creating a tumultuous storm of doubt and fear.

More pressing, however, was her fear of the future. She'd almost lost Gabe this time. What if the contents of the diary made Gabe reconsider his decision to stay with her? After all, he did not love her, not truly. And now that Savoy was gone for sure, what did that mean for them? What if this diary reminded him of his deep unshakable love for his late wife? If only the diary had been destroyed in the accident...

She shook her head at herself, calling her a fool for wanting something like this. But she soon came to a decision. She was allowed a bit of fear, wasn't she? She sighed deeply, her fingers trembling. But just as she was about to open the diary, the door creaked open. Panicking, she quickly shut the diary and looked up to see Seb entering the room. She knew he'd already guessed what she was about to do, so she tried to explain, "I just..."

Seb smiled, sent a glance at Gabe and then walked to her, "You were about to read the diary. But why does it look like you were about to commit a theft? Hmm?"

Autumn looked down at her hands, clasping the diary tightly, "Wasn't I? This belongs to Arabelle and Gabe..."

Seb sighed and took her hand in his, "Read the diary freely, Autumn. You don't have to worry. Gabe wouldn't want to hide anything from you."

"But what if the contents inside this are not what I imagine? What if, reading it changes everything?"

Seb smiled then, "Isn't change the only constant in this world? Hmm? Listen, if you find something Gabe hasn't told you, you can't hold it against him. Everyone has their secrets, and sometimes they're kept for a reason. But Gabe cares about you. He wouldn't want you to be left in the dark."

Autumn nodded slowly, taking in Seb's words. "You're right. It's just... I'm scared."

"I know," Seb said gently. "But Gabe will wake up soon, and you can talk to him about everything. For now, read the diary if you feel you need to. Understand Arabelle, understand Gabe, but don't let it shake your faith in what you two have."

Taking a deep breath, Autumn gave Seb a small, grateful smile. "Thank you, Seb. I really needed to hear that."

Seb smiled and quickly gathered her in a hug, "Have lunch. Ian made it and sent it for you. You need to keep your energy up for when Gabe wakes up, okay?"

As Seb left the room, Autumn took another deep breath and opened the diary, her heart pounding with trepidation.

"Gabe.

If you are reading this, it means I am no longer with you. I know how much you have done for me, how tirelessly you cared for me, even when I was lost in the labyrinth of my own mind. I am grateful for every moment, every touch, every whispered word of comfort. You were my light in the darkness, my only constant in a world that shifted like sand beneath my feet.

You know, for the last few months, I have hoped to die instead of being a source of constant pain and threat for you. And at times, I cannot wait for death to come to me... But...

But now, I must ask you for one last thing. Will you do it for me? Do not let me go alone into the afterlife. I need you with me, as you have always been. I cannot bear the thought of being without you, even in death. You are my soul, my heart, my everything. Without you, I am scared of even dying..

I know it is selfish to ask this of you, but you must understand: your love has made me even more thirsty for it. I can't bear the thought of you moving on and falling in love with someone else.. I need you by my side, in this world and the next. Promise me, my love, that you will not abandon me. Promise me that you will find a way to be with me, even after death.

Autumn's breath hitched as she read the words on the page. Arabelle wanted Gabe to die with her? The revelation sent a cold shiver down her spine. She couldn't believe what she was reading.

She felt her hands trembling, the diary almost slipping from her grasp. Her first instinct was to destroy it, to tear the pages out and burn them so that Gabe would never have to see this. She could already envision the torment it would cause him.

But then she took a deep breath and steadied herself. Destroying the diary would be a betrayal. No. She had to trust Gabe and give this to him while waiting for his decision about this. She knew, of course, that he would never kill himself. That was just not him.

But what about the part where Arabelle had said that she wouldn't want to see him with another woman? Would he decided that he did not want to be with her. This could almost be considered Arabelle's last wish.

#### Chapter 652: The Answers

The moment his eyes snapped open, Gabe looked around frantically. "Autumn?" he called out, his voice raspy but urgent. Autumn, standing beside the bed, squeezed his hand. "I'm here, Gabe. I'm right here."

Relief washed over his face as he met her eyes. "You're safe. Thank God."

"I think she should be the one saying that dialogue," Ian muttered, making Gabe look around lethargically to see all his brothers scattered around the room.

"Why are you all here?"

"To see the sleeping beauty, of course. Now that he has finally woken up," Ian replied with a grin.

"What do you mean finally?" Gabe asked with a frown.

Demetri jumped in, "You've been catching up on your sleep for the last four days now."

Gabe blinked, trying to process the information. "Four days? What happened?"

Seb shook his head dramatically. "What do you think happened? Some witch brought a spindle, you touched it, and then... You were in an accident, Gabe. You were out cold due to swelling in your brain. So, did the entire swelling go down, and your brain is back to its original pea size, or is there some hope for it?"

Everyone chuckled while Erasmi shook his head. "Shut up, Seb. Don't tease him. His brain is bigger than a pea. It's almost as large as a peanut."

Gabe chuckled, then winced as he felt a stiff pain in his side, making Autumn frown. After sucking in a sharp breath at the pain, Gabe slowly let out the air and then asked softly, "Gregory?"

Ian scoffed, "Gosh! The doctor did say he might lose some senses! But really, he's lost them all! Do I look like that rat Gregory to you, Gabe?"

Gabe smiled at Ian's attempt at humor but then cast a worried look at Demetri.

His brothers exchanged glances before Demetri explained, "Don't worry. He won't bother you anymore. Autumn took care of him... with a trash can."

Gabe's eyes widened in surprise. "A trash can?"

Autumn shrugged nonchalantly. "It was handy, and he wasn't."

Before Gabe could ask more questions, Erasmi chimed in, "A lot of things happened, Gabe. We'll let Autumn fill you in later. For now, just rest and focus on getting well soon, okay? Just know that there is nothing threatening you now..."

"Unless we count his own lack of IQ, which is always a threat to be honest," added Seb, stepping forward to hug his brother gently. "I'm just glad you're back, Gabby."

It was only a matter of time before Gabe was 'accosted' by each of his brothers, realizing just how worried they'd been despite downplaying the entire thing.

"What happened to your arm?" Gabe asked Lucien as he came to hug him.

"Lucy was jealous and wanted to get bandages like yours. So he used some clever tricks," Seb answered, prompting Lucien to threaten, "You better stay quiet! I have a score to settle with you as it is!"

"Hey! Shut up..."

Slowly, everyone stepped back and left the room, leaving only Autumn and Gabe. Gabe tightened his hold on her hand. If his brothers had been this worried, he could only imagine the toll it had taken on her. He was about to pull her close when the doctor entered.

Throughout the time he was being checked, Gabe kept an eye on Autumn, something about her demeanor bothering him. As soon as the doctors left, Gabe, already tired, called Autumn to his side. He saw her hesitate and felt a chill, but in the next moment, as she sat by his side, taking his hand in hers, everything felt right again.

"Tell me what happened."

Autumn looked down at their joined hands and sighed. "A lot of things... Elena is dead."

Gabe stilled. "What did you say?"

Autumn sighed. "Elena...After you left and were in the accident, she had a falling out with Gregory. He was enraged and hit her on the head, and she was injured. Later, she died in the hospital from internal injuries..."

As she began, everything came tumbling out. She explained how Officer Humphrey had rescued and saved him, demanding that Savoy be dealt with, to how Lucien had replaced him in the entire scenario, cooperating with the police to bring down an entire chain of traffickers. She revealed that the woman pretending to be Savoy's fiancée was actually one of the most wanted criminals.

"Lucien?" Gabe asked, cursing. "The idiot! What was he thinking?"

"I guess he was thinking about saving you." Autumn said wryly.

Gabe closed his eyes, absorbing the information. "And Gregory? and the woman?"

"Locked up. Facing charges for a laundry list of crimes," Autumn said, her voice steady but filled with emotion.

Gabe squeezed her hand. "And you? You've been through hell. Hmm?"

Autumn managed a small smile, but Gabe could see the exhaustion in her eyes. "We've all been through hell, Gabe. It wasn't easy, but we got through it."

Gabe's expression softened as he studied her face. "You look like you haven't slept in days," he said gently. "Have you been here the whole time?"

Autumn nodded. "I couldn't leave you, Gabe. Not after everything that happened. I needed to be here when you woke up." Her voice almost broke at the end and the need to comfort her was overwhelming.

"Come here, Autumn. Come lie next to me."

Autumn looked up at him then, "No... I... You're a patient..."

"And I just need you to lie next to me. Come on, we're lucky that I am in a VIP room so that the bed is wider. Come on. You can lie next to me. I need to hold you, Autumn." She looked at him then, as if searching his eyes for some answers.

But instead of coming to lie next to him, she went back and picked up the diary, bringing it to him, "This... It was in the car when you were in the accident. The police gave returned it."

Gabe took the diary from her hand and then casually placed it on the table next to the bed. "Okay. Now come here. I need to hold you, Autumn."

Autumn cast a glance at the diary and then his extended hand. Did he not want to read it? Then should she confess that she'd read the diary.. But ultimately, she said nothing and slowly got into the bed, carefully lying next to him and closing her eyes... He was back with her... and that was all that mattered.

#### Chapter 653: Take Care

"So, are you completely prepared for the wedding postponement?" Erasmi inquired as Autumn finally emerged from the hospital. It had been quite the ordeal convincing her to step away and take a much-needed break, but Erasmi had succeeded in persuading her. Given the circumstances, it was essential to discuss their plans in detail, after all, it was a surprise wedding.

Gabe nodded, "Yep. Its not like I can marry her when on a wheelchair. I'll have to plan the surprise for some other day."

Erasmi sighed and nodded, "Of course. And I think it might actually be better this way..."

"Why?"

"I think you need to confess a lot of things to Autumn before you marry her again."

Gabe frowned, 'Like?'

"Are you really trying to act smart Gabe Frost? Everyone but Autumn knows that you are in love with her. And the only reason she doesn't know this is because you have not confessed to her. So, I suggest,

before you show your love to her and bury her in your affections, letting her know would be a good start."

Gabe chuckled at that, not bothering to argue. It was humbling, even a bit disheartening, to realize how blind he had been to his own feelings. But he had come to understand that the worry and care he felt for Autumn, the deep sense of calm he experienced when he was with her, and the restless yearning when she wasn't around were all signs of genuine love. It was different from what he had felt for Arabelle—this love was richer, more intense, and undeniably more powerful. It was a revelation that had taken him some time to accept, but now it was as clear as day.

"You might be right." He acknowledged, already thinking on how he was going to tell her. Now that he had accepted it, he wanted her to know as soon as possible. There was no reason to let her keep thinking that her love was unrequited.

"I'm always right, Gabe. So, you work on your confession and also a few other things..."

"Hmm. I'll do that. Eras, can you do something for me?"

"Of course, tell me." Erasmi answered.

"Take care of that diary for me."

Erasmi cast a look at the diary on the bedside table and then back at Gabe, "You read the diary?"

Gabe frowned, "No. I don't want to."

"Why?"

"You know why, Erasmi! I've already mentioned I am long over her. I really have no interest in knowing what she had to say anymore. And I love Autumn, so why would I worry about what Arabelle had to say?"

"That is really a good thing. Gabe, there is something else you need to tell her as well."

"I'm having the procedure reversed. I already spoke to the doctor." Gabe answered before Erasmi could continue.

"And what about the success rate? Its been almost two years now since you had the vasectomy done..."

"The doctor can't guarantee everything. But he said its only been a few years so, the chances of it being a success are good."

Erasmi nodded. Satisfied with his brother and they soon continued to talk about other things. It was only after Autumn returned a few hours later, that Erasmi said goodbye to Gabe.

As she came back, she immediately noticed that the diary was missing from the bedside table. She paused and looked at Gabe, a questioning expression on her face.

"Oh, Erasmi took it," Gabe explained. " I asked him to take care of it."

"Why?" Autumn asked sharply. Gabe looked at her carefully then. There was something off about her..."Did you read the diary, Autumn?"

"Yes." Even though she felt guilty, she raised her chin and stared at him, daring him to...

However, instead of getting angry or offended, she was surprised as Gabe shook his head and apologized, " I am sorry that you had to read whatever nonsense she had written."

"It wasn't nonsense. She said she loved you." Autumn answered, carefully searching Gabe's face for any sign of what he was thinking. After almost losing him, Autumn had come to learn one thing about herself. She wasn't okay with just loving him. She wanted him to love her back.

Gabe didn't react to this revelation. Instead, he leaned back and gazed out the window, his expression contemplative. "I love Autumn," he said softly, almost as if speaking to himself.

That made Autumn look up at him in shock. What did he say? Did she mishear? But then she realized he wasn't talking about her. His gaze remained fixed on the outside world. "There's something about autumn," Gabe said quietly, his voice thoughtful. "It's a season of change, of letting go. The leaves fall, making way for new growth that will come with spring. It's fascinating, isn't it, how soon the weather turns?"

"Yes," Autumn replied, her voice barely above a whisper.

Gabe turned to face her, a gentle smile playing on his lips. "You look exceptionally beautiful today, Autumn. I want to kiss you. But I'm scared."

"Scared?"

Gabe chuckled and extended his hand to her, which she took without hesitation as he pulled her close, "Hmm. Autumn, do you still love me?"

Autumn looked into his eyes and nodded. She loved him. More than anything else.

Gabe smiled then, "Good. That is good."

Autumn frowned, "What do you mean? That is good?"

He looked into her eyes with a mix of tenderness and playful mischief. "Well, if you're sure about that, then I can say what is on my mind. I love Autumn, you know that right? I just said so."

Autumn nodded and Gabe continued, "But, here's the thing, I love Autumn even more when she is with Frost..."

Autumn widened her eyes as she tried to understand the meaning implied...as Gabe continued, "Autumn Frost, will you do me the honour of accepting my love?"

Before Autumn could react, Gabe's lips gently met hers, the kiss tender and full of promise. And it was only as Gabe broke the kiss that Autumn, still in disbelief, repeated, "You love Autumn?"

Gabe smiled and nodded, "hmm.. I love you, Autumn Frost. More than anything. More than myself."

#### Chapter 654: Confessions and Proposals

"I can't believe he proposed to you in a hospital," Nora muttered, her voice tinged with disbelief as she finished dutifully oohing and aahing over Evana's ring.

Evana chuckled, the memory still fresh and amusing. "I couldn't believe it either! That sneaky man! I didn't even realise when he slipped it on my finger." Even as she said this, she couldn't stop admiring the ring.

As a princess, she was no stranger to all sorts of jewels but this simple emerald cut diamond ring, captured her heart. Everytime she looked at it, she could feel te butterflies in her stomach...

"Tsk tsk. I had such high expectations for Lucy," Olivia teased, her eyes sparkling with mischief. She leaned closer, a playful smirk on her lips. "I mean, a hospital? Really? What happened to the romantic dinner or a surprise getaway?"

"Yeah, Evana, you deserve a grand gesture! Candlelit dinners, fireworks, the whole works!" Isabellla asked, her voice softening as she questioned, "Weren't you a bit disappointed? I mean, it's not exactly the setting every girl dreams of."

Evana shook her head, not the least bit worried, as she answered thoughtfully, "I'm actually too happy to be disappointed. The last time when I thought he would propose... Things took a different turn." Evana thought back to her own foolishness and continued, "After that, I was too scared to even bring up the topic. I know that Lucien had openly accepted me when he gave our relationship a second chance, but I was too scared to even bring it up..."

Nora hugged Evana then and shook her head, "You shouldn't have felt scaered in the relationship, Evana."

"I wasn't scared about Lucifer. I was worried about myself and my own foolishness. So, the truth is that he could have proposed anywhere, and I would have said yes. What mattered was that we were going to be together."

Isabella shook her head and hugged Evana, "Okay okay. We'll give him a pass this time. Just make sure that he gives you a grand wedding! Uh huh. And now that your matter is resolved and we know you are not going to blame Lucy for being a dum dum... its time to turn to someone else..."

In unison, Isabella, Olivia, Nora, and Evana turned to the two women who had been sitting quietly until now. With a single exchange of glances, they picked up the next target... "So, Miss Autumn Frost."

"Huh? What?"

Nora chuckled and placed her chin on her palm as she stared at Autumn, "What are you doing?"

Autumn looked up at the sound of her name, her eyes a bit dazed from the conversation happening around her. "What am I doing?" she repeated, her voice a little confused.

Olivia nudged her playfully. "Yes, Autumn, what are you doing? You've been awfully quiet. Spill the beans!"

Autumn hesitated, still finding everything unbelievable.

Nora leaned in closer, her curiosity piqued. "What is it? Don't keep us in suspense! I can see that you have some secret up your sleeve..."

As she looked at the expectant faces of the girls around her, she inhaled slowly and spoke, "Gabe told me he loved me."

There was a moment of silence, followed by a collective gasp and then a chorus of exclamations erupted from the group.

"Oh my goodness!" Olivia exclaimed.

"No way!" Isabella's eyes widened.

"Finally!" Nora clapped her hands together.

Evana grinned, her eyes sparkling with excitement. "Tell us everything!"

Even Ava managed a smile and added, "That is such great news."

Autumn laughed, the warmth of their enthusiasm making her feel even more giddy. "It was so unexpected..."

Before she could say more, she was buried in a group hug as the women all hugged her tightly... smothering her, making her laugh. This was what it felt like having sisters...

Autumn laughed then, finally accepting that maybe she had not dreamt everything up. "It was so unexpected. I thought I was dreaming for a second."

Nora chuckled and shook her head, "Gabe and Lucy share the same brain cell! Someone needs to tell these guys that the hospital is not a romantic place."

Isabella wound her arms through Autumn's nudging her shoulders, "Well, I think Autumn and Evana here might disagree. I mean look at their glowing faces..."

"But we can't hold it against Gabe. The thing is he did not wait to confess as soon as he came to his senses."

"You two deserve all the happiness in the world. Gabe is an incredible man, and you're an amazing woman. Together, you're unstoppable."

Nora's eyes sparkled with mischief again. "So, Autumn, now that we've heard the big news, tell us... how did it feel when he said those three magical words?"

Autumn's smile widened, her heart fluttering at the memory. "It was... I have no words."

Isabella sighed dramatically, placing a hand over her heart. "I'm not crying, you're crying."

This caused everyone to laugh and chuckle as Nora announced, "This is the best! We're all having our..." But then paused.

There was someone who had not yet had their happy ending...

They turned to look at Ava then, who had yet to speak up, and was lost in her own thoughts. Ava felt the women's gazes on her and shook her head, "Erasmi hasn't proposed or confessed his love in a hospital or anywhere else..."

Silent looks were exchanged before Nora blinked and asked innocently, "Would you like him to?"

Wide-eyed, Ava looked at the women and then shook her head, "Uhh no. We are not in that kind of a relationship. We are only marrying for Caius.. There is no love."

Nora wanted to say something then. Hadn't she and Autumn also married for a reason other than love? But they'd found it.. But as she met, Autumn's gaze, she knew that sometimes sometimes did not need to be said... Time would teach everything.

And so, they shifted the topic to the upcoming wedding of Ava and Erasmi, which had been postponed another week due to two groomsmen being in the hospital.

Chapter 655: Babies

"I'm pregnant," Isabella announced candidly.

Poor Ian, who had been taking a sip of water, promptly choked and coughed, spraying water everywhere like a malfunctioning sprinkler as he stared at his fiance.

"What did you say?"

"I am pregnant? Are you not happy? Do you not want babies with me?"

"I'm pregnant," Isabella announced candidly.

Poor Ian, who had been taking a sip of water, promptly choked and coughed, spraying water everywhere like a malfunctioning sprinkler as he stared at his fiancée.

"What did you say?"

"I am pregnant? Are you not happy? Do you not want babies with me?" Isabella's voice wavered, her eyes filling with exaggerated tears. She dramatically clutched her stomach, taking a step back as if she needed support.

"Ian, I thought you would be thrilled! I imagined us painting the nursery together, picking out little baby clothes, and planning our future. But you—" she sniffled theatrically, her lower lip trembling, "you look like you've seen a ghost. Do you not love me enough to have a family with me?"

Ian, still trying to regain his composure, opened his mouth to respond, but Isabella barreled on, her voice rising in intensity. "Do you not see us growing old together, with children running around and filling our lives with joy? I can't believe you'd react like this!" She turned away, covering her face with her hands, her shoulders shaking with dramatic sobs.

Just as Ian managed to catch his breath and was about to speak, Isabella spun back around, a mischievous glint in her eyes. "Gotcha! I'm not pregnant. I was just practicing the announcement. But now that I know your reaction, I think we need some time."

Isabelle turned away, then disappointed. She'd spent the day with Innocenza and Vincenzo and her maternal instincts seemed to be pressing down on her. She wanted little babies for herself and Ian. It was something that had been going on in her mind for a while and she'd finally decided to broach the subject with Ian. But his reaction told her what she needed to know. Ian was not yet prepared.

Trying to hide her disappointment, Isabella walked towards the bedroom, but before she could go further, Ian's arms came around her waist.

"Isabella..." He nuzzled her neck and she leaned back onto his chest, smiling.

"What?"

"You want a baby..." Isabella paused. Of course, Ian always knew everything.

"I do. I know we are not yet married. And you might need time so, I won't be forcing..."

Before she could say more, Ian caught her mouth in a soft kiss, assuring her and yet wanting her..."Isabella... I would like nothing more than having a little Isabella running around the house. But, are you sure. It would mean a lot of changes for the both of us..."

"I want those changes with you, Ian. If it were someone else, maybe I would never have.. But you.. I think you would make a perfect father..."

Ian grinned and pulled her close, lightly biting her lower lip," Really? You think that... I suddenly feel motivated.. Alright then, lets start working on the baby making project... as soon as we are wedded. So, have you made a decision on where and when you want to hold the wedding."

Isabella nodded, sure of her choice now. All these months, she had been teetering over where to do. Every destination had felt perfect and every destination had felt as if it was missing something. It was only as she heard Evana and Autumn's happiness that she realized something. She was unable to decide not because all the places they had seen were good. But because she had a perfect partner and so everything seemed perfect.

Isabella looked up at him then, tugging at his tie," I've decided. Ian, lets elope."

Ian widened his eyes and slowly checked Isabella's temperature,"What is wrong with you? Do you have fever? Did the girls mix something in your drink today?"

Isabella shook her head, "Nothing is wrong with me. I just... The wedding is not important anymore. I've realized that whatever type of wedding we have, it will be perfect for us. So, why should we invest so much time and energy to planning a wedding when we can simply elope? Hmm? So what do you think, should we get married tomorrow?"

Grinning, Ian quickly stole another kiss, "Alright. I'll make an appointment at the Civil Affairs for tomorrow. And now, we can get to the next part of our plan."

Isabella wound her arms around him and waggled her eyebrows, "Next part?"

"Hmm. We need to practice for the wedding night and the baby Isi project. Extensive preparations are needed..."

Isabella giggled and clung to him as she was lifted by Ian in a bridal carry and protested, "Ian Frost, I think you have enough practice in these aspects. We don't need to practice anymore.."

Ian threw Isabella on the bed decisively, before quickly pulling at the knot of his tie. "I don't think so. I'm sure I'm unprepared for it so practice should make things perfect."

Discarding his shirt and pants in a single move, Ian quickly got rid of Isabella's clothing as well. With glittering possessive eyes, he knelt before her, gently caressing her belly as he placed little kisses all over, and whispered, "I can't wait to see you get all big with our baby."

Slowly, he kissed his way upwards, his mouth pausing to pay attention to the twin peaks as he murmured, "So sensitive. You know you'll get even more sensitive here..."

Isabella caught his shoulders, "Ian! Come here and stop teasing me."

Ian smiled and gently rolled her nip\*les between his fingers, his eyes tracing every part of her body as she writhed beneath him...

"I want you, Ian. Please..."

Habitually, he would have reached for the condom but this time, as he entered her, the anticipation of their future together, gave him a different pleasure.. Until slowly, he kissed her, releasing himself into her... hoping for a future they had envisioned..

#### Chapter 656: Do You Want

"I can't believe you guys eloped. What happened to me being your maid of honor?" Nora muttered, staring at her Isabell and Ian, who had just tied the knot in a small chapel in Vegas. "At least you had the decency to video call me and not shut me out."

"That wasn't decency, Nora. That was fear. We were scared you'd come after us with a machete." Ian muttered, giving her a grin.

Nora crossed her arms, and gave the newlyweds a mock glare. "You're lucky I didn't hop on the next flight to come and crash your wedding night! In fact, I still might."

Ian grinned," I expect as much! Don't worry, I'm taking her away somewhere that you won't be able to find us easily."

Nora snorted," Shu\* up! You Bride-napper. Wait till I get my hands on you."

"That will be a long time! And now, I am off to take my bride on our honeymoon!"

"Hey hey! Wait! What about the others? Who is going to tell them?"

"Don't worry.I've shared the wedding video with everyone and where to send the gifts and red packets. Bye Nora."

Nora chuckled as the phone disconnected, grabbing the book she was currently reading. They really thought they could have escaped without anyone knowing. Of course, everyone already knew but since the two wanted to elope, they kept quiet.

Let them come back. Then they would know what a wedding is! Ha! A wedding with family and best friends is only a rehearsal!

As she returned to the gripping story, she couldn't help but grin at the antics of the female lead. She was just like her...

As she returned to the gripping story, she couldn't help but grin at the antics of the female lead. She was just like her...

The sound of the front door opening and closing pulled her from the pages. She lit up, when she watched Demon come in, loosening his tie as he always did. Sigh! The site never failed to bring butterflies to her stomach...An idea struck her.. Someday, she will convince her husband to do a strip tease just for her...

Her wild thoughts were brought back to the present when Demon walked over and quickly kissed her forehead before picking her up and taking her in his arms. Like a contented cat, she snuggled close to him and looked up, "How was your day?"

"Long. After all, my right hand man disappeared, leaving me in the lurch. So, did they call you?" he sighed, kissing the top of her head again.

Nora nodded, and leaned up to kiss his chin, "They did. And I am so happy for them! Now Isabella can work on getting the babies she wants..."

Demetri smiled at that. Of course, he too had noticed Isabella staring at the little babies with stars in her eyes. At this, he couldn't help but wonder what was on Nora's mind. His little kitten had gotten too crafty and he didn't want to make any wrong guesses... "What are you reading?"

Nora grinned, holding up the book for him to see. "It's about a little girl who's trying to play cupid for her parents. She's quite cute and has all these funny, elaborate plans to get them back together."

"Sounds adorable. Is she succeeding?"

"So far, she's facing a lot of obstacles, but she's determined. Little buns with naughty ideas are the best!"

Demetri sighed and took the book out of her hands, observing the cover carefully before placing it aside, making sure not to lose the page and hugged her close.

His hand caressed her waist, sliding under the tshirt as he caressed her sides. Nora moaned, " Demon... Wha..."

Her moan was stolen with a kiss as he shushed her and instead deepened the kiss. His hands moving to caress her waist and then up before coming down to settle on her belly as he broke the kiss.

Nora opened her eyes then, the look of desire driving him wild with want. Demetri kissed her again, wanting more but he knew he had to stop before things went too far. He needed to ask her..

"Nora..." As Demetri broke the kiss for the second time.

Nora opened her eyes and pouted up at him. This was not fair. Placing her head on his shoulder, she played with the buttons of his shirt and questioned him, " What?"

"Do you also..." He petted her stomach, gently tracing the slight curve. Nora clenched her stomach, feeling ticklish and looked up at him... It took her a moment to understand his unasked question before she understood it and snapped her head up.

Her head hit his chin, making him wince as Nora quickly apologized, " Sorry sorry!"

He chuckled, rubbing his chin. "It's okay, kitten."

Nora looked into his eyes, searching for his true thoughts. "Do you...do you want babies too, Demetri?"

He sighed, brushing a stray lock of hair from her face. "That's what I wanted to ask you, kitten."

Nora sighed, placing her head against his shoulder again as she muttered, "Do you think it's odd that I'm not tempted about having babies now? Actually, I did think that I wanted them. But I'm not too sure even now. Do you want them? I mean you are the oldest and the other are already ahead of you..."

He shook his head, pressing a gentle kiss to her temple as he smiled, "It is not a race. And no, I'm happy with just you. I'm just wondering if you're getting the baby fever too."

She smiled, relieved. "Not yet. I want to continue focusing on the business and us. I want to keep you to myself, enjoy your love for a little while longer before we can share it with our babies."

Demetri smiled, his fingers tracing circles on her tummy. "Okay then. So, I guess I'll keep all my love reserved for you."

Nora grinned and caught his wrist with one hand, even as she unbuttoned his shirt with the other, "Of course you will. Demetri Frost.. I love you..."

#### Chapter 657: Second guesses

Erasmi sighed as he signed the deal, watching the woman walk away and wondering for the nth time if he had made the right decision. It wasn't like him to second-guess everything, but he was unsure of what to do next as this was new territory to him.

Being a parent was hard. Even though he had gotten the hang of it over the past year and Caius was probably the easiest child to get along with, he couldn't help but question his own decisions.

It wasn't as if he had a problem with living here but he wanted to be closer to his brothers. Gabe's incident and the time it had taken for him to reach there, had made him realise that while this place had given him a break, he was now ready to move back.

He had tried to broach the topic of moving with Avaon return, but she had shut it down completely, much to his shock. In the past, she had been willing to consider it when he proposed that they go back and live in the house that had been left to him by his grandfather.

And so, here he was, having bought the biggest building in town, not for himself, but to give to his soon-to-be wife as a wedding present. But he didn't understand why she wanted to stay here. From what he'd seen, she'd come to love everyone in the family. So why did she insist on staying here? It was a mystery to him...

Grabbing the file, he smiled. Let it be a mystery then. If she was comfortable here and felt happier here, then they would stay here. Having adjusted his mood, he looked at the file again. Time to give his wife to be a gift.

With a feeling of excitement and apprehension, the file clutched in his hand, ready to present his soon-to-be wife with the gift he hoped would make her as happy, Erasmi walked home. But as he entered the house, he immediately sensed that something was off. Ava was standing in the living room, her posture rigid and her expression distant.

"Ava," he greeted, trying to keep his voice light. "I have something for you."

She jumped as she whirled, making his eyebrows rise. Why was she so jumpy? It reminded him of the time when she'd been ready to run away with Caius but he shook his head. That couldn't be. That was more than a year ago and they had come a long way since then.

"Whats up, Ava? You look like a cat on a hot tin roof."

Unexpectedly, instead of rolling her eyes at him as she would have done in the past, she looked away and instead extended a file to him. Placing the file in his hand on the side, he walked forward and took the one she extended, without opening it, "What is this? A prenup? Ava, what is this about?"

"I don't want anyone to think I'm marrying you for your money," she replied, her voice firm but with an underlying tremor. "I want to make it clear that I'm not after your wealth."

He stared at her, trying to understand. "Ava, I know you're not after my money. This... this isn't necessary."

" For me, it is. I need this.. It is a simple agreement. I have no claim over whatever you own and you have no claim over what I own while coming into this marriage. When we separate, you can have Caius on the weekends but he will live with me."

Erasmi frowned. What was this about? He reached out and gently took her wrist, hoping to calm her. "Ava, what's going on? Why are you so afraid?Did someone say something?"

The moment he touched her, however, she jerked away, her eyes widening with fear. Erasmi froze, "Ava, what's wrong? Why are you acting like this?"

She stepped back, wrapping her arms around herself. "I... I just need some space, Erasmi. Please, sign the document."

Erasmi's mind raced. Something was deeply wrong, and he needed to understand what it was. They'd considered for a long while before even coming to the decision to marry. So, why was she talking about a divorce already? And that too... she said when and not if.

With a sigh, he placed the document on the side and shook his head, "I won't sign this. Not until you tell me what this is about."

"Then I won't marry you. If you don't sign this, then you can call off the wedding next week."

Erasmi stilled then and shot her a look. With narrowed eyes, he picked up his own file, "Ava. You should know by now I don't take kindly to threats. So, either you tell me whatever it is that is bothering you, so that we can resolve it or if you wish to break off the wedding, then you are free to do so. Just be prepared to answer Caius' questions."

With that, he walked off, feeling like a fool. Here he was, trying to do everything he could think of to make a stable home for Caius and Ava... And instead she was here trying to hold onto her fears and whatever it was that made her look at him as if he was a monster. What was wrong with her? Hadn't they become friends. So why was she in such an odd mood today?

Angry and baffled, he kicked the small rock on the side of the house, before getting into the car and driving away, trying to cool himself down. As he drove, he couldn't help but wonder what could have happened. Did something happen back home? She'd been stand offish ever since they returned... Determined, he made a call to Nora. If Ava was troubled because of something that the girls had discussed, she may know...

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While Erasmi drove away, Ava continued to stand there, a note clutched in her hand. It was the note that had scared her into doing what she did...

#### Chapter 658: Second Guess

"Eras, you're going to wear a hole in the floor with all your pacing," Demetri remarked, his voice tinged with exasperation as he watched his brother pace for what felt like the hundredth time.

"Forget about wearing a hole, he might end up sweating like a pig at his own wedding," Seb quipped, his tone hushed as he tried to soothe little Innocensa to sleep. His daughter's face scrunched up at the sound of his voice, so he could only whisper as he gently rocked her, his eyes fixed on Eras.

"Is something the matter, Eras? Are you having second thoughts about the marriage?" Ian's question sliced through the air, causing Eras to freeze mid-step. The brothers exchanged alarmed glances, tension crackling between them.

"It's too late for cold feet, Eras!" Gabe whisper-shouted, his eyes wide with urgency. "It's almost time for you to go out and take your place at the altar!"

"I need to talk to Ava," Eras announced, his voice resolute.

"You can talk later. You have to go to the altar now," Demetri insisted, stepping forward.

"Demetri can go in my place for now. Let me just go and talk to her first."

"Hey! Nora will kill me if I replace you at the altar!" Demetri protested, throwing his hands up in mock surrender. "I am a happily married man with no intention of marrying anyone else! Also, do you think the girls will let you talk? They are going to..."

But Eras was already beyond listening as he marched towards the door, with a curt order, just delay everything for a bit. I'll go and talk to her.

"Hey! What is your plan? How are you going to get in?"

Eras paused at the door and turned back, "Demon cannot play me but I have no qualms about playing him."

"Hey! Why would I want to talk to Ava? Eras..."

Before Demetri could raise his voice, Seb shushed him with a glare. His daughter had barely slept and if these guys continued to shout, then she would be crying through out the wedding, getting on everyone's nerves! His little girl had well developed lungs.. she could even give an opera singer a run for their money!

As the door closed behind him decisively, they could only exchange a glance. Something was the matter, and they did not know what... But whatever it was, it was better to sort things out before the marriage.

Ian groaned, running a hand through his hair. "Great. Just great. What do we do now?"

"We stall," Gabe said with a sigh, adjusting his tie. "I'll go tell the officiant there's a minor delay."

"I just hope he knows what he's doing." Seb muttered as he rocked Innocensa. At least the little girl had fallen asleep. With a smile, he quickly kissed her forehead and looked up. All was well as long as his little devil of a girl was sleeping.

Meanwhile, Eras made his way down the corridor, determination etched on his face. He knew where the bridal suite was, and he had no intention of letting anyone stop him. As he approached the door, he could hear the chatter and laughter of everyone inside.

He took a deep breath, straightened his jacket, and knocked. As expected, it was Nora who opened the door. Quickly, she smiled up at him, "Demetri..." but then paused and quickly glanced behind her, stepped out and closed the door behind her. "Erasmi. What are you doing here?"

"I want to talk to Ava." Erasmi stated.

Nora rolled her eyes, crossing her arms over her chest. "You have a terrible sense of timing, you know that? It's bad luck to see the bride before the wedding."

Eras sighed, his expression unyielding. "Nora, I need to talk to Ava. It's important."

Whatever it was that Nora saw in his eyes, seemed to give her an idea of his desperation. And she nodded, "Just keep it quick, okay? I'll ask everyone to come out..."

Erasmi shook his head, "Just bring Ava to the other room there. No need to tell anyone..."

Nora nodded, but looked at him searchingly. "Erasmi? Is everything alright? Ava has also not been herself and you look... terrible."

Erasmi sighed, "Something is wrong but I don't know what. It is why I am here."

Nora nodded, concern etched on her face. "Alright, give me a moment."

Erasmi watched as she slipped back into the bridal suite, her expression immediately shifting to one of cheerfulness. He could hear her voice, though not her words, as she spoke to the others and quickly marched towards the small room, ready to wait for his bride.

Meanwhile, inside the room, Nora whispered Eras' request to Isabella, letting her know to warn the other girls before she approached Ava, "Come on, miss beautiful bride. We have a little surprise for you."

"A surprise? Right now?"

Nora smile unwaveringly. "Yes, it'll only take a minute. Trust me."

As Ava nodded, Nora intertwined her arm with hers and walked her out of the bridal suite. As they walked towards the smaller room, Nora asked, "Ava, is everything okay between you and Erasmi?"

Ava smiled but tried to avoid the question instead asking, "Nora, can you tell me about your mother?"

Nora stilled and shot her a look. "My mother? What do you want to know of her?"

"Was she really bad?"

Nora smiled, " Bad? Well, when she was not trying to sell me off, or torturing me, or getting me eaten by ferocious dogs, or burn me, or generally have me killed, I guess she was okay. Why do you ask?"

Ava shook her head, her eyes searching Nora's. She knew that Nora had married Demetro to escape her mother but never knew all the details. Could the woman really have been that cruel?

However, as much cruel as she was, was it justified what Erasmi did... If he did it.. As they reached the door, she asked Nora hurriedly, " And did Erasmi really kill her and your sister?"

As Nora turned to look at Ava in shock over the question, the door opened. Ava's eyes widened as she looked at Erasmi who had heard the question...

Without another word, he pulled Ava into the room and turned to Nora, " I'll answer her questions. You go back to the guests."

Chapter 659: Erasmi's anger

Ava shivered as she entered the small, dimly lit room, casting a worried glance back at Nora, but she had already disappeared down the hallway.

Once inside, Erasmi closed the door behind her with a decisive click, the sound echoing ominously in the confined space.

"Where did the question come from, Ava?" Erasmi asked quietly, his voice laced with an unsettling calm.

"I..." Ava gulped, her gaze shifting away, unable to find an answer that wouldn't betray her fears.

"Is that why you've been avoiding me, Ava?" His tone was sharper now, the undercurrent of accusation clear.

Ava trembled as Erasmi stepped closer, his presence overwhelming. He paused, observing her reaction with a predatory stillness.

Stepping back slightly, he cocked his head and sent a glittering look her way. "Ava, do you remember the original agreement we made when we decided to get married?"

Ava nodded hesitantly. "That we would continue to be friends and co-parent Caius."

Erasmi's lips twisted into a bitter smile as he nodded. "Yes, we did say that. You were so certain we knew each other well. But there's something else, something you seem to have forgotten."

"What?" Ava's voice was barely a whisper, her anxiety mounting.

Erasmi straightened, covering the short distance between them in a single, smooth stride. Casually, he placed his hand around her waist, pulling her close. "I made it clear that we would be sharing a bed as well. I have no intention of spending my life like a monk."

Ava's eyes shot up to his, her body trembling as she met his cold, unyielding gaze. The memory of their first meeting surged back—he had seemed dangerous then, too. But she had overlooked the danger when he had shown her and Caius kindness, protecting them from so many threats.

She tried to push away from his grasp, but his hold remained firm. "Erasmi, let me go."

"I will. In a minute. First, let me make sure that you are going to be fulfilling your end of the promise."

He leaned down, bringing his face close to her and watched as she tried to cover her mouth in a panic as she murmured, "Let me go, Erasmi."

"Why should I?" His grip tightened slightly. "You think I am capable of murder, don't you? So, what is a little force?"

Ava opened her mouth to refute his claim but found herself unable to form the words. She didn't know for sure. Over the past year, Erasmi had been a steadfast protector, but she had also glimpsed the cold, ruthless side of him. When he'd threatened to take Caius from her. But later, he'd been reasonable about it and she'd forgotten. Later, she had heard whispers of his intimidation tactics, the way he had cowed the mayor and his wife to stop them from making her life a living hell..She'd dismissed them but now, after everything that had happened with Gabe, some things were too fresh on the mind.

Suddenly, his hand moved to the nape of her neck, forcing her to tilt her head up to meet his gaze. The cold glint in his eyes made her heart race. "So, what did you plan to do, Ava? Make me sign the prenup and then file for divorce, keep custody of Caius? As a mother, you would not want your son to be with a murderer. Is that why you kept insisting I sign the contract?"

Ava's breath caught in her throat as she stared into his eyes. She could feel the weight of his suspicion, the threat lurking behind his calm facade. "No, Erasmi, I..." But she knew it was the truth.. Not her plan for divorce but the rest of the things... she'd thought that if their relationship soured...

"Don't lie to me, Ava."

Her pulse pounded in her ears as she struggled to maintain her composure. The room seemed to close in around her, the walls pressing in as his grip tightened. "Please, Erasmi, this isn't what you think..."

He pulled back slightly, his eyes narrowing as he studied her. "Then what is it, Ava? Tell me, before I lose my patience."

"Did you really murder them?"

Erasmi stilled, "Yes. I did plan and execute their death. But I wouldn't call it murder. It was justice. So, what are you going to do now that you have your answer, Ava?"

Ava remained silent, her mind a whirlpool of fear and confusion. Erasmi's admission hung heavily in the air, the weight of his words pressing down on her.

Erasmi watched her intently, his expression unreadable. "I will go out and cancel the wedding," he said finally, stepping back. "We'll forget everything for now."

As he turned to leave, Ava's hand shot out, grabbing his. Her fingers trembled as she clutched his hand tightly. "No," she whispered, her voice barely audible. "We need to get married."

Erasmi paused, looking down at their joined hands before meeting her eyes. He sighed, "Ava, you don't understand—"

"I do," Ava interrupted. "I understand more than you think. We need to get married. For Caius."

Erasmi studied her for a moment longer before sighing again. "I will explain things to Caius. You don't have to sacrifice yourself," he said. "The only reason I saw this marriage thing working out was our friendship and trust. But if we don't have that... I don't want you living in fear."

Ava shook her head, "We can discuss everything. I... Just give me some time to process everything. I.. I do trust you Erasmi."

Erasmi gave a bitter smile then, carefully extracting his hand from hers. "Don't be in a hurry, Ava. Think properly. If you decide to come out, the original agreement will continue to stand. So, take your time and think. If you come out in the next ten minutes, then you are still agreeing to everything we originally decided on. If you do not agree, just walk out to the car and go home. I'll handle the guests..."

With that, Erasmi walked out of the room, leaving behind a confused Ava.

#### Chapter 660: The Wedding

"Is the wedding still going to happen?" Demetri questioned as his brother walked back into the room, clearly in a foul mood. And since Nora had already messaged him about Ava's question, he could guess all was not well.

Erasmi glared at Demetri, his eyes burning with anger. "Where are the others?" he snapped.

"They're talking to the wedding guests outside. Eras, don't be angry and do something foolish, okay?" Demetri warned, his tone gentle but firm as he looked at Erasmi worriedly. Is that why he'd looked worried?

Erasmi shot him a look of pure frustration. "What foolishness do you think I'm going to do? Or do you, like her, also think I'm a cold-blooded murderer who would harm anyone in anger?"

Demetri froze, then shook his head slowly. "Is that what she thinks? Eras, I'll go talk to her. Explain things."

Erasmi sighed, the fire in his eyes dimming slightly. "You will do no such thing!"

"But—"

"You will do no such thing, Demon Frost. I am warning you. I do not need you or anyone to intervene on my behalf. Over the past year, I have shared enough of myself with Ava to let her know if I am a bad person or not. And if she still believes that I am in the wrong, then you or I can do nothing to change her mind. Let's wait here a few minutes and then go out."

"Why are we waiting?" Demetri asked cautiously.

Erasmi slumped into a nearby chair and sighed, leaning back and closing his eyes for a moment. "Give her time to run away from the wedding. If we announce it's off now, the guests might see her before they leave. So, just ask the others to handle everything quietly. We don't need to add any more drama to this already chaotic day. I can't care enough."

Demetri nodded before carefully looking at Eras, "This is bothering you."

Eras scoffed, " Demon. You're a genius for figuring that out. Who would not be bothered about their wedding being called off?"

Demetri shook his head, "This isn't about only wedding being called off."

Erasmi rubbed his head and glared at Demetri, " I swear I look at you and want to murder you, Demetri!"

Demetri shrugged, " You've been wanting to do that since before we were born. Never worked, did it?"

Erasmi cast a glance at Demon and shook his head, "You will not try to analyse my feelings about this. I am well aware of them. I am your older brother, you know. Just go and let the others know before we have to announce it to the guests."

"Alright, I'll go inform them. Is there anything else you need?"

"Yes," Erasmi said, opening his eyes and sitting up straight. "Bring Caius here. I need to speak with him before we make any announcements."

Demetri was about to respond when a soft knock interrupted them. The door creaked open, and Nora peeped in, her expression curious. "The bride is waiting. If the groom would please take his place."

Erasmi straightened, his eyes wide with shock. "What? How is that possible? Did someone coerce Ava? Did you talk to her?"

Nora shook her head, sending a searching look at Erasmi. "No, Eras. As far as I know, Ava hasn't spoken to anyone since you left that room. She's waiting by her own choice."

Nora stepped fully into the room, closing the door behind her. "I promise you, Eras. No one has pressured her. I think you should go see her yourself."

Erasmi took a deep breath, trying to steady his thoughts. "Let me go talk to her..."

But Nora stopped him, "There isn't time. We already delayed the wedding. Any more and the people will start to talk and the children will know something is wrong. I don't know what has happened suddenly but you're going through the wedding. Later, if you still feel, you guys can annul the marriage quietly. Now is not the time to make such decisions."

Erasmi pushed a hand through his hair, looking anguished. Dam\* it! This was supposed to be a new start for them. And yet, the burdens of the past were already pushing down on them.

Straightening his jacket, he sent Demetri a look and murmured, "Get the annulment papers ready."

With a final nod to Nora, Erasmi walked out of the room and made his way to the altar. As he approached the front, Caius rushed up to him, a look of concern on his face.

"Dad, what took you so long? Why was there a delay?" Caius asked, his eyes wide with worry.

Erasmi forced a smile, trying to reassure his son. "I think I had cold feet. Caius gave him a horrified look to which Erasmi casually patted him on the shoulder, "Relax! Sometimes delay happens for no reason kiddo."

Caius rolled his eyes at that and shook his head, "You have a weird sense of humor, dad!"

Erasmi grinned, and before he could say more, Caius leaned in closer, whispering conspiratorially, "I'm so excited for you and Mom. You two are so amazing together. Dad, just make sure you give her a proper expression when you see her, okay? The one that lets her know that she looks beautiful and makes her feel special. Don't give her that unimpressed look you always have on your face."

Erasmi chuckled and shook his head, "Why does that sound like you are trying to insult me, Caius Frost. It seems I need to keep you away from your uncles."

Caius chuckled and shook his head, "Hey! Don't do that! I didn't say that it's bad! I like your unimpressed look! I am even practicing pulling it off on myself. Just don't give it to mom."

Just then the sound of light music played and Caius hurriedly moved back to take his place, observing his father carefully. And finally as his mom entered the church, Caius was satisfied when his father sent a totally loving look at his mother... He had to of course. His mother was the prettiest!