

Benefits 671

Chapter 671: Never Let Go

Ava dreaded the thought of returning home. The moment she stepped inside, she knew she'd be met with Erasmi and Cai's questioning looks. She was exhausted by the constant tension and uncertainty that had become her life. In a desperate bid for peace, she had tried contacting Hannah, hoping to buy her silence with more money. Elijah Frost had ensured her financial stability with generous monthly payments, and even after his death, Lucien had continued to provide for her.

Every month, Ava siphoned a small portion into her own account, while the rest went into Caius' trust fund. She had never dared touch Cai's money before, always prioritizing his future. But now, with Erasmi in the picture, Cai's future seemed secure. So she need not feel guilty about using the money. It was millions of dollars! And she would give her more even if Hannah ran out. But she needed Hannah to go away!

She tried desperately to call Hannah again but the woman seemed to have blocked her number.

Giving up, Ava walked inside, ready to face whatever awaited her. To her surprise, the living room was filled with laughter. Erasmi and Cai were sitting on the floor, engrossed in a game of Jenga. The tension and questioning looks she had anticipated were nowhere to be found.

Erasmi looked up and smiled warmly. "Ava, you're just in time! We were waiting for you to join us."

Before she could protest or question the sudden change in mood, Cai ran up to her, his eyes sparkling with excitement. "Come on, Mom! We need a third player. It's no fun without you."

Ava hesitated, her mind still preoccupied with all the troubles. But the eager look on Cai's face made it impossible for her to say no. She allowed herself to be pulled into the game, sitting down on the floor with them.

At first, she found it hard to concentrate. Her mind kept drifting back to Hannah and the looming threat she posed. But as the game progressed, Ava found herself getting drawn into the fun.

Cai was relentless, his small hands steady as he carefully removed a block and placed it on top of the precarious tower. "Your turn, Mom," he said, grinning widely.

Ava took a deep breath and focused, carefully sliding a block out and adding it to the top. The tower wobbled, and she held her breath, but it remained standing.

Erasmi clapped her hands in delight. "Now it's my turn. Let me show you both how champions play!" As he boasted, Erasmi carefully pulled out the block but just as he was about to place the block on top, the tower collapsed, sending blocks tumbling everywhere. Cai let out a gleeful shout, as both him and Ava burst into laughter with Cai teasing, "I think you meant to say how champions do not play, dad."

Erasmi, pretending to be deeply offended by Cai's teasing, raised an eyebrow and smirked. "Oh, you think you're funny, huh? Just for that, young man, I'm going to teach you a lesson you'll never forget."

Cai's eyes widened in horror as Erasmi lunged at him, fingers wiggling menacingly. "No, Dad! No!" Cai squealed, darting behind Ava for protection.

Ava laughed, enjoying the playful banter, even as Cai tried his best to use her as a shield. "I don't know, Eras. I think you might have brought this on yourself. Who told you to boast about being a champion."

Cai peeked out from behind Ava, his giggles barely contained as he said, "See dad! Mom is on my side..'" Erasmi gave a wolfish grin at that and slowly advanced, as he threatened, "You think that would be helpful?"

Caius widened his eyes and clutched at her clothing, "Mom, help! He's going to tickle me to death!"

Erasmi's his grin widened. "Oh, I'm not stopping at you, Cai. If your mom keeps teasing me, she's next!"

Ava's laughter rang out as she held up her hands in surrender, even before Eras reached her. "Alright, alright! I surrender! Just spare me from the tickling!"

Erasmi stopped in his tracks, raising an eyebrow playfully. "Spare you? Well, I don't think so... but I can spare.. Cai, if he..."

As expected, his son quickly caught on and before Ava knew it, she was being tickled from both sides as she fell backward laughing trying to evade the ticklish fingers of father and son.

Finally, breathless from being tickled, Ava called for a time out and swore, "Okay okay! I give up! I won't tease you ever again."

"Alright, you're off the hook," Erasmi said, his voice mock serious. Then he turned to Cai, who was sitting beside Ava having lowered his guard... "But you, young man, are still in trouble!"

Cai squealed again and tried to dart away, but was quickly caught and as he called for help, Ava grinned, "Ha! This is what happens when you tease your mom and side with your dad!"

Finally, Caius was scooped up and tickled mercilessly his high pitched giggles filling the room. Cai's laughter was infectious, and Ava found herself laughing along with them, feeling a sense of warmth and love that chased away her earlier worries.

"Okay, okay! I give up!" Cai managed to gasp between giggles. "I won't tease you again!"

Erasmi finally relented, setting Cai down and ruffling his hair. "That's more like it."

As they all collapsed onto the floor, breathless and happy, Ava looked at Erasmi and Cai, feeling her heart swelling with gratitude for them being in her life. They were like the sunshine in her dark and gloomy sky.

As they lay there, catching their breath, Erasmi reached out and took Ava's hand. She looked down at their co joined hands and then at him as he lay there, looking at her with a smile on his face. She smiled back at him, feeling her heart flutter at the look as she realized that this man was her husband. He was the prince to her otherwise dreary fairytale...she curled her fingers around his hand and sighed. She wished she never had to let go of him.

Chapter 672: Surprise

Erasmi watched as Ava washed the dishes, a sigh escaping his lips. Finally, he had seen the worried look on her face disappear, even if it was only for a little while. Gabe's suggestion had been spot on. Instead of asking Ava directly or hinting at her to open up, it was much better to create an environment where she could see, feel, and believe that everything was well. Only then would she relax enough to let down her guard.

Since the evening had been a roaring success, it was time to work on making the night equally memorable. Silently, he walked over to her and slipped his arms around her, nuzzling her hair. She jumped at first, something he'd expected, and then relaxed against him, whispering his name softly, "Erasmi."

He smiled and gently kissed her neck, savoring the way she said his name. Instead of letting her go, he hugged her closer, wanting to eliminate any distance between them. The warmth of her body against his was a comforting reminder of their bond.

"Erasmi... let go. Caius will..."

"He's asleep," Erasmi reassured her, his voice low and soothing. "He won't come down."

His hands slowly moved upward, caressing her belly. He felt her tense momentarily before letting out a soft sigh, "Erasmi... I need to finish this."

Ignoring her protest, he moved his arm around her and turned off the tap, the water stopping abruptly. "No. Leave it. Finish it later."

Ava turned slightly to look at him, a mix of frustration and affection in her eyes. "But the dishes..."

"They can wait," Erasmi said firmly, his eyes locked on hers. "We can't."

As he said this, he turned her around and slid his hands onto her bu**. With both hands there, he gently lifted her, so that her legs wrapped around his waist as he carried her to the couch.

Ava felt her heart race as he placed her on the couch, leaning over her. "Erasmi... we can go to the bedroom."

"No, we can't," he murmured with a mischievous glint in his eyes. With that, Erasmi leaned in close, kissing her softly on the lips before pulling back just as her eyes fluttered closed. She opened her eyes again, wondering why he had stopped, then blinked in confusion as he moved.

"What are you doing?" she asked, bewildered, as she watched Erasmi sit on the couch and take her feet onto his lap.

"Giving you a break," he replied with a gentle smile.

Ava's confusion melted into a mix of anticipation and curiosity as she watched Erasmi sit on the couch and take her feet into his lap. His touch was firm yet tender, sending a jolt of electricity through her. She leaned back into the cushions, her eyes never leaving his as he began to massage her feet. She tried to pull back, but he caught her ankle in a tight hold, "Erasmi.. there is no need for this..."

But he gave her no time, simply using everything to his advantage. Her breath hitched, her entire body responding to the intimacy of his touch. His fingers worked their way over her calves to her toes, each one receiving careful attention. She let out a soft moan, unable to suppress the pleasure pain that radiated from his ministrations.

His hands moved up to her calves, kneading the muscles with expert precision and Ava felt her pulse quicken, her skin tingling wherever he touched. The room seemed to shrink, the air thick with unspoken desire. She could feel the heat between them, an invisible thread pulling them closer.

"You're driving me crazy," she confessed, her voice trembling. "I thought..."

He smiled, a mischievous glint in his eyes. "You thought what? That I'd carry you to the bedroom and have my way with you?"

Ava's cheeks flushed, a mix of embarrassment and excitement flooding her. "Something like that."

Erasmi leaned in, his lips brushing against her ankle, sending shivers up her spine. "Patience, baby. I want do that too and very soon I will. But first, I want you to relax...."

His hands continued their journey up her legs as he massaged her thighs, his fingers digging into the soft flesh, making her gasp and crave for more.

"Erasmi," she murmured, her voice barely audible. "I need you."

He paused, his eyes locking onto hers, the intensity of his gaze making her heart race. "And you have me," he said, his voice deep and filled with emotion. "Always."

With a slow, deliberate movement, he shifted closer, his hands trailing up her body, leaving a path of fire in their wake. He cupped her face, as he shifted to kneel between her legs, his thumb brushing over her lower lip, making her tremble.

"I want to take my time with you so you know how much I cherish you," he whispered, his breath warm against her skin.

"Erasmi," she breathed, her voice pleading. "Please..."

He smiled, his lips finding hers in a kiss that was both gentle and demanding and once again lifted her up, carrying her towards the bedroom... to have his wicked way with her.

This time, all thoughts of taking things slow disappeared from his head as he kissed her deeply, wanting her surrender. His mouth devoured hers, as he pressed her into the bed. He felt her tears as he leaned down to kiss her shoulder and looked up in alarm but before he could ask her, she pressed her lips to his...

As the night stretched on, time seemed to blur and the hours melted away until they lay spent in each other's arms. Erasmi could feel himself dozing off, his mind drifting in and out of a contented sleep, when he heard Ava's soft voice break through the quiet.

"Erasmi," she whispered, her tone tinged with vulnerability and uncertainty. "Will you still be with me after you know about my past?"

The question pulled him back from the edge of sleep and it took all his efforts to not open his eyes... Was that what was eating at her? Something in her past?

Chapter 673: Hello

"Erasmi, wait a minute! How are you doing?"

Erasmi paused and turned around at the sound of someone calling his name and saw Hannah walking towards him with a bright smile. "I'm doing well, thank you. How about you?"

Hannah's smile brightened even further as she answered. "I'm doing well too. I really like this place. The people here are so warm and welcoming."

Erasmi nodded. "That's wonderful to hear. It's always nice when you feel at home in a new place. Did you have something you wanted to tell me?"

Hannah's smile faltered slightly, and she quickly apologized, "Oh, no, nothing serious. I just thought I'd update you on Caius' progress. He's been getting along really well with the other child now. It turns out there was just a misunderstanding between the boys."

Erasmi nodded, "That's great news. I'm glad they sorted it out. Children can be unpredictable sometimes."

Hannah laughed softly and nodded, "They sure can be. But it's all part of the learning process, I suppose."

There was a brief moment of comfortable silence and Erasmi was about to bid her goodbye when Hannah spoke again, a hint of hesitation in her voice. "You know, I was just on my way to grab a coffee. Would you care to join me?"

Erasmi frowned at the sudden invitation and was about to refuse when she quickly continued, "If you're busy, it's okay. I'm sorry for putting you in an awkward position out of the blue. Actually, I'm feeling a bit lonely and my boyfriend has been ignoring me since I moved here. I don't know any other man. So, I thought maybe I could pick your brain and ask you for help on how to get him to talk to me! He was so supportive when I decided to move here! He was even planning to come here this weekend. But we had a fight yesterday and now he won't answer my calls..."

Before Erasmi could say more, she continued, "Oh my Gosh! I am so sorry! First I ask you for coffee and then rant about my personal problems! That is TMI possibly! I am so sorry. Just ignore me and treat it as if I said nothing."

As Hannah waved her hands for him to leave, a hint of sorrow flashed in her eyes and Erasmi sighed. Accompanying someone for coffee was not a big deal..." Its okay, Hannah. Come on, I'll take you to a place where you don't have to worry about being alone for coffee."

Erasmi turned around, expecting her to follow him and so he failed to see Hannah's triumphant expression. Erasmi Frost was a typical man, unable to stop himself from helping a weak woman. Perfect. Today, she'd won a date with him thanks to her imaginary boyfriend. Soon, she would have him under her thumb. And then she would show Ava... who was the better woman.

She frowned, however, when instead of getting into his car, he continued to walk down the road. Hurriedly, she caught up with him and asked, "Where are we going? The coffee place is on the other side?"

Erasmi shook his head, "I know a place that has better coffee."

"We can take your car then... Or mine...Its parked right there."

Erasmi shook his head, "No need. It is only a couple of blocks away. In case you're too tired to walk, you can go in the car."

Hannah shook her head, keeping pace with Erasmi, "No no. I like to walk so its okay."

Hannah glanced at Erasmi and smiled. Of course she would be happy to go with him. It meant spending more time with him. As they walked, she tried to get closer to him, brushing her hand against his as if by mistake. But Erasmi continued to keep a polite distance somehow effortlessly blocking her attempts to get closer to him, seeming not aware of her even.

Soon, they reached an older, rustic café, its wooden sign swinging slightly in the breeze. Hannah looked up and frowned, not liking the simple, appearance of the place. She had been expecting something more modern and chicer. However, Erasmi failed to notice her reaction and walked inside with a smile.

For a rich man, this man had no taste in aesthetics. But, she quickly adjusted her expression, masking her distaste as she followed him in as she saw him greeting an old waitress. She didn't like the older woman and from the way the older woman looked at her suspiciously, the woman didn't like her either.

And when the woman asked Erasmi about her identity, Hannah stiffened. A lowly waitress actually had the gall to question him!

"Big mama, this is Hannah, she is Cai's new teacher. Hannah, this is big mama. She was the first person I met when I came to this little town. With her around here, you will never have to fear drinking coffee alone. And she has the answers to every problem in the world."

The older woman gave a hearty laugh at that and quickly patted Erasmi on the cheek, "You are a flatterer, Erasmi Frost! Nice to meet you, Hannah. Any friend of our Cai is welcome here. Come and have a seat. Your first order is on the house."

Hannah masked her irritation as she and Erasmi settled down at a small table by the window. The quaint café buzzed with the hum of quiet conversations and the rich aroma of freshly brewed coffee. She picked up the menu, scanning it quickly.

"I'll have a tiramisu and a cappuccino," Hannah said, handing the menu back to Big Mama, who nodded warmly.

"Erasmi, will you have your usual?" Big Mama asked, turning to him with a smile.

Erasmi shook his head. "Not today, Big Mama. I actually have somewhere to be. I'll leave Hannah in your capable hands."

Hannah's eyes widened in surprise. "Wait, you're leaving?" she asked, unable to hide the shock in her voice.

Erasmi stood up and gave her an apologetic smile. "Yes, unfortunately, I have a meeting to attend. But don't worry, Big Mama will take good care of you."

Before Hannah could protest, Erasmi had already turned to Big Mama. "Thank you for looking after her. I'll see you later."

Chapter 674: No Clue

"So, did you find out?" Erasmi asked as he adjusted the video equipment for his next upload.

"Not yet. When Grandpa asked me to send the money, he insisted I shouldn't investigate, so I didn't. Then, when we connected the dots and realized Ava was Cai's mom, it seemed unnecessary to dig further. I still don't understand why you're investigating her now," Lucien continued as Erasmi paused to look up.

"Because she's hiding something from me, and it's driving me crazy. The only thing I've been able to uncover so far is that whatever's bothering her stems from her past. I've already checked in with her ex-husband. He hasn't even tried to contact her, so it must be something else."

"Yeah, I reached the same conclusion. Anyway, because of you, I've hired investigators and risked my neck. If Evana or the others find out what I've done, I'll throw you under the bus," Lucy warned, his tone half-joking. "Here's the interesting part: all records of her existence have been erased before her marriage to that old man. And they've been done so by our old man- Elijah Frost."

"Erased?" Erasmi asked incredulously. "How is that even possible?"

"I don't know, but it's like she didn't exist before then. No birth records, no school records, nothing. It's like she appeared out of thin air the moment she married him. So now the only people who can shed light on her past is herself. Or I've got a few contacts who specialize in this sort of thing. It won't be easy, but it's not impossible. We just need to be careful. If Ava finds out we're investigating her, it could ruin everything."

Erasmi sighed. So either he dug deep into her past, opening her to hurt or he continuously try to get her to confess. the answer to that dilemma was obviously a no brainer. He would have to convince her to tell him.

"Drop it for now. And what about the other thing. Did you find out, who put the note in her purse?"

Lucien nodded" Yeah. But you don't have to worry about it. The person who did it is dead. It seems it was Elena's person who placed the note in Ava's bag so that she would wreak havoc. But before she could, Elena passed away."

Erasmi sighed, " Well, at least that's one less problem to worry about. I guess that is the only thing we can thank Savoy for. Getting rid of her."

Lucien chuckled at that and then shook his head, " Okay, then. I am going to drop the investigation for now. And you resolve your matters asap. You know Gabe is already planning something and if you are not clear by then, the girls will definitely smell something fishy."

Ava sighed as she walked back home after another unsuccessful day. She didn't know why she was facing trouble from all sides. For one, she couldn;t find a job. And then to add to that, Hannah was now ignoring her. After reaching out to her in that cafe, she'd taken to igoring all her messages and calls.

As she reached the front door, her phone buzzed. She looked down to see a message from Hannah and shuddered. Think of the devil!

I'll be visiting your home tomorrow. Introduce me to your family..

Panic surged through Ava. She quickly dialed Hannah's number, but it went straight to voicemail. She sent a flurry of texts, hoping for a quick response, but there was nothing. The prospect of Hannah visiting their home with Erasmi present was too risky. She didn't want to introduce them ever! No, she needed to find a way to either make Hanna not come home or if she did thne Erasmi shouldn't be at home.

But that was almost impossible. After all, Erasmi usually worked from his home office and would leave the house only to pick or drop Cai or for shopping. As Ava entered the house, still racking her brain for a solution, she heard Cai's voice from the living room.

"Mom, our school is going on a field trip tomorrow. Can you volunteer to come with us?",Cai asked excitedly, waving a permission slip.

Her mind raced. This was the perfect opportunity. She could send Erasmi to volunteer. This would ensure that he was out of the house throughout the day... And she needn't worry about the time Hannah would visit. Forcing a smile, she nodded.

"Of course, Cai, but I think it would be even more fun if Erasmi went with you. Wouldn't you like that?" she suggested, trying to sound enthusiastic.

Cai looked at her then with a frown and she tried to look not guilty. This was the first time she'd refused to go on a field trip. In the past, she would always make a point to volunteer.

"Cai. I have a job interview tomorrow. I don't want to miss it."

"But... okay." Cai wanted to protest but looking at his mother's tired face, he remembered dad's warning about not upsetting her and gave her a smile, "Okay, mom. I'll ask Dad! He does make everything fun so maybe this will be there too."

Relieved that Cai was on board, Ava quickly signed the permission slip and hugged Caius, "Thank you baby! Next trip, your dad will have to fight me to go, okay? So don't have too much fun with him or mom will be jealous."

Caius giggled at that and teased his mom, "Then I will have more fun with him. That way you cannot refuse next time!"

"Okay okay! You want to make me jealous hmm? Wait!"

"No mom! We really need to ban tickling in this house!"

Ava laughed at Cai's complaint before ruffling his hair, "Okay okay. Go and check in with your dad if he will go with you. Let him think it is your idea."

Cai grinned, darting off to find Erasmi. Ava took a deep breath, feeling a mix of relief and anxiety. She knew she had bought herself some time but needed to be on guard.

Chapter 675: Attraction

"Settle down, everyone!" Hannah called out, her voice barely audible above the din. "If you don't quiet down, I'll have to turn this bus around and take you all back to school!" she threatened, a playful twinkle

in her eye as she looked at the excited children in the bus. The children giggled but began to quiet down, eager for their field trip and not wanting to return to the school just yet.

As they started to quiet down, Hannah brought her hands to her lips, as if intending to use them as a microphone as she called out, "Come on, class! Let out a loud cheer before we begin!"

While she screamed and hyped the kids, the bus started moving with a lurch, causing Hannah to lose her balance. She stumbled and fell, landing in a man's lap. She froze for a moment, feeling his hands reach out to steady her by the elbows. She turned her head then and their eyes met briefly as she whispered his name, "Erasmi..."

Realising that she'd fallen on top of him, she blushed and quickly scrambled to get off him, holding his shoulders for a better balance as she moved to sit beside him, "I am so sorry, Erasmi. I lost my balance and..."

Erasmi shook his head and moved away making more space for her as he shifted closer to the side of the bus. "It's alright. No one's hurt so makes no difference."

"Then, thank you for catching me." Erasmi gave a curt nod then, turning his head to look out of the window.

As the bus sped towards the destination, Hannah spoke to Erasmi, "And I think I need to thank you for introducing me to Big Mama. She's such a wonderful person. I've been there so many times after that. She won't let me feel like I am a stranger."

Erasmi smiled at that. "Yes. She is like that. Good for you."

"It was. She even helped guide me about my mixed feeling about breaking up with my boyfriend. It makes me sad not to be able to talk to him and be with him, but she is right, it is better to break things off instead of hiding from each other."

A sudden jolt from the bus hit a bump on the road, causing Hannah to lean into Erasmi's shoulder. She quickly straightened up, murmuring another apology.

"Are you always this clumsy?" Erasmi teased lightly, a small smile playing on his lips as he looked at her with interest.

"Only around you, it seems," Hannah replied, her cheeks flushing a deeper shade of red. "I am sorry again."

The bus finally reached their destination, and as the children began to disembark, Hannah turned to Erasmi. "Can you help me with the bags?"

"Of course," he replied, getting up and inadvertently brushing against her arm. Hannah felt a jolt at the contact and looked up to see him turn away. She turned away dismissed the touch as accidental.

As they worked together to help unload the small bags of the children, their hands touched while handing it to each other. This time, as his fingers grazed hers and his eyes lingered on her for a beat too long, Erasmi held the bag out and said, "Here you go."

For a moment, she was confused and blushed but as she turned away, she knew it. Erasmi Frost was interested in her and was now taking the initiative to approach her. She didn't have to initiate the little brushes...

Through out the day as Hannah and the other teachers and volunteers helped the children with studying samples and exploring the gardens, Hannah could feel Erasni's gaze on her.

On the other hand, as she checked her phone, she felt even more energized as she saw the numerous missed calls and messages from Ava. Her plan had worked beautifully. First she'd messaged about her visiting her house today so that woman had not come for the field trip and sent Erasmi. And Erasmi was now showing his interest in her. Everything was going perfectly.

Soon, she would reveal herself to Ava and then she would reveal her truth before Erasmi. By then, her image as a good girl would have been established in front of his eyes...But first, she needed to make sure he knew that she was not going to come between him and his wife...

As the trip came to an end, the children were all exhausted and already half asleep on the way back. This time, she sat on the inside of the seat while Erasmi on the outside. As she felt the heat of his hard thigh

against hers, she felt a bit envious. Ava really did land on her feet. Even if Erasmi Frost had not been full of money, he was hot and attractive.

She turned her head to glance at him, only to find him already looking at her with an unreadable expression. Her cheeks flushed a deeper shade of red.

Erasmi's lips curled into a teasing smile. "You're looking awfully red, Hannah. Did I miss something exciting?"

Hannah wanted to pounce him then but she knew that would be against her persona. So she looked away, as if feeling shy and shook her head.

She stammered, "Oh, um, I just—well, it's a bit warm in here, I guess."

Erasmi chuckled softly, his gaze lingering on her with a mixture of amusement and something else she couldn't quite decipher as he leaned in close to her, "Sure, let's go with that. You look extremely sexy like this Hannah."

She cast him another look and felt herself tempted to let go of her persona. Dam* it! She needed to touch this man and feel him all over. As they dropped off the children at their houses, she stood up to bid them goodbye, but instead of letting her pass, Erasmi did not move, forcing her to brush against him as she moved out of the seat...

Hannah smiled in triumph. Today had been a roaring success. To keep him hooked, she turned towards him, bending slightly, offering him a view as she slid past him onto the aisle. She watched as his gaze fell there and looked up at her...the heat in his eyes searing.

Chapter 676: Tenterhooks

Ava had been on tenterhooks all day waiting for Hannah to arrive. She'd even kept the cash ready, to entice her. Seeing the cash, Hannah would definitely not be able to resist it and let it go. She knew that woman this much! She was as greedy as a person could be.

But as the hours ticked by and the sun began to set, Ava felt a mix of disappointment and relief. Part of her was glad that Hannah hadn't shown up—perhaps it meant that she wouldn't have to deal with her after all. Maybe Hannah had decided to spare her? Or found some better target? But another part of her

was worried. What if Hannah was just biding her time, waiting for the perfect moment to strike? What if this was just the calm before the storm?

She tried to busy herself with small tasks, tidying up the already spotless living room, rearranging the flowers in the vase, but nothing could distract her from the nagging worry that gnawed at her. Every sound made her jump and she was on the edge.

Just as she was beginning to relax, the doorbell rang. Her heart skipped a beat, her mind racing. Damn it! It was almost time for Cai and Erasmi to return. But when she opened the door, it wasn't Hannah standing there—it was Cai, looking flustered.

"Cai? What happened?" She asked in concern.

"Mom, I need an ice pack. My teacher sprained her ankle."

Ava stepped aside as Caius quickly raced into the house to get the ice pack. Shaking her head as she watched him almost stub his own toe in his hurry to get the pack, Ava looked at the bus curiously. Maybe she should go and meet this new teacher. After all, Cai had been singing her praises for a while now.

However, she'd only taken a few steps when she felt her blood run cold...From around the bus, Erasmi walked out, carrying someone in his arms.

For a moment, her mind couldn't process what she was seeing. It was as if time had slowed down, and everything around her was moving in slow motion.

And then it hit her. It was disconcerting enough that Erasmi was carrying a woman like that. But what made her freeze in horror was that the woman in his arms was Hannah.

Ava's heart plummeted, wave after wave of shock washing over her. She felt the blood drain from her face and her knees threatened to buckle under her. How was this possible? How could this be happening? Hannah, the woman she had been dreading to see all day, was now here—being carried into her home—by her own husband.

Unable to move or speak, she could only watch as Erasmi walked past her, carrying Hannah into the house. She pinched herself hoping against hope that she was in the middle of a nightmare. But as her eyes met Hannah's gloating stare, she knew it wasn't. This was her worst nightmare come true.

Ava finally forced herself to move, her legs feeling like lead as she followed them inside. Her mind was a whirl of emotions—fear, confusion, disbelief. How had this happened? What was Hannah doing here, and why was Erasmi carrying her as if she was precious?

As she stepped into the living room, the scene before her only deepened her shock and horror. Cai was hovering over Hannah, concern etched on his young face, while Erasmi knelt in front of her, gently applying the ice pack to her swollen ankle.

And then she realized what it was that Cai had told her. His teacher had been hurt. Hannah was his class teacher? So, she'd already laid out a trap for her son and ensnared him. She remembered then, Erasmi had met her too. And he'd even praised the teacher for being level headed and a positive influence on Cai.

No one seemed to notice her standing there, rooted to the spot. She felt like an outsider, watching a scene unfold that she had no control over.

Suddenly, Hannah broke the silence, her voice smooth and almost sweet as she called out weakly, "Mrs Frost. I am so sorry for coming into your home like this. I'm feeling a bit faint. Could you please bring me some water?"

For the first time, Ava felt helpless anger surge through her! The audacity of this woman. How could she barge into her home and have the gall to order her around as if she belonged here. For the first time, since Hannah had returned, Ava considered throwing caution to the wind and this woman out of her house. The fear that she in her heart was replaced by the urge to hurt her.

But in the next moment, she calmed herself. She needed to stay calm, to keep her composure for Cai's sake. If she let Hannah provoke her now, it would only give the woman more power.

With a forced smile, Ava nodded, her voice steady though her hands trembled slightly. "Of course, I'll get you some water." The words tasted bitter on her tongue, but she knew she had to play along—for now.

Returning to the living room, Ava handed the glass to Hannah, her expression neutral. "Here you go," she said, her voice devoid of the warmth she would usually offer a guest.

Seeing Erasmi and Cai like that had suddenly given her a jolt of clarity that she had not had in a while. She did not know why she'd been so foolish wanting to hide everything. But now she knew she had to fight back. Instead of making Hannah take the money and disappear, she had to get rid of the threat that Hannah brought with her.

Hannah took the glass with a gracious smile, though the smugness in her eyes remained. She took a sip and thanked her. But even that felt like a taunt to Ava. "Thank you. I'm so glad you're here to help. It's been such a long day. If it had not been for Erasmi, I don't know what I would have done."

Chapter 677: A Challenge

"Thank you, Mrs. Frost, for offering to drive me home." Hannah's voice carried a practiced graciousness that made Ava inwardly snort. The charade was almost laughable.

"Cut the act, Hannah," Ava snapped, her tone sharp as she kept her eyes on the road. "It's just us in this car. Now, tell me—what's your game?"

Hannah blinked innocently. "Game? I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't play dumb with me. Why did you approach Erasmi and Cai? You'd already laid out your terms in front of me? So, why did you not leave them alone?"

Hannah shrugged, feigning nonchalance. "I didn't approach them. It was just a coincidence. Cai happens to be in my class, and he was having some trouble with a boy and I helped him out. It was only later that I discovered that he was your adoptive son."

"You really want me to believe that you did not do your research? You take me for a fool, Hannah?"

Hannah laughed then. "You never were a fool, Ava. That was the problem. You were the best we had! But what did you do? You bailed out on us."

"What do you want Hannah? I already agreed to introduce you to the rich people in Erasmi's circle. But it is going to take time! I've mentioned that I would invite you to the gathering next month!"

Hannah shrugged, "I've changed my mind, Ava. I've decided that it would be too much work to go and seduce some old man. And too unsure. What if he keeps me as a mistress only? And a month is really far. Especially when we don't even know what might happen tomorrow."

"So what do you want from me, Hannah? If it money, I can still give you."

"No, Ava. See this is your problem. Despite everything you are so naive."

"I still want the money and the rich husband. I've just decided that instead of looking for a new one, I want yours."

Ava's grip tightened on the steering wheel, her knuckles turning white as Hannah's words sank in. "What did you say?"

But the woman was not deterred, "I said I've decided that I want yours. I want to marry Erasmi Frost."

Ava braked hard, causing Hannah to almost fall face first into the dashboard, as she turned to look at Hannah, "You can't be serious. You think you can just waltz in and take my life? My husband? My son?"

Hannah smirked, her eyes gleaming with a cold, calculated confidence. "Why not? You know as well as I do that men can be easily swayed. And I'm more than capable of doing it."

Her shock quickly turned to anger blazing hotter now than what it been an hour ago, when she'd first seen Hannah being carried into her home. Her voice shaking with the effort to keep her emotions in check, Ava spoke through clenched teeth, "Listen to me, Hannah. Take the money I offered you and disappear. This is your last chance. Don't make the mistake of underestimating me."

Hannah's laugh was low and mocking, filling the car with an unsettling chill. "Oh, Ava, you're still so naive. Do you really think you can buy me off so easily? Why would I settle for a golden egg when I can

have the entire goose? I'll tell you what, when I'm living in your house, enjoying your husband's wealth, maybe I'll toss you a few scraps before I send you packing."

"You're delusional if you think I'll let that happen. You might be good, Hannah, but you've got no idea who you're dealing with. You really think you can take Erasmi from me? Go ahead, try to take what's mine. I'll be ready. Erasmi belongs to me and only me."

Instead of being scared of the challenge, she heard Hannah laugh. "Oh my God! You are even in love with Erasmi! I had no idea you could do that. Oh, Ava, I was only thinking of taking Erasmi for his looks, but now that I can hear the love in your voice for him, I think snatching him would be even sweeter. I always did like the things you loved. You remember that, don't you?"

Ava gritted her teeth and ordered, "Get out of my car, Hannah."

Hannah laughed and shook her head, "Okay okay! Don't be such a stuck up bitch! So, let's set up this challenge today. Next month, Erasmi Frost will be mine and you will be gone... What do you think?"

Ava glared at Hannah but nodded, accepting the challenge, "Try your best Hannah."

As Ava turned around the car, however, her anger and confidence slowly started to drain, letting her fear and uncertainty take her place. This confrontation had shaken her to the core.

Because Hannah had been correct. She had fallen for Erasmi Frost. And watching him carry Hannah and taking care of her, had made the jealous inside her threaten to burn her inside out. She'd realized she did not have a problem with just Hannah. If it had been any other woman who Erasmi had been taking care of, she would have been just as angry.

She floored the pedal and shook her head. But now, she had a problem. For the truth was Erasmi did not love her. And when they'd decided to marry, they had agreed on one thing- that if ever they fell in love with someone else, they would find a way to separate peacefully.

She wondered then. What if Hannah succeeded? What if Erasmi did fall for her? The very idea gnawed at her, threatening to unravel the careful life she had built. She couldn't let it happen. She wouldn't. But

as much as she wanted to fight, the lingering doubt continued to harass her. What if, in the end, she lost everything?

With a shake of her head, she promised herself then. She would not let go so easily. She had the upper hand in this challenge. She was after all Erasmi's lover, best friend and his wife. Now, all she had to do was make him love her back, before Hannah did.

Chapter 678: A Plan

Erasmi and Caius were already in bed when Ava returned from dropping off Hannah. With a sigh, Ava closed her eyes and breathed deeply. She didn't know why, but finally, now that she'd decided to fight back, she felt different.

The first thing she did, after entering was to clean the couch and the area around that. She didn't know why but somehow it felt cathartic to clean what ever that bit*h had touched.

Next, she went into Cai's room and smiled. Her little boy was still the same even though he was growing up and was almost as tall as her. He would sleep with the blanket on him but then somehow how, the blanket would end up under him while he shivered with cold. Carefully, she pulled the blanket out from under him and tucked it around him. Quickly he burrowed into the blanket as if he'd been cold for a while, but the next moment, his foot shot out from under the blanket. She grinned and kissed his forehead before carefully adjusting the temperature and then walking out of the room.

At the door to her own room, she paused, feeling butterflies in her stomach. Tonight was the first time, she was going to make a move on Erasmi. Always, she'd been a willing participant but she'd never had the courage to actively seek him out. She knew the reason of course. It was her own complex feelings about his past and hers.

She inhaled slowly and walked into the room, determined. She had to make sure that Erasmi would be with her, see her as someone who wanted him and did not just tolerate his presence in her life. She was sure that if he was convinced that she wanted him and desired him, he would not look at another woman. Love or not, Erasmi was a person who was loyal to the core.

Inside the room, the lights were dim but he'd left a night light on for her. It was what he did when she was late to come to the room. She smiled softly as she walked towards him. His breathing telling her that he was already asleep.

For a moment, she just stood there, absorbing the quiet intimacy of the moment, the way his chest rose and fell with each breath, the peacefulness that seemed to surround him. This was the man she had fallen in love with, without even realizing her own feelings. She'd fallen for his quiet strength and his determination in protecting her.

He'd stood by her side, patiently, as the doctors had poked and prodded at her. All because she was the mother of his son. She knew he could have taken Cai away with a click of his fingers. Nothing could have stopped him, even if she'd fought tooth and nail. But instead of taking what he wanted, Erasmi had given. He'd given his understanding, trust and everything she could have asked her.

As she carefully, slid into bed, she could not help but turn on her side. Rising on her elbow, she placed her head on her palm and continued to watch him. He was a deep sleeper. She sighed. It seemed her plan to seduce him would have to wait for tomorrow. She lay her head back on the pillow and closed her eyes. But in the next moment, she knew she would not be able to sleep. Unless...

Closing her eyes, she slowly inched towards the man who was still asleep on the bed, until she was hugging his arm her head on his bicep. Carefully, she opened her eyes a bit and peaked, reassured that he was asleep.

The warmth of his skin and the steady rhythm of his breathing made her feel safe, grounding her in the moment. Slowly, almost absentmindedly, she began to trace a word on his arm with her fingertip.

"Mine," she whispered, her finger outlining each letter with a featherlight touch. The word was a declaration, a quiet affirmation of what she was feeling. Happy at having 'branded' him with her 'doodling', Ava closed her eyes. Tomorrow, she would seduce him and have her way! For sure.

As she traced the word again and again on his arm, unawaredly this time, she felt herself growing drowsy, the tension in her body slowly melting away. Her breathing evened out, and soon, she drifted into sleep, her hand still resting on his arm.

But Erasmi wasn't asleep. He had been awake the entire time, his eyes closed as he felt her approach. His own feelings after today had been a mess and he'd found himself unable and unwilling to face Ava. But as he felt her shift close to him, resting her head on his arm, his heart moved with some undefined emotion.

ently, he slipped his arm out of her grasp, trying not to wake her. Then, with deliberate slowness, he turned onto his side, facing her.

For a moment, he just watched her, reminding herself that this was the mother of his child. The only person he was to be with until Cai grew up. There was no way, he could let anyone or anything interfere with this. Especially not some fickle attrac... He shook his head, hardening his resolve.

Determinedly, he reached out and pulled her close, wrapping his arms around her as he held her close to him. She stirred slightly in her sleep, instinctively snuggling closer to him, her body molding to his and he closed his eyes, pushing away a few thoughts far away from his head. He breathed deeply, letting her scene envelope him and sighed.

With her in his arms, he finally allowed himself to relax, his own breathing slowing as he drifted off to sleep, reassured that he would not give in... Erasmi finally let sleep claim him, clinging to the warmth of the woman in his arms as if she were his anchor in the storm raging inside him unaware that the real test was yet to come...

Chapter 679: Surprised

Erasmi woke up slowly, blinking as the morning light filtered through the curtains. He felt the warmth of Ava beside him before he saw her, but when he looked down, he was surprised to find her already awake, her eyes fixed on him.

"What would you like for breakfast today?" he mumbled, his voice thick with sleep, not yet fully awake and yet already thinking on the next chore of the day.

Ava smiled, and keeping in mind her new plan, she looked up at him and smiled, "You."

He blinked then, giving her a stare that was so confused she almost giggled.

Erasmi's mind struggled to catch up with her words. What did she mean. Hsd the sleepiness made him lethargic and slow? Before he could fully process what she'd said, her hand slipped under his shirt directly onto his chest, almost jolting him awake. His eyes widened, reminding him that his ears were probably not playing jokes on him.

And then, she rose on her elbow, sliding close to him, as she whispered, "I want to eat you for breakfast Erasmi." Erasmi's breath caught in his throat, the lingering sleepiness quickly evaporating as he realized she wasn't joking.

"Ava," he murmured, still unsure whether she was teasing or serious. But the way she was looking at him, the way she was touching him—it was unlike what they had done in the past. Her nails screeched against his skin, as she played with his nipples.

He watched as she came closer to him, unable to believe this was the same woman who had been in his bed all this time.

She pressed herself closer, her hand sliding from his chest to his shoulder, pulling herself over him. "Don't tell me you're not hungry," she whispered, her lips hovering just above his.

Erasmi could only stare up at her, speechless, his mind racing as he tried to catch up with the change in her demeanor. The tension between them crackled like electricity as he watched her lean close to him and place her lips on his.

He felt her smile against his lips as he tentatively responded and somehow that was even more enticing to him.

His hands slid into her hair as he deepened the kiss, amazed when she pulled him closer as well. He groaned and pulled her so that she lay on top of him. His hands slowly explored her curves, and it was then he realized what it was that was different. Last night, when she'd slid into bed with him, she'd been wearing a plain tshirt and shorts.

But this morning... he bit her lip gently, causing her to break off the kiss and move back. In a minute, he flipped her over, his eyes heatedly roving over her from her satin covered breasts to the dress that ended as soon as it started, barely covering her...

He smiled then... and moved back to her, covering her neck with kisses, as he whispered, "You planned this, hmm?"

"I did." She whispered back, pushing at his shoulder. Taking the hint, Erasmi rolled over onto his back and almost came there and then when she straddled him. "Ava." her name escaped him in a moan.

His hands moved to hold her hips, but she swatted them away, instead leaning over him, placing her hands on his shoulders as she kissed his neck, biting and sucking.

"You're going to leave marks, Ava." He couldn't help but warn. And received an even deeper bite in retaliation. She looked up then, her eyes glittering as she asked, "Are you scared people will see Eras? Hmm? When you leave marks on me all the time..."

Erasmi gave a small smile then, enjoying this side of Ava and turned his head, bearing the other side, "Go ahead and mark me as much as you want, Ava."

With a triumphant smile Ava leaned forward and did exactly that, peppering small love bites all over Erasmi's neck and shoulders as she continued her exploration of him. She paused when she reached his manhood...

Erasmi almost jumped off the bed when he felt her mouth close over him. This morning was an eye opening experience.. And then, every thought evaporated from his head, as he could only focus on the sensation of her hot mouth moving over him.

Finally, when he knew he wouldn't be able to take more, he pulled her over, watching as she pouted in aggravation.

"Ava...", he groaned, settling himself over her. In response she brought him close, whispering, "I want you Eras... Now."

He pushed against her now and she caught him between her legs, her ankles on his lower back, pushing him toward her, "I want you Erasmi."

Erasmi growled then, all thoughts of giving her pleasure first disappearing between the need to possess her. He kissed her then, not slow, but as if he wanted to devour her. And she... kissed him back, with just as much ferocity and as he entered her with a single thrust, he somehow knew things between them were different.

As Erasmi buried his face in her neck, Ava brought up her hands, caressing his neck and holding him in place, satisfied. She knew that she'd changed the rules of the game and somehow, Erasmi was with her all the way. She turned her face and smiled, the words that she wanted to speak, reflecting in her eyes...

And when he buried himself in her, letting lose with a groan, she fell over the edge with him, hugging him close to her... his weight slumped over her, pressing her into the mattress. She tightened her hold on him then, not letting him move and smiled, whispering, "Let me roll over, Ava. I'll crush you."

But instead she shook her head, liking the weight of him on her. "I have to say," Erasmi whispered, "I could get used to this side of you. Who knew you had such a taste for...aggression in bed?"

Chapter 680: A Date

The next time Erasmi woke up, the sun was high in the sky. As he seepily patted the bed next to him, it took him a moment to realize that it was cold and empty. With a sigh, he opened his eyes and turned his head, confirming what he already knew.

Feeling lazy, he slowly slipped out of bed, and like a woman doing the walk of shame, checked himself in the mirror and winced... It seemed Ava had been possessed... The scratches and love bites scattered across his neck and shoulders made him shake his head with a rueful smile. He might just have to use those concealer thingies to cover these... or else he wouldn't even be able to step out.

Grabbing his short and tshirt, he walked down out of the room and almost fell off the stairs at the scene before him. She was planning to kill him. That had to be it..this was a meticulously crafted plot for murder. But if he died today, it would be with a sense of satisfaction.

He must have made a sound then, for she turned around and smiled at him. He frowned. It was a smile he'd seen a thousand times before, but this morning, it felt different—more dangerous, more... inviting.

As he stared, she picked up a flower and began walking toward him. If that could be considered walking. Why was she walking as if this were a ramp? And with that dress, she had on, clinging to her curves? She might as well be on a runway. Did she drink something last night that had caused this kind of a side effect.

He cleared his throat, struggling to find his voice, and asked hoarsely, "Caius."

Yes. Caius. His son was his lifeline. The only one who could save him from being seduced to death. She paused then and he looked at her in question. "Caius has gone for football practice..."

His eyes widened! He was supposed to take him for football practice almost an hour ago! How had he forgotten that.

"Relax, I told him you were worn out and couldn't go. He went with his friends", she told him huskily.

And then, she continue to walk towards him, offering him the flower," So, we have the next three hours to ourselves...What do you think we should do Eras?"

He took the flower and then looked at the table she had set up. He knew what he wanted to do... Clear that table and... But that was not the right answer..

"We should have a breakfast date?" He asked slowly and watched her smile bloom. Good. That was the right answer it seemed.

"Hmm. I thought as much. We've never really had a proper date date, have we. So, I thought I'll set us up a brunch date... Replenish our energy..."

Erasmi looked down at the flower in his hand and then at her, a slow smile gracing his face. It didn't matter if it was a side effect or not. He would not mind taking advantage. As she held his wrist to bring him towards the table, he tugged at her hand, pulling her towards him.

He felt her eyes widen as she fell against his chest, his hand around her waist. For a moment, he simply held her there, savoring the closeness, the electric charge in the air between them.

And then slowly, almost teasingly, he lifted it to her face, the petals just grazing her cheek. Her eyes fluttered shut as the soft touch of the flower traced a path along her jawline, down to her neck. He could feel her shiver, her lips parting slightly in response.

"You're full of surprises today, Ava,"

He continued to drag the rose along her skin, drawing invisible lines with its petals as he trailed it from her collarbone up to the curve of her chin. His hand at her waist tightened, pulling her just a little closer until there was no space left between them. "It makes me wonder, what it is that you are hiding. Or what it is that you hope to get."

He felt her stiffen then and knew that he'd been spot on but she recovered quickly as she looked at him in the eye, "I hope to get you, Eras."

He smiled then, "I like when you call me Eras..."

Ava smiled and raised her lips to kiss his chin, "Come on, Eras. We have a date to finish before the kid comes back home."

Erasmi grinned and rubbed his nose against hers, "Alright ma'am. I am at your service. So, what would you like to eat for breakfast. I'll make it right away."

"No need. I already have the perfect breakfast. Take a seat..." As she tried to move away, however, she realized that his hand was still clamped around her, making her unable to move... Blushing, she looked up at him and sighed, "You have to let go of me so that I can get the breakfast."

"I don't want to..." Erasmi murmured with a grin.

Pushing at his hand, Ava rolled her eyes and quickly jumped out of his arms, racing towards the kitchen.

Erasmi watched with a grin as Ava darted toward the kitchen, her dress swishing around her legs. The sight made him chuckle, his heart feeling lighter than it had in days. It seemed his plan had worked... Or rather... Ian's suggestion had worked. Dam*! Now he would have to thank that kid. Or maybe he wouldn't tell Ian

But as she walked out of the kitchen, carrying the steaming dish, he knew that it would be useless to try and hide it from his brothers. Because Ava had definitely spoken to Ian... For the delicious smelling dish was none other than breakfast Lasagne... Ian's signature dish... and his favourite all time breakfast ever.

She placed the dish in front of him and then looked at him expectantly, "Come on then. Taste it and tell me how is it?"