

## Benefits 681

Chapter 681: Gloating

"Did you like the lasagna?" Ian asked over the video call, taking a bite from his own plate as Erasmi sprawled on the couch, basking in the afterglow of food and sex.

"It was incredible. Thanks for sharing the recipe," Erasmi replied, his voice a little drowsy.

Ian chuckled through the screen. "Oh, Ava's sworn to secrecy on that one. If you think you can get it out of her, good luck."

Erasmi smirked, rolling his eyes as he shifted on the couch. "Why bother? I can just make you cook for me."

"You do realize you live hours away, right? And I'm definitely not starting a food delivery service," Ian shot back with a grin, shaking his head at the idea.

Erasmi shrugged, "We'll be moving back once Cai's semester is finished."

Ian coughed and spluttered as he heard the news before staring at the screen, "Erasmi Frost! I can't believe you are sharing the news like this! This is amazing! Is Ava really okay with moving here in that old house?"

Erasmi sighed, "It was her idea to move back. She said so this morning."

"Ha! This has to be my lasagne's magic! But why are you guys waiting till the end of semseter. Cai is smart, he can manage here also."

"Ava wants to wait." Erasmi sighed, before moving to sit up and spoke, "There is still some unfinished business."

There was a moment of silence before Ian asked, "So, I believe my suggestion to make her jealous worked..."

Erasmi sighed, thinking back to this morning- the early morning and then the late morning and nodded, "It did work too well. But I am still nowhere close to the truth. Anyway, did Lucy find out anything about that woman- Hannah Spencer?"

"Hmm. You're sure there is a connection between Ava and Hannah?"

"I am ninety nine percent sure." Erasmi sighed.

"But how?"

Erasmi sighed, " Its because of Ava's habit of doodling."

Ian frowned, "Huh?"

Erasmi nodded, his gaze distant as he recalled the past. "Ava has this habit. She starts doodling with her fingers whenever she's worried or deep in thought. It's something I picked up on last year during all those hospital visits. Whenever we were waiting for test results or news, she'd do it—tracing invisible shapes on her thigh or the armrest. Over time, I realized that whatever she was drawing, it usually reflected what was on her mind, what she was anxious about. So, I made it a point to sit close to her, keep an eye on her hands, trying to understand what she was really feeling."

Ian was sure his mouth had fallen open. He could not imagine this kind of observation. Not even Demetir, the most observant of all.

A she was admiting his brother'd deviousness, Erasmi continued, "Anyway, I forgot all about it during these past months because things had been going well. And when you suggested that I make Ava jealous, I was thinking whom to use."

"So, you used Hannah Spencer, Cai's new class teacher, right? That is what you said in your message anyway. But how does that connect her to Ava.

"Three reasons. First because Ava was tracing the name Hannah the night before last while eating. I wasn't sure at first but yesterday confirmed it... She had not yet met Cai's class teacher until then so why would she doodle her name. Secondly, that woman has been trying to get close to me. The first two times I was sure it was a coincidence but after yesterday. That woman literally threw herself onto my lap. I was tempted..."

Ian widened his eyes. " You were tempted by her?"

"Not by her!" Erasmi gave a disdainful glance. "I was tempted to ask her directly what she was trying to do! Anyway, since she was already presenting herself on a platter, I used her to make Ava's jealous... Lets just say, the moment she saw that Hannah woman, Ava is a changed woman..."

Ian grinned at the smugness in Erasmi's voice at that point. " Uh huh. I can see the change all over your neck."

Erasmi rolled his eyes, " Don't be a bloc\* head! Pretend to be blind, okay. Its not like I've never seen them on you."

"Okau okay. I'll keep my mouth shut." Ian's grin faded as he leaned closer to the screen, his tone becoming more serious. "You were right to be suspicious about Hannah Spencer. She's a con artist. Moves from city to city, targeting men who are either lonely, stuck in loveless marriages, or single fathers. She seduces them, makes them believe she's their salvation, and then drains them dry—financially and emotionally. Once they're tapped out, she vanishes, off to the next mark."

Erasmi's expression darkened as he absorbed the information. "I knew something was off about her, but I didn't expect this. She seemed too smooth... "

Ian sighed and nodded, " I would have sent her information to the police already but I was waiting for your go ahead. What I don't understand is, how could Ava had contact with a con artist."

Erasmi sighed and nodded, " I don't know how, but I am very sure about this. Somehow, somewhere these women have had a contact and Ava is worried enough... to have taken some drastic steps... Just ask Lucy to dig deeper, Ian. Until we find the connection."

Ian nodded before pushing away his empty plate, "We'll dig deeper, but I think it would be faster if you had Ava talk about it to you directly. Earlier you were playing in the blind. But now, you've connected some dots so that should not be a problem..."

Erasmi nodded and as they disconnected the call, his mind was not on the problem about how to approach Ava again but something else that she had doodled... On his arm last night.. What did she mean by that? Was she laying a claim on him... like he'd been thinking or was it something else?

As he closed his eyes, hugging the pillow to his chest, Erasmi vowed, "This time, he'd been completely seduced by his wife.. But it would be her turn next..."

Chapter 682: Help

"Erasmi! How are you? Well this is a surprise!" Hannah smiled as she said the words while Erasmi raised an eyebrow...

"It sure seems like it." Erasmi answered ironically as he watched Hannah take a seat across from him without being invited. It was hard to believe that this meeting was a surprise when he knew for a fact that Big mama had mentioned him coming here every weekend.

I'm glad I ran into you. You did take a rain check on that coffee the other day... since we're both here now, why not have that coffee? Let's make it a date."

Erasmi paused mid-sip, peering over the rim of his cup. "What did you say? A date?"

Hannah looked at him then and smiled, "I don't mean.. I didn't mean like a 'date' date. Just that... we were supposed to grab some coffee and..."

Erasmi nodded, "Go ahead then and order some."

Hannah nodded and quickly placed an order for herself while Erasmi proceeded to ignore her in favour of the book in his hand.

"What are you reading?" Hannah asked seriously as she leaned over the table, to read the title of the book apparently.

Erasmi closed the book with deliberate slowness, his gaze shifting from the discreet cover to Hannah, who then moved back to sit on her chair. He set the book aside on the table and leaned back in his chair, staring at her impassively.

Hannah's smile faltered slightly at his stare and she looked away. "I'm sorry if I interrupted. I didn't mean to disturb you. I just thought... since you're a friendly face, I'd join you for breakfast instead of eating alone. You can read the book if you want to. I won't disturb you anymore"

As she started to stand, she couldn't help but ask, "Did your wife say something to you about me?"

Erasmi smiled then and extended his hand, "Relax, Hannah. I was just playing a prank. You got serious."

Relieved, she eased back into her seat, a smile returning to her face. "For a moment there, I thought maybe something was wrong..."

Erasmi shook his head and just when Hannah thought that she was off the hook, Erasmi asked curiously, "Why would my wife say anything about you? Did something happen when she went off to drop you?"

Hannah widened her eyes, "No no. Nothing happened. I just got the feeling that she somehow did not like me much."

Erasmi raised an eyebrow then, "Why would you think that?"

Hannah shook her head, "Just a hunch. But I am relieved that she does not hate me. Actually not many women befriend me. I find it easier to be friends with men..."

"Is that so?" Erasmi murmured, shaking his head on the inside.

Hannah nodded softly as if aggrieved with the state of things. "Yeah... I guess I just connect better with men. It's like they understand me better. Maybe it's because I'm not like most women."

Before she could say more, a waiter cheerfully came to the table and all but ignoring Hannah, smiled at Erasmi, "Would you like your coffee topped up?"

Erasmi shook his head, turning the waitress' attention to Hannah with a gesture, "You can bring something for her. I'll be leaving soon."

As the waitress turned to Hannah, the woman quickly gave her order before turning to look at Erasmi again, "Are you going to leave me here again today? Erasmi this is not fair..."

"I assure you, you won't want me sitting here opposite you, within the next five minutes."

"What? Why?" Hannah asked in confusion not understanding the gaze.

Erasmi shrugged and answered with a frustrated look, "Because my wife is very much a jealous type. And she is unreasonable. She doesn't like me talking to other women. And never sharing a coffee."

Hannah shook her head, "You've got to be joking, Erasmi! I'm sure she is not like that. And if she is, she might be a bit insecure. After all, you are so good looking." With that, she extended her hand and held his in sympathy, though on the inside she was happier than she could even imagine. Already Erasmi was troubled with Ava. Soon, she would be able to make him loathe her.

However, she'd barely had time to revel in her satisfaction when, a torrent of ice-cold water cascaded over her head from behind. She screamed, her hands flying up to cover her soaked hair, mascara smudging as she tried to shield herself from the unexpected onslaught. "Erasmi, help me!" she shrieked, flailing in her seat, too shocked to move.

But Erasmi, unfazed by the chaos, merely sipped his coffee, his expression calm as ever, as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening and even told her, "I did warn you that my wife is possessive and unreasonable."

The water finally stopped, leaving Hannah drenched and shivering. She whipped around, her face a mixture of fury and shock, only to be met by glare of a beautiful girl standing behind her, holding an empty jug.

"How dare you hold my husband's hand?" the girl demanded as she placed the jug back on the nearby waitress' tray..

Hannah blinked, her mouth opening and closing as she tried to process the accusation. "Husband?" This woman was not Ava. Was Erasmi Frost married to another woman? But that was not what her research had told her. She narrowed her eyes and then looked at the woman carefully... before turning to look back at the man on the table..." You are Demetri Frost..."

Before she could see the man nod, however, another jug of water was upended on her head... as Nora Frost scolded, "Don't take my husband's name..."

Thoroughly embarrassed and drenched like a stray cat, Hannah ran out of the cafe, wanting to flee the sight of humiliation. As the door swung shut behind her, Nora burst into a fit of giggles, unable to contain her amusement and high fived Erasmi who walked out of the kitchen... while Demetri shook his head and sipped the coffee indulgently watching the two of them.

#### Chapter 683: The Twins

Erasmi and Nora quickly set to work, clearing the mess on the floor as Big Mama hustled around them, before joining Demetri at the table for breakfast.

As the waitress brought out steaming plates of food, Big Mama couldn't help but shake her head in wonder. "And to think I was blaming myself for misjudging that girl when we first met," she mused, her voice tinged with disbelief. "She was so sweet the other day, talking so well and charming the socks off me. I had no idea she was just playing me to get information about Erasmi's habits and likes. What a piece of work."

"It's okay, Big Mama. Women like her are always too smarmy, too smooth. They know exactly how to play people, and they do it well." Nora soothed the older woman.

Big Mama sighed, then broke into a grin as she clapped her hands together, her mood lifting. "But you folks really turned the tables on her! That was some top-notch trickery you pulled off. I totally loved it! Just for the early morning entertainment you've provided, breakfast is on the house today! And Nora, I'm going to whip up a special dessert just for you, my treat!"

Nora laughed, her cheeks flushing with pleasure. "Thank you, Big Mama! You're the best."

She then turned her attention to the two brothers sitting across from her, and blinked. No matter how many times she saw them together, it never failed to amaze her just how identical they were. It was like looking at the same person twice, down to the smallest detail. "Holy shi\*! You two really are like carbon copies," she murmured, shaking her head in disbelief.

"You talk as if you don't know that," Erasmi pointed out, causing Nora to laugh as she waggled her eyebrows, "I'm just thinking what the two of you can do to..."

Demetri narrowed his eyes then and warned, "Hold your imagination, right there, Nora..."

Nora giggled and raised her cup of hot chocolate in toast, "Okay okay! I won't imagine anything... So, why have you summoned us here, your highness, Erasmi Frost?"

"I didn't summon you." Erasmi pointed out to Demetri and said, "I summoned him. I need him to pretend to be me..."

Before Demetri could say a word, Nora warned, "If you think I am going to let Demetri fool Ava while you do whatever..."

"No no. I need Demetri to pretend to be me. But no fooling is involved. At least not much..."

Nora and Demetri both looked at Erasmi then, "What are you upto?"

As Erasmi outlined his plan, Nora and Demetri could only stare in amazement. That was one convoluted way to get what he wanted.

While Nora looked at Demetri for his opinion, Demetri nodded hesitantly, "Are you sure she won't find out? Because if she did, I don't want my sister in law attacking me, okay?"

"She won't attack you, I think. Anyway, I could not think of anything else..."

"So, if I'm going to meet Ava just now, where are you going?" Demetri asked cautiously.

"I'm going to Hannah to apologize of course."

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Ava paced inside her home, her eyes fixed on the drive way outside. Like every Sunday morning, Erasmi had gone to Big Mama's Cafe for his weekly coffee and chit chat. But, unlike every other Sunday morning, she had received a text from Big mama asking about Erasmi's new friend who had been coming to the cafe quite regularly.

It was Hannah. She just knew it. She wanted to tell Erasmi to stop meeting that woman but then she would have to give an explanation. And she had no idea on how to give one. What if he?

No no. She would have to find some other way of saving Erasmi from Hannah's grasp. But who was she supposed to contact? She had no idea. Maybe she could reach out to Demetri or the others. But even then she wouldn't know what to say.

She sighed. And then breathed a sigh of relief when she saw Erasmi walking back home. So, he'd definitely come back soon. There shouldn't have been any time for Hannah to seduce him right? Hannah wanted to try? She could keep trying and nothing would come off it.

As Erasmi twisted his key in the lock, she raced to him, wanting to kiss him, but unexpectedly, he stepped back, even going so far as to raise his hands as if she were threatening him.

She paused, "Eras?"

He cleared his throat and looked away, "I'm not feeling well, Ava. I think I might be catching something. I'll go and rest."

Ava's heart skipped a beat as she watched Erasmi step back, his usual warmth replaced by an uncharacteristic aloofness.

The words "catching something" echoed in her mind, but they didn't make sense. Erasmi rarely got sick, and even when he did, he was never the type to avoid her.

"Are you sure?" she asked softly, "You were fine this morning."

Erasmi avoided her gaze, focusing instead on the doorframe as if it held all the answers. "Yeah, just... I don't want you to catch anything. I'll rest, and I'm sure I'll feel better later. Also, uhh... I'll be having dinner with friends outside so you and Cai can maybe order something." His voice was steady, but there was a tightness to it that didn't escape Ava's notice.

Before she could press further or ask more questions, he brushed past her and headed toward the stairs, leaving Ava standing in the hallway. Something was definitely off, and the more she thought about it, the more certain she became that it had to do with Hannah.

Ava narrowed her eyes and quickly made a phone call. Cai could stay at his friend's place tonight. She needed to find something out...

Stealthily, she walked up to the bedroom door and peered inside. Erasmi really was lying on the bed... but then her eyes caught his phone and she hurriedly moved to check it... her world almost turning upside down when she saw the text message...

#### Chapter 684: Wedding Planner

Autumn almost bowed her head in front of Jacks as she tried to make the man talk. But he was as tight lipped as a bank vault!

"Come on, Jacks," she pleaded, her voice edged with frustration. "I know you know who it is! I'm the manager of the resort, okay? You can trust me. It's not like I'm going to spill the beans! At least tell me the name of the bride? Or the groom? Or just give me a hint! Is it some celebrity, business tycoon or someone royalty like Evana?"

Jacks simply shook his head, offering her the same smile he probably practiced in front of the mirror every morning. It was the kind of smile that said, "Nice try, but no dice."

Autumn groaned, throwing her hands up dramatically. "Seriously, Jacks? You're really going to make me beg? Do I need to bribe you with coffee? Donuts? A lifetime supply of those little resort mints? Come

on! Who is it! They are throwing such a lavish affair! I mean the entire town and the next four towns have been turned upside down..."

Jacks chuckled, but still, his lips remained sealed as he mimed the zipping motion.

"Oh, I see how it is," Autumn huffed, leaning in closer. "You really are going to hold onto the secret, hmm? Do you think I cannot pull the nepotism card on you? I am your boss' wife, you have to tell me..."

Jacks laughed and shook his head," He already expected that you would try that so I've been warned, if I spill the beans, I'll be sent off to the farm to be a 'bean collector'. So.. sorry boss lady.. I'm not risking my neck just to satisfy your curiosity. Now, go to the office and stop lurking at my door!"

"What if I guess? If I guess correctly, you nod. If I'm wrong, you... shake your head! Or blink twice! Or tap your foot! Just give me something!"

Jacks sighed, finally throwing his hands up in surrender. "Alright, alright! Enough, Autumn Frost. If you really want to know, go ask your husband."

As Jacks hurriedly closed the door, he could not help but breathe a sigh of relief. He'd almost spilled the beans on that one! He'd taken a deep breath when he heard his husband's laughter," Why don't you just tell her who the high profile guest is and what this is about?"

Jacks pouted and went to sit on his husband's lap as he sighed," I can't... She is the one getting married."

His husband coughed and almost threw Jack off his lap as he heard this. Shaking his head at the shock, he rubbed his husband's back and sighed," Don't worry. I won't blame you this time... I was stumped as well when Gabe told me his plan."

"You're telling me, your cold, quiet and silent boss is the one planning the Dream Disney wedding that is so over the top that it is almost giving me second hand embarrassment, the one you've been oohing and aahing over all these days."

Jacks nodded and grinned."Yes. And it is a surprise wedding. So, just keep quiet okay? And don't tell anyone."

"I won't. I won't. But isn't a surprise wedding too risky? What if she doesn't like something?"

Jacks rolled his eyes at his husband's question," Didn't you hear the excitement in her voice. She definitely will like it. Also, in case there is something she doesn't like, she is on the wedding planning committee. So she can voice her opinions freely."

"So let me get this straight. Autumn Frost is on the committee planning her own wedding, but she has no idea it's her wedding?"

Jacks nodded, looking both amused and slightly stressed. "Exactly. It's like one of those reality TV shows where the big twist is revealed at the end. Gabe's plan is to surprise her with everything—down to the last detail. She thinks she's just helping with the arrangements for some high-profile guest with all the different kinds of foods and experiences etc."

His husband shook his head in disbelief. "That's either incredibly romantic or completely insane. Probably both. Though I should complement him. He really is giving this everything he has. So, Jacksie, how long do you think you can keep her away from sniffing out the truth? She is already poking and prodding."

"I am going to keep it as long as I can. Gabe has promised that if this happens perfectly, he'd make me permanent here, to handle the resort. I'm already training two of my replacements!"

His husband smiled then and quickly kissed him," That is the best news. So, if this wedding surprise happens perfectly then your workload and work hours will come down?"

Jacks nodded and before he could say more, his lips were caught in a kiss,"This is perfect! I hope Mrs Frost doesn;t find out about the wedding until she is at the altar!"

Jacks giggled at his husband's enthusiasm and shook his head. He wouldn't hope for her to remain clueless until she reached the altar but at least until she reached the bridal dressing room would be good...

Meanwhile, Autumn was already at work, and could not help but sigh as she watched the transformation that had slowly been taking over the past few days. The simple garden was slowly but surely changing into a dreamscape.

"Featherland," she whispered to herself, unable to suppress a smile. "Whoever came up with this idea is a genius."

In a few days, the entire place would be full of white feathers and white flowers until every inch was white so that it would feel as if the bride was walking on clouds towards her groom. Autumn could only let out a sigh as she wondered who this couple was...

What kind of couple would choose such an elaborate and unique theme for their wedding? And why was everyone keeping it such a tightly guarded secret? She sighed then. It was probably some celebrity who would do all this for the publicity and turn all the beautiful scene nothing but a drama.

Chapter 685: Follow

"Psst... how did you know she would leave the house before the Demon—I mean, before you woke up?" Nora whispered, her eyes following Ava as she slipped quietly out the door while they sat in the car as if on a stake out.

Erasmi sighed, rolling his eyes as if the answer was obvious. "Because Ava is the least confrontational person you'll ever meet. She'd rather stick her head in the sand or run away than get into an argument with someone."

Nora giggled at that, her amusement clear. "I think that's exactly why she needs a knight in shining armor like you. So, what do you think she's going to do?"

Erasmi's expression tightened with concern. "Honestly, I'm hoping she'll go and confront Hannah or at least get some clarity. But knowing Ava, she might just find a quiet corner somewhere and overthink everything. She has that habit too," he added, the worry evident in his voice. He then noticed Nora's eyes fixed on him, her gaze full of mischief.

"What? Is there something on my face?" Erasmi asked when he noticed Nora staring at him.

"Other than my husband's reflection? No," Nora quipped, a playful grin spreading across her lips. "But I'm just wondering... for a man who claims he married his wife solely to give his son a proper family, you sure do know an awful lot about her."

Erasmi frowned slightly, feeling awkward at the line of questioning. "I... I mean, it's just common sense, really. Anyone would pick up on these things after living together. And I do say that she is also my good friend. In fact, the only friend I do have..."

"Oh, so you're saying you don't pay special attention to her?"

"Of course not," Erasmi quickly replied, perhaps a bit too defensively as he heard his tone and cleared his throat. "I just— I mean, she's the mother of my son, so naturally, I notice things."

Nora leaned in, narrowing her eyes, "Mhm. And that's all it is? Just fatherly observation?"

"Exactly," Erasmi nodded, though the conviction in his voice wavered slightly.

"Whatever you say, Erasmi. But don't think I didn't catch that little worried look in your eyes when you talked about her. Seems like someone might be a little more invested than he's letting on. Or even realising.. Erasmi Frost.. I didn't expect you to be the slowest of the bunch... "

Erasmi scowled then and then widened his eyes, shushing Nora, " Look, she's hiding there. But why is she hiding?"

Nora looked at Ava in the dark, as much as she could and grinned, " It seems your non-confrontational wife is ready to catch you red handed. She's hiding here in waiting for you to go and meet Hannah... I bet you were not counting on this..."

"What do we do now?"

"Well, now we play a game of chase with Ava. Though you still have a chance to come clean..." Erasmi shook his head then and sent Nora a look... which had her narrowing her eyes in warning.

"Erasmi Frost. This is going to cost you..."

"Okay okay! You can collect the debt later."

With a harrumph, Nora made the call to Demon whose role should have ended here... But would not extend to going to Hannah so that Ava could follow them.

As expected, the moment, Demetri stepped out of the house and started to stroll out, Ava started to trail him at a distance...

Erasmi and Nora, parked a few houses down the street, watched the whole scene unfold like a spy thriller. "She's really going for it," Erasmi murmured in awe. He had not expected that. He'd been aiming for her to confront Hannah and catching them red handed in the argument. But this...

"Your wife has more guts than you give her credit for. But this is getting good—looks like she's trying to be a detective now."

Before Erasmi could agree or disagree, Nora hit him on the arm repeatedly in excitement, "Come on. We need to follow them! Don't just sit here like a lump!"

Quickly, she jumped out of the car and Erasmi rubbed his arm as he stepped out, wondering how things had spiraled out of control. This almost felt as if they were cast in some bad detective movie where one person followed the other and then another person followed the second.

As they approached Hannah's house, Erasmi felt his stomach knot up. He exchanged a worried glance with Nora who also looked worried. This had never been part of the plan when they'd sent Hannah the message about him wanting to apologize and meet up. Something was definitely going to go wrong.

Just then, Hannah came racing out of the door and after a moment's hesitation, threw herself at Demetri which caused Nora to murmur, "I'm going to cut off her arms..."

"Come on, Ava! Show that woman who the boss is." Nora cheered as she watched Ava stiffen at the scene. Well, if she could not break bones, she would be happy to watch Ava breaking them.

But against their expectations, Ava did not storm inside to confront Hannah. Instead, they watched in stunned silence as Ava's shoulders slumped, and she took a step back from the house.

"No, no, no," Nora muttered, watching as Ava hesitated for a moment, then turned and began to walk away, her steps heavy with defeat. She could see Ava's heartbreak even from this distance, and it made her blood boil.

"Do something!" Nora hissed, smacking Erasmi on the arm, harder this time. "She thinks you're cheating on her, and she's walking away! Do you really want her to believe that?"

Erasmi winced, rubbing his arm, but the panic in Nora's voice snapped him out of his daze. He knew she was right—he couldn't let Ava walk away like this believing the worst.

Without another thought, he raced after Ava, ready to defend himself and explain everything even if he had to beg her to listen.

#### Chapter 686: A Confrontation

Ava was heart broken to say the least. She'd been so sure that Erasmi would never... She stifled the sob that almost escaped her before she tried to get a control over herself. What a fool she'd been. He didn't love her. They were not even attracted to each other and had come together only for the sake of this relationship. Even their friendship had been formed out of a need. Her need to make sure Cai was safe if something happened to her. And Erasmi's need to be with his son.

She should have accepted the truth sooner, instead of being carried away in her own fairytale. She'd let herself be influenced by Autumn, Olivia and Nora's love stories. They hadn't started out with love but they'd ended up that way, hadn't they? But she'd forgotten, in each of those cases, both parties had choice to choose or reject each other. In their case, they did not have that option.

And Erasmi had been so sure that he would not love her that he'd mentioned it repeatedly that if they were to fall in love then they would break it off. He'd seemed to want to assure her but she'd even seen it as a reminder, that she should not cling to him when such a time comes.

Even when she'd been shaky about the marriage, it had not even taken him a moment to propose an annulment. She just had not expected that their time together would be so short.

But even as she walked away from Hannah's home, she felt a surge of anger. Had Erasmi really fallen for Hannah and her fake self? Could he not discern the difference between real and fake. Or had his 'love' made him blind to the 'fakeness' of that woman?

She stopped then and almost turned around. She should go and confront the two of them! So what if Hannah revealed her past? She would reveal Hannah's past too. Which was even worse than hers. After all, she had done what she needed to do to survive and then later escape. But Hannah, she'd even enjoyed doing what she did and stealing money from unsuspecting people.

A bitter smile came over her face then. What would she do if he chose to forgive Hannah's sins? That would make her double a fool and double her heartbreak. She turned back then. If he chose to jump into a valley and hurt himself that was upto him! She would just refuse to divorce him. It wasn't as if she'd signed some pre nup that she would divorce him if he fell in love foolishly. He could wait forever to get a divorce. She would take the Frost brothers' help if need be! She'd even ask them to pound some sense into him...

She stumbled then. For standing in front of her was Erasmi...

"What are you doing here?" Ava asked sharpky which

"Following you." Erasmi answered giving her a smile as he pushed his hands into his pockets.

The surge of anger that she had earleir felt returned full force at the sight of his smile. How dare he! How could he stand here and smile at her like nothing happened. When she knew he'd lied to her and gone to Hannah's house?

Marching towards him, she hit his arm with all her pent-up emotions, causing him to wince, " How dare you smile at me like that after everything! You lied to me that you were going out with friends! And you went to see that Hannah! How could you."

Erasmi raised his hands and when Ava would have hit him again, he quickly caught her wrists, pulling her towards him, " I did not lie to you, Ava. Not exactly."

Hot tears ran down her cheeks as she looked up at him, wanting to believe his claim. " What do you mean you did not lie to me? And don't tell me that Hannah is your friend and so that makes it a non lie. I saw the way she jumped at you."

Before she could speak more, she found herself crushed in Erasmi's embrace. Even as his closeness and scent calmed her, the thought that he had hugged Hannah like that, hurt her even more. She sobbed now and looked up at him, " Do you love her? Is that why you are doing this?"

She looked up at him now, wanting to see his face. She would then accept that as a fact. But he had to say this to her directly.

He smiled then, a goofy smile that made her feel even worst. And then, instead of answering her, he actually had the gall to tap her nose and exclaim, " I never knew someone could look so beautiful even when crying."

"Erasmi, stop it," she whispered, her voice trembling as she tried to pull away, but his grip on her was firm, keeping her close.

"No, Ava, listen to me," he said, his voice softening as he looked into her eyes, his expression serious now. "I don't love Hannah. I've never loved her. I did not lie to you and I did not go to her."

He must have noticed her disbelief because he shook his head and answered, " I didn't. That was Erasmi. The person who returned to you this afternoon was not me but Demetri."

Ava's eyes widened at that, finding this too unbelievable. She knew that Demetri and Erasmi looked the same but they had different mannerisms. She's never confuse them. But then she remembered Nora telling her that the two could adopt each other's mannerisms and Erasmi had avoided her touch this afternoon... Was that really Demetri? But why?

"Why?" Ava looked up at Erasmi and asked the question. If Demetri really was pretending to be Erasmi and he had been the one with Hannah, then why did they do it. Her eyes widened then. She knew the Frosts were powerful... But were they so powerful that they could even dig up the sealed files. Had Erasmi discovered everything?

Chapter 687: Hannah's downfall

"I just wanted to clear the air, Erasmi. I couldn't bear the thought of you thinking poorly of me." Hannah murmured as she held his hand earnestly, explaining how embarrassed she was for his mistake.

Hannah smiled earnestly as Erasmi stared at her. She'd planned this perfectly. She'd sent him an apology for mistaking his brother for himself and then asked him to apologize to Demetri and his wife as well, letting him know just enough that he would realise something had happened. And then he'd called, just as she'd anticipated, asking about her with concern, she knew she'd succeeded. After all, no man could resist her allure.

"Thank you for meeting me. I just wanted to make sure there were no hard feelings or misunderstandings between us or even between your family and you because of me. I value your friendship too much."

Erasmi smiled then, a slow smile that gave her butterflies. Somehow, she felt that he'd become even more attractive almost magnetic. "I understand, Hannah. But you need not worry, there are no hard feelings between my brother and me because of you."

She breathed a sigh of relief. "That is good then. I would have hated for you to have confronted your brother because of me." With that, she pretended to be shy and looked down, gently pushing her hair behind her ear in a soft motion.

Erasmi's smile widened even more as he said, "It is unbelievable."

She looked into his eyes then, "What is unbelievable?"

She felt her heart race as she felt him tuck her hair behind her ear again and softly caress her cheek, "Your beauty... It is unbelievable..."

Hannah shook her head as the scene suddenly entered her head and stared expectantly at him, only to not believe her ears when she heard his words, "I find it unbelievable that someone can be so delusional."

"De...Delusional? What are you saying Erasmi?", Hannah stuttered.

"You heard me. Do you really think that you are some kind of a siren who can attract anyone? That you are important enough for even your name to be taken between us brothers? Because then you are definitely delusional."

"What are you saying Erasmi? Why would you say such mean things to me? All I've wanted is your friendship. Why are you attacking me?"

"Because all I want is the truth. Hannah Spencer aka Hannah Stone aka Hina Spence... and many other names that you have."

Demetri watched as the woman's face turned pale and waited her out to come up with whatever story she wanted to. And she did not disappoint.

"I... I'm not that person anymore," she began, her voice trembling. "I came here to start over, to turn over a new leaf. And then I met you, Erasmi. I fell in love with you. Can't you see that?"

"Look, I did what I had to do to survive. I was an orphan, Erasmi. I had no one to guide me or back me. I had to learn to survive on my own. But I've changed Erasmi. Trust me."

Please, Erasmi, you have to believe me. I'm not that woman anymore. I'm different. I'm—"

But before she could touch him, Demetri stepped back, avoiding her grasp. "Don't. Don't touch me," he said coldly. "You are right. You are a changed woman. Other than scamming people and petty tricks, you've also taken to blackmailing others."

Hannah froze, her outstretched hand hovering in the air before slowly dropping to her side as she realized that he was talking about Ava.

"You think you're so much better than me, don't you? Did Ava tell you this?" she spat, her voice shaking with anger. "You think your dear wife is above all of this? Above these petty tricks? She's no saint, Erasmi. She's just as capable of manipulation as anyone else! Would you like to give you some examples? She"

Demetri stilled. He knew now would be the time that this woman would blurt out everything that Erasmi wanted to know. The one part of Erasmi's plan that he was not comfortable with. Invading Ava's privacy... As he sought to redirect this conversation back to Hannah, a cold voice spoke up, "Those are my secrets to share, Hannah. You have no right to interfere."

Demetri breathed a sigh of relief as Ava and Erasmi walked in and moved to sit down. He was okay with watching drama. As expected, once Ava and Erasmi were inside the small house, Nora, who had been lurking outside house naturally followed them in.

Hannah's face twisted with fury as she pointed a trembling finger at Ava. "You planned all of this, didn't you? You've been playing me from the start! You wanted me to get close to Erasmi, to think I had a chance, just so you could watch me fall. So you could get your revenge! Isn't that right, Ava? But I'm not going down alone, Ava. I have proof. Proof that you're not the saint you pretend to be."

With a flourish, Hannah brought out the file that she had painstakingly taken care of all these years, just so that she could use it at the right opportunity. "This," she hissed, "is the truth about Ava Frost. Let's see how your precious husband and his family react when they know who you really are."

"You think you've won, Ava? You think you can just walk in here and silence me? Well, let's see how you talk your way out of this," Hannah sneered, pushing the papers toward Demetri whom she believed to be Erasmi.

Ava looked away when she saw Demetri take the file. She knew her moment of reckoning had come... "That is where you are wrong, Hannah. I am truly ashamed of my past and have worked hard to let go of those things. But you, you've used the past as a shield and excuse to continue your wrongdoings and justify your actions."

"Go ahead, Hannah. Show them everything you've got. My past doesn't define me."

#### Chapter 688: Erasmi's choice

Ava was in shock, and she knew it. How else could she explain the strange detachment that had settled over her, turning the chaos around her into something distant and surreal? It felt like a daydream—a distorted, slow-motion nightmare she couldn't quite wake up from. She blinked, trying to make sense of it all, her eyes fixed on the scene unfolding before her.

Hannah was being dragged away by the police. Ava had expected many things when she challenged Hannah, a screaming match or possibly even a violent fight, to reveal the secrets that had hung like a dark cloud over them. But this? This was beyond anything she could have imagined.

The police had burst in at the crucial moment, cutting off Hannah's venomous tirade mid-sentence. They'd read her rights, their voices cold and authoritative, while she thrashed and screamed, her threats echoing long after she was shoved into the back of the police car for scamming a lot of people. They'd even said something about it being a federal offense...

The sudden silence that followed when the police left was deafening. Ava's breath hitched as she took in the empty space where Hannah had been moments before, the air still thick with the tension. So, the truth had not been revealed again...

Her gaze drifted to Demetri, who stood nearby, the file Hannah had shoved into his hands hanging limply at his side. Ava felt a tremor pass through her and she gulped, trying to think of words that might be able to explain everything. This was even worst than she could imagined

Her legs gave out beneath her, and she sank to her knees. She was utterly lost, unsure of what to do or how to move forward. Was she supposed to go take that file and hide everything? If Hannah had revealed everything maybe she could have found some courage in the heat of the moment. But now...

Demetri and Erasmi exchanged a glance. Without a word, Demetri placed the unopened file on the table. Taking Nora's hand in his, he turned to leave, pulling her gently but firmly away from the scene when she would have gone to console and talk to Ava. Even as they waled away, Ava could hear Nora's murmuring protests...

She gave a bitter smile then. She was all alone again. But maybe it was for the better... just then, a hand appeared in front of her. She looked up slowly and realized that Erasmi had not walked away... She looked up at him, her vision blurring slightly as she met his gaze, wondering what to do next.

But she shook her head. She wanted to take his hand and try and stand up. But the truth was that everything was too raw for her right now. She couldn't handle anything right now...

Seeing her unwilling to take his hand, he didn't push. Instead he caught her shoulders and firmly pulled her upwards until she was on her feet and guided her to the couch. Once there, he sat down and quickly tugged her into his lap, wrapping her in a hug.

The tears came suddenly, without warning. He pressed her close to him and she buried her face into his chest, trying to hold back, but it was no use.

"I'm so sorry, Ava," Erasmi whispered.

Erasmi sighed as she only cried harder and felt the regret deeper. Over her head, he glared at the file that Demetri had placed on the table. If he'd known that digging up the past would hurt Ava this much, he would have simply buried it deeper instead of causing her more pain. And when he felt her continue to sob, he could not help himself, "Ava. Please. I really am sorry! I just... I know this is not an excuse, but I was genuinely worried. Okay. I'm sorry I made you worry and cry."

Ava's sobs only grew stronger as Erasmi's words sank in. She clung to him tighter, her fingers digging into his shirt as she buried her face deeper into his chest. The guilt and shame that had been festering inside her for so long finally spilled out, overwhelming her.

"I'm sorry," she choked out between sobs. "I'm the one who should be sorry. I've been hiding so much, keeping things from you... I've messed everything up. We—we should just... maybe we should get a divorce."

Erasmi's arms tightened around her at that. He shook his head and scoffed, "Divorce? Really, Ava? You think you can get rid of me that easily?" He pulled back just enough to look at her, and so that she could look into his eyes. "You don't get to use the whole 'it's not you, it's me' line and think I'll just walk away. We're in this together, no matter what. So, no more talking of divorce, okay?"

Ava tried to speak, but the lump in her throat made it impossible. She could only shake her head, tears streaming down her face as she looked at him and then at the file, "You need to take a look at the past first. And then you get to decide. Don't worry. I won't hold it against you when you decide to leave... I... I have just one request, Erasmi... Let me be a part of Caius' life..."

He glanced at the file on the table, then back at Ava, his eyes searching hers as if trying to see what it was that tortured her so much. Without saying anything, he gently placed her on the couch and walked to pick up the file.

Ava's heart pounded as she watched him, dread curling in her stomach. She couldn't bear to see the look on his face when he finally learned everything. She looked away, her fingers twisting together as she braced herself for the inevitable. This was it. The moment that would change everything.

Erasmi reached for the file, his hand hovering over it for a brief moment before he picked it up.

#### Chapter 689: The Past

Just as Ava closed her eyes, as if it could shield her from everything, she felt something thrown onto her lap. She opened her eyes and looked at the file in confusion before looking up at Erasmi in confusion.

"I won't read this. My entire reason for doing everything was to make sure that you were alright. These last few weeks, you'd been a mess. This file... I am leaving it here now, Ava. Don't let it hang over your head like a dark cloud, Ava. It doesn't define who you are now." He reached out, brushing a tear from her cheek with his thumb. "I don't need to know what's in that file to decide. I've already decided. I'm not going anywhere."

Ava stared at him, stunned by his words. "But... how can you just ignore it? What if it changes everything?"

Ava stared at him, stunned by his words. "But... how can you just ignore it? What if it changes everything?"

He shook his head, sitting down beside her again. "Because I trust you, Ava. Whatever's in that file, it's part of your past. But it's not who you are now."

"You really don't want to know?"

Erasmi shook his head, "Not unless you want me to know or need me to know."

It was the words that finally gave her the courage to accept the truth. Maybe just maybe, he would be forgiving of her. And even if he chose not to forgive her, she would hold onto this moment...

"Read it, Erasmi."

Erasmi sighed and shook his head, "Ava..."

"Read it, Erasmi. I think I'd like to get it off my chest."

Erasmi looked at her, searching her eyes for any sign of hesitation, but all he saw was a quiet determination. With a resigned sigh, he finally reached for the file, opening it slowly. His gaze skimmed over the first few lines, and his expression shifted as he read further before closing the file decisively.

Ava watched him closely, her heart pounding in her chest. He continued to look down and she continued to stare at him.

"Say something, Erasmi..." Ava called out in a small voice, her fear palpable.

"What do you want me to say, Ava?" Erasmi answered back as he placed the file aside and walked outside.

Ava felt her world come crashing down as she watched him walk away. This was it. The end of them. She wanted to call out to him. Hadn't he just said that he would be with her. Why then was he walking away?

She slid down to the floor, bringing her knees close to her. She wanted to scream, to call him back, to beg him not to go, but her voice seemed to be trapped in her throat. The silence that followed was unbearable, each passing second stretching out like an eternity to her.

But then, just as she felt herself spiraling into despair, she heard the door creak open. Her head snapped up, and she saw Erasmi standing there, holding something in his hand. As she watched, he came back and then before she could even process everything, he brought out a lighter and set the file on fire.

Ava's eyes widened in shock, and she scrambled to her feet, pointing at the burning file wordlessly as she looked at him and then at the file. As the file continued to burn, Erasmi threw it into the water sink nearby, continuing to watch it until the entire thing had turned into ashes.

"Only when everything was reduced to nothing, did he look at her," There. Now you know that the past doesn't matter."

Ava opened her mouth and then closed it before opening it again. "But, doesn't it bother you that a man was crippled because of me? If I had not done what I did... It was unforgivable, Erasmi. His life was ruined because of me..."

Ava tried to explain as if Erasmi had failed to grasp the details in her file. She'd been part of a bigger scam then. They'd usually go out to supermarkets and pick things up while the others created a scene and then escape from there. She'd been a part of lots of such burglaries since she was sixteen years. But then, that fateful night, they'd encountered the man...

He'd been prepared for their scam and the moment the others had started to create a disturbance, he'd pulled out a gun... The leader of their group had been her then boyfriend and he had been drinking and fought the man...causing the gun to go off...

"I tried Erasmi.. I... when I saw the man pull out the gun, I tried to pull him away, but he pushed me off...I know you must feel the hatred for me... you don't have to pretend..."

How could Erasmi not hate her. Hadn't he too been paralysed because of those people? And he'd been so angered by that feeling of helplessness that he'd even killed them. He came to her then and gently cupped her face, "Ava..."

She blinked, not even able to see his face clearly through her tears. What did he intend to do? "Ava," he said, moving closer to her as he wiped her tears, "I understand that what happened in your past weighs heavily on you. But there's a difference between what was done to me and what happened to you. Isn't that what you are scared of?"

"Yes, maybe you moved in the wrong groups in the past and paid the price for it. But even that man didn't blame you. It wasn't you who pulled the trigger. It wasn't you who decided to hurt the man. In fact, if not for your testimony and calling the ambulance he might not even have survived that. So, don't

blame yourself... Lara and the others... they planned meticulously to hurt people to satisfy their selfish desires. But you were trying to survive and do that right thing... Everything that happened was tragic, yes. It shouldn't have happened. But it is not your blame to carry."

### Chapter 690: Marry A Frost

"I'm going to marry a Frost when I grow up."

Caius, who had just popped a piece of popcorn into his mouth, nearly choked at Dora's sudden declaration. His eyes widened in alarm as he processed her words. After all, the only Frost anywhere near Dora's age was... well, him.

Seeing the scandalized expression on his face, Dora couldn't help but roll her eyes in exasperation. "Relax," she said with a smirk, waving off his concern. "You're safe. I'm your aunt, after all."

Caius blinked, staring at the girl in front of him as if she had suddenly grown a second head. She barely came up to his shoulder, and she was younger than him by a few years. He frowned in confusion, trying to make sense of what she was saying. "What are you talking about? How can you be my aunt?" "What are you talking about? How can you be my aunt?" he asked, his skepticism evident.

Dora huffed, clearly annoyed by his lack of understanding. "This is the problem with civilians," she muttered, crossing her arms. "They don't teach you anything about lineage or family trees. Your biological mom was my half-cousin... which makes me your aunt. I was your aunt the day I was born!"

Caius stared at her for a moment before rolling his eyes. "Alright, alright, Auntieeee," he said, drawing out the word with a teasing grin.

Dora's face scrunched up in displeasure as she immediately scolded him, "Don't call me Auntie! It makes me sound old!"

Caius chuckled at her reaction, shaking his head as he popped another piece of popcorn into his mouth. "Whatever you say... Auntie Dora," he teased, knowing full well it would annoy her. This was fun! The mighty Dora had actually handed him something to tease her with on a platter.

He watched as she rolled her eyes in frustration, clearly deciding that ignoring him was the best course of action. Caius followed her gaze as it settled on her next target, which just so happened to be his Uncle

Lucifer. His grin widened even further as he settled back into his seat, popping more popcorn into his mouth. This might actually turn out to be good entertainment and keep his mind away from the fact that his parents had actually sent him over because they wanted to have more time to themselves.

While he was happy that his mom and dad were happy, he needed to be grossed out about how they were always 'making moony eyes' at each other. Yuck. And now that he was here, he always had to witness Uncle Lucy and Aunt Angel do the same at each other. After observing his uncles doting on his aunts, he had come to one conclusion... The Frost men were all crazy. And according to Uncle Demetri, it was passed onto them from their great grandfathers and all. So this 'disease' was hereditary. Shaking his head, he turned to look at Uncle Lucifer, expertly handling Dora as she claimed that she would marry a Frost...

"Well, if you want to marry a Frost when you grow up, you can marry Vinny..."

Caius chuckled at the grimace on Dora's face then and outright laughed when she complained, "Uncle Lucy! That is gross! Vinny poops almost every hour!"

"Well, he'll grow out of it, Dora..." Lucien pointed out, as he suppressed his own smile...

"Ew ew ew! I am not going to marry someone younger than me! Come on, Lucy! You have to find me a Frost. Maybe you have some long lost family branch? Like your grandfather's cousin or something? Or maybe your great grandfather's illegitimate child..."

Lucien shook his head at that, "Sorry, Dora darling. All Frosties are out of stock..."

Dora's shoulders slumped in disappointment, and Lucien, seeing her dejection, added, "Okay, I'll tell you what. There are other good men who aren't Frosts."

"Like who?" Dora demanded, crossing her arms defiantly.

"Like your father," Lucien replied with a gentle smile. "He's an amazing man, isn't he?"

Dora looked at Lucien skeptically, her brow furrowed in confusion. "What's your point, Lucy?"

"My point is," Lucien continued, leaning in as if sharing a secret, "once you grow up, how about we throw any good men your way? Hmm?"

Dora tilted her head, considering his words with the seriousness only a child could muster. "But they have to be really good, Lucy. Like, Frost-level good. And I draw the line at them wearing diapers," she insisted, clearly not ready to let go of her original plan.

"That means Vinny is out of the running, Aunty?"

Dora glared at him, "Of course he is. And if you call me aunty one more time, you will regret it!"

"Aunty, aunty!!"

Dora's glare intensified as Caius gleefully chanted, "Aunty, aunty!" so she reached out to swat at him. But he predicted her move and quickly dodged, popping to his feet and darting across the room. Determined to make him pay for his teasing, she chased after him.

"You're going to regret this, Caius Frost!"

As she raced after him, she misjudged her footing, and her ankle twisted sharply beneath her. She fell to the floor with a yelp of pain.

Caius skidded to a stop, his playful grin vanishing as he turned to see Dora clutching her ankle, tears forming in her eyes. "Dora!" he shouted, rushing back to her side while Lucien had already moved to pick her up as he said, "I'll go get the ice."

Dora tried to blink back her tears but could not help but sniffle as she felt the pain in her ankle. Caius hovered near her, guilt written all over his face.

"I'm sorry, Dora. I didn't mean for this to happen."

Dora sent a glare his way before looking away. She was going to blame him!

Caius felt his worry grow as he watched Dora sit there, her arms crossed, clearly not ready to forgive him. He crouched down beside her, trying to catch her eye. "Dora, I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to make you fall."

Still, she wouldn't look at him.

He hesitated, then tried a different approach. "What if... what if I help you find the best possible groom in the future as well? I'll help you sieve the good ones from the bad ones? Hmm?"

Dora's pout faltered, just slightly. She peeked at him from the corner of her eye, but remained silent.

Caius sensed a crack in her resolve and hurriedly pressed on, "I mean, you'll need someone to help you filter out the bad ones, right? I can help with that. I know what makes a good Frost—or at least, I'll know by the time you're ready to get married. And I'll make sure no one gets through unless they're worthy of you."

Finally, Dora turned her head to fully look at him, still pouting but clearly considering his offer. "You'd really do that?" she asked, her voice laced with suspicion.

Caius nodded earnestly. "Absolutely. I promise I'll help you find the best guy out there. No diapers, no gross habits—just someone as awesome as you are."

"Alright," she said begrudgingly. "But you better keep your word, Caius Frost. If you don't, I'll make sure you regret it." She raised her hand, pinky finger and all and Caius quickly put his finger against her, promising something he would definitely regret in the future.