

Benefits 691

Chapter 691: I Love You

Erasmi looked around the grand house and smiled softly. They were really moving back here. When he'd left after Grandpa's death, he'd never imagined returning. Yet here he was, back in the place he'd once thought he'd left behind forever. The very thought of coming back with the people he had left to find, now filled him with an unexpected sense of peace.

He heard Ava's footsteps as she entered the large library and turned to her, hand extended.

It had been a month since they'd overcome the hurdle that was Hannah, and now they were finally moving here, together.

As soon as her hand slipped into his, he didn't waste a second. He pulled her into his arms, capturing her lips in a kiss. Finally, when her fist hit his shoulder, he let go with a wolfish grin, while she complained, "There are people in the house, Eras!"

"Well, so? I'm kissing my wife. Not having some scandalous affair!" Erasmi shrugged.

Ava giggled at that and shook her head, "Actually, this is the perfect place for having a scandal. The library!"

"Well, then we should do something scandalous," Erasmi said as he quickly followed his words with decisive actions, wrapping his arm around her waist and pulling her close.

Ava chuckled and pulled at him, "All scandals can only happen when these people have left."

Erasmi grimaced but stopped pulling her and instead asked, "So, did you check out the designs that the interior designer suggested for remodelling?"

"Hmm. I did."

Erams raised his eyebrows at her dejected expression, "And? Didn't you like any?"

"Not really. Actually...I think this house is perfect as it is. It has even been modernised to add the new improvements, etc. And still retains that old charm. If you don't really hate it, I don't want to change anything."

Erasmi smiled then and hugged her close," Whatever you like is fine with me."

"You always say that," she murmured, her fingers tracing the lines of his jaw as she stared up at him, wanting to confess her feelings that were only growing stronger by each day.

"Because it's true," Erasmi replied in a steady voice "You make this a home, Ava. Whatever makes you happy makes me happy."

"Then I guess we leave it as it is. Maybe add a few personal touches here and there, but nothing drastic. This place... it's already full of memories and I just know it. I don't want to erase any of them."

Erasmi grinned at that," Well, it does have a lot of memories. Good and bad. And you better be prepared to be recounted the lot of them, when everyone comes over for the dinner."

"I'll look forward to it..." Ava added while Erasmi leaned down to kiss her again. She stopped him this time, with a hand on his lips.

"Erasmi...We decided that we wouldn't have secrets between us, right?"

Eramsı frowned and nodded," Yes."

"So, there is something I need to tell you. I have a secret..."

Erasmi stilled at that. "What do you mean you have a secret."

"Be quiet and just listen."

Suddenly, the atmosphere in the library changed and Erasmi looked at Ava, waiting for her secret. "Erasmi, you said that we were allowed to fall in love. So, I want you to know that I am in love."

Erasmi's heart skipped a beat, and a cold wave of dread washed over him. She was in love? His mind raced, and he couldn't help but wonder who it could be. Was it someone she had met recently? Was she telling him because she wanted to divorce him and marry that ba*tard? He needed to think of a way to get rid of him, fast.

But as Erasmi felt the jealousy and possessiveness take control, he could not think clearly. "Who is he? Who is that man?" he growled.

She blinked, surprised by the raw intensity in his voice. But she couldn't help the small smile that tugged at the corners of her lips. Did that mean that he cared more than being friends for her. She was sure that what she heard was jealousy in his voice.

"Eras," she said softly, lifting a hand to cup his cheek, "it's you. I'm in love with you. I'm in love with you. I wanted you to know that—truly know that—because I don't want any secrets between us. You are the ba*tard I love..."

Erasmi blinked as he watched her smile blossom but before he could grasp the meaning, she winked at him and slipped out of his arms, "I am going to go get rid of those people outside now..."

With that, she raced out of the library, her heart beating fast. She hadn't meant to confess like this. She'd been planning to do it slowly, maybe when they were in bed... But she'd been unable to control her feelings then...

Red in the face, Ava quickly rushed down the stairs, to let the designers know her decision but also to escape Erasmi and whatever he would say to let her down gently.

However, she did not expect him to follow her almost immediately. Even as she spoke to the designer, she could feel him standing behind her, staring at her. And when finally the designer and his team left, she twisted her fingers nervously, wanting to rush out from there as well.

Without turning back, she said, "I just remembered I need to get some groceries..."

But she had not even taken a step when suddenly she was picked up and thrown over a shoulder, making her squeal. With her face hanging close to his bu**, Ava tried to defend herself, "Erasmi! Put me down! You can talk to me normally..."

And the only response she received was a growl, followed by him speaking, "I am not putting you down. What I am going to do is carry you to the library and do something scandalous..."

As they entered the library, he closed the door behind him and quickly brought her down, "I need to make love to the woman I love and the one who loves me back."

Chapter 692: The Bride Arrives

Autumn stood in the middle of the resort, her eyes sweeping over the beautifully decorated surroundings. The place looked stunning, every detail meticulously planned, and she couldn't help but let out a contented sigh. Everything was just so perfect, almost like a dream. As she admired the setting, she caught sight of Jacks heading in the opposite direction. Having spied her target, she hurried after him.

"Jacks!" she called out, quickening her pace to catch up since she knew he would definitely try to escape her again and asked, "When is the couple and their guests arriving? They're supposed to have their rehearsal tonight, right?"

Jacks, who had been focused on something on his phone, paused and turned to face her. His usual sulky expression vanished, replaced by a rare flicker of excitement that she could not understand the reason for. "Forget about the guests for now," he said, "You should come check out the bridal suite with me. The dress just arrived."

Autumn's eyes widened with surprise and delight. "Oh, that's amazing!" she exclaimed, nearly bouncing with excitement. "What's it like? Is it flowy and dreamy, like something out of a fairy tale? Or is it sleek and elegant?"

Jacks laughed, "Aren't you too excited over someone else's wedding?"

Autumn shrugged, "Well, I know I've said this a few times but I'll say this again. This entire wedding event feels like something I would have designed if I was the one getting married. So, on one hand, I want to make sure that every aspect of it is perfect. And on the other, I want to find some flaw so that I might not feel so envious."

"What is there to be envious about? You just ask Gabe to hold such a wedding for you. I am sure he would arrange it."

Autumn rolled her eyes, "Oh please. There is no need for it. I mean, yes it is romantic, but it is... I mean... I think it would be over the top! We are already married so why would we hold a wedding?"

"Because you can? Also, didn't Nora and Demetri also held a wedding?"

"Don't tempt me, Jacks! I do not want to become a bridezilla! And I assure you, if I need to prepare for my wedding, that is what I will be."

Jacks grinned and muttered something under his breath that she did not catch. Meanwhile, as they walked towards the large bridal suite, he quickly typed out the message to inform the 'guests' of the next move.

"Take your eyes out of the phone, Jacks or you will trip over your own feet." Autumn muttered as the man slowed down. She wanted to go and check out the dress of the bride.

Jacks chuckled and, without looking up, reached into his pocket and pulled out a small key. "Here," he said, pressing it into her hand. "The bride just arrived with her team for a fitting check. Go on ahead and open the bridal room for her."

Autumn's heart skipped a beat as she felt the cool metal of the key in her palm. "You mean I get to see the dress first?" she asked in anticipation.

"Yep, but you better hurry," Jacks replied with a wink, finally glancing up from his phone. "She'll be here any minute."

Autumn didn't need any more encouragement. Clutching the key, she turned and practically sprinted down the hall.

Reaching the door to the bridal suite, she stepped inside, walked around the screen. And then froze. Every step she took after that was as if she were in a trance. As she reached the dress, she studied it closely, wondering if she was hallucinating. It had to be that...

How could it be this? And yet, as her eyes traced the delicate pattern of embroidered flowers and vines across the bodice, flowing into more abundant flowers on the skirt she knew in her heart that this was the dress.

The dress that she had wanted for herself when she'd gone with the girls to choose a dress for Ava. It had taken her weeks to get the dress off her mind, when she'd almost planned to go buy it and keep it in storage. And yet, here it was now... For a moment, she forgot that this was someone else's wedding, someone else's dream. In that moment, she was tempted to make it her own.

Just as Autumn's fingers lightly brushed the edge of the gown, she suddenly felt strong arms wrap around her waist. Her heart leapt into her throat, and she instinctively tensed, ready to defend herself. But before she could react, she caught a familiar scent—earthy, warm, and distinctly Gabe's.

"Gabe?" she whispered, her voice a mix of surprise and confusion. "What are you doing here?"

"I came here for you, of course. Come here."

As Gabe caught her hand and they walked back around the screen, her eyes widened even further, making Gabe chuckle. She looked like a little doe when she did this. Before he could tell her anything, the girls all screamed, "Surprise." While she was still surprised, a bottle of champagne was popped open and within a minute, a flute had been pushed into her hand and Nora announced Gabe to make a toast.

Autumn felt as if something was wrong. Why were all the Frosty girls here? And why were the popping champagne? The bride and her entourage were going to come in at any moment...

But then, Gabe made the toast as he raised his glass, "To Autumn becoming the most beautiful bride."

Autumn stood frozen, the words echoing in her ears. The most beautiful bride? She glanced around, her mind racing to catch up with what was happening. The Frosty girls—Nora, Ava, and the rest—were all there, their faces lit with excitement and mischief, as if they had been in on some grand secret.

"Wait a minute," Autumn began, her voice shaky as she looked at Gabe, who was grinning from ear to ear. "What do you mean, 'the most beautiful bride'? The bride's supposed to be arriving any minute—"

"She already has," Nora interrupted, her tone teasing as she took a step closer, clinking her glass against Autumn's. "And she's standing right in front of us. Once we are done with the champagne, we'll check the dress trial..."

Chapter 693: Happy

Soon after the toast, Gabe was pushed out of the room by Nora, "Alright, Gabe Frost, you've had your fun. Out you go now.!"

Ava chimed in, "Shoo! This is a ladies-only zone now. We need to get the bride her trial and then prep for the rehearsal dinner tonight. Come on, out you go."

"But," Even as Gabe tried to protest the rest of the girls joined in, playfully pushing him towards the door. He chuckled, holding his hands up in mock surrender. "Alright, alright, I'm going! Gosh, you girls are worse than a mafia gang."

Once the door was closed, Nora turned to Autumn and grinned, "Okay girl. You can have your breakdown now."

The words were like a release valve for the emotions that had been building inside her. Autumn felt her legs give way as she dropped into the nearest chair. The flute of champagne in her hand trembled, and her vision blurred as tears welled up in her eyes even as laughter escaped her.

"I... I don't even know what to say," Autumn whispered, her voice cracking. "This is all so... overwhelming. I... this is my wedding dress." Autumn waved her hand in the direction of the screen and then her other hand flailed as it pointed towards the window, "That beautifully decorated garden with all its flowers and everything... is MY wedding venue..."

As she said the words 'my', she almost smacked herself in the head with her glass. Hurriedly, Isabella took the glass from her hand while they quickly handed her the tissues," Here..."

Finally, the dam seemed to let loose and she started to cry," "I thought I was planning someone else's wedding, and all this time it was mine... I can't believe he did all this for me"

While Ava knelt beside Autumn, rubbing her back gently as she wept and Evana muted,"Well, technically, Gabe did make you do all the work. I mean, you planned your own wedding without even knowing it. Don't you think it was quite sneaky of him?"

Autumn let out a watery chuckle, nodding her head as she wiped her eyes with the tissue. "Yeah, he did, didn't he?" She laughed through her tears, the absurdity of the situation dawning on her. "He made me plan every little detail... I even stressed over the timings and everything which I would have anyway but this... Do you know how many times I went after Jacks? Almost threatening him if he didn't reveal the couple...I was so envious of the bride...Oh! I was envious of myself..."

The girls all laughed at that and finally the mood was lightened so Isabella said," Okay, that is enough chit chat. Come on girl, wipe those tears, time for you to try on the wedding dress. I just hope it looks as perfect on you as it is supposed to be!"

Finally, having accepted the reality, Autumn squealed happily," I can't believe I'm getting married to Gabe again."

"Well,do you want to change the groom?" Nora asked with a grin as Autumn sent a horrified glance her way and shook her head repeatedly," All I want is Gabe."

"Then get to it, Autumn! Come on! We've got a rehearsal dinner to attend, and I'm pretty sure you'll want to dazzle everyone tonight." Evana added as she pushed her towards the screen.

As Ava stepped behind the screen and changed, Nora spoke up," By the way, did you know this dress originally had buttons and not a zipper? Gabe had them changed."

The girls all oohed at that while Autumn blushed and heard them teasing," Well, that was smart of him...after all, she can get out of the dress faster."

Autumn ignored them and for a moment, could only stare in the mirror. She already looked like a blushing bride with her red cheeks. And the dress... her eyes widened when she saw the small design that had been embroidered into the sleeve...It was their names together...

Isabella peeped around the screen and smiled, "This was also his idea... come on out now."

With Isabella's help, Autumn stepped out and smiled as the room fell silent before everybody let out a collective sigh and moved to shower her with compliments. "Oh, Autumn... you look stunning."

"Oh... this dress is perfect for you!!"

The way it flowed around her as she moved made her want to twirl like a little girl, but instead, she found herself tearing up again.

Isabella wagged a finger at her. "Now, now, no more crying! You'll make your eyes swell before the rehearsal dinner and then end up looking like a panda!"

Autumn chuckled through her tears, dabbing at her eyes with a tissue. "I can't help it. This is all just... so perfect. I never imagined it would be like this."

Evana, standing beside her, grinned mischievously. "With the way you're behaving, Autumn, all these mood swings and water works, one might as well be planning a baby shower instead of a wedding!"

The room erupted in playful laughter, but Autumn's eyes widened at the suggestion, her hand instinctively moving to her stomach. The girls noticed the subtle reaction and exchanged knowing glances.

Nora raised an eyebrow, her grin widening. "Wait a minute... Are you?"

Autumn quickly shook her head, though her cheeks flushed a deep pink. "No, no... I mean, I'm not sure yet. I haven't taken a test or anything, so it's just... not confirmed."

"Really? Yay!" Nora then exchanged a glance with Isabelle as she mouthed the words, "It seems your kid is going to have playmate."

Isabella glared at Nora for her teasing and quickly diverted the attention, "Well, if you are, it's a good thing you're getting married now! Otherwise, you might not have fit into that dress!"

"This is so good! Gabe has a surprise for Autumn and Autumn has a surprise for Gabe.. Hey! We are going to have to be flies on walls when you tell him! He is going to be so happy."

Chapter 694: A Toast

To our future." The six brothers clinked their glasses, the collective sound ringing out like a promise. They sat in Gabe's room, waiting for the women to finish their dress trials before heading to the rehearsal dinner.

Ian leaned back in his chair, a playful smirk tugging at his lips. "Gabe, I don't know what to say about your latest business move. I mean, with all the press coming here tomorrow and the wedding photos set to be splashed across every media outlet, it almost feels like you're orchestrating an advertisement campaign for the resort. Mixing business with pleasure—now that's taking things a bit too far, don't you think?"

Gabe chuckled in amusement, "Hey, don't let Autumn hear you say that" he warned, shaking his head. "This is our wedding and this resort—well, it's our baby. If our special day brings a little fame to the place, we've worked so hard to build, where's the harm in that? It's a win-win, if you ask me."

"There's multi-tasking and then there is this..." Erasmi sighed as he sipped his own glass. But he had to agree.. it was a win win. This place looked like something out of a dream wedding and with the pictures set to be shared tomorrow, it would become the next hottest destination for weddings.

Lucien raised his glass at Gabe and added, "Hey! He's actually hit two targets with one shot. He's made Autumn the happiest woman on Earth and found a way to monetize their wedding vows."

"You know," Seb however, brought out the concerning subject, "you're going to leave this baby behind and move back to the city soon. What then? Who's going to take care of everything here? Is Autumn going to be okay with that?"

Gabe nodded, "Yep. Autumn has already trained her replacement and Jacks is going to be here for another six months. While he finds and trains a replacement for himself here. So, we'll be okay I guess. We need to keep Arabelle away from here."

"Did someone say something to her?" Demetri spoke up, sharply this time. They'd been keeping an eye out for any gossip that might reach Arabelle. And thought; they'd been able to filter it out."

"We can't be on the defensive forever, Demon. And you know that. It is better if she leaves here and comes back only after she has heard the truth from us and no one else. What about you, Lucien Frost? When are you holding the wedding? Yours will be the last of the Frosts of this generation. Its going to have to be a royal affair probably."

Lucien looked down at his glass and shook his head, "We are not holding the wedding celebration."

This time, there was a pin drop silence in the room until finally, Ian asked worriedly, "Did something happen?"

Lucien frowned and shook his head, "If you mean if something happened between Evana and me? Then, no! We are still strong. And Evana and I are going to elope like Ian and Bella. But something did happen on Evana's side... However, we can always discuss that later. For now, this will be the last Frost Wedding of this generation. So, lets enjoy that."

"To the last Frost Wedding celebration of the generation!" Lucien raised his glass in a toast and after a moment's hesitation, everyone raised their glassed and clinked.

For a moment, the entire room remained covered in tension before Ian leaned back and smiled, "You know," turning to face Gabe, "it's kind of iconic how we all thought you'd be the first one of us to get hitched and Demon be the last."

"And it turned out to be the other way round." Erasmi completed the sentence while Seb protested, "Hey! What do you mean Demon would be the last. What about me? I was the eternal bachelor!"

"Nah! You were just the pining lover, the one who was supposed to live in heartbreak until rescued."

"Ahh! And you were sure that Olivia would rescue me so soon?"

"That was soon? The two of you were slower than a turtle."

"Hey! You are the one who is slower than the turtle."

"Oh yes!!"

Before everyone could start an argument, there was a knock on the door as Jacks announced, "The ladies are ready to leave."

Quickly the brothers abandoned their drinks and ambled out, while Demetri gestured to Lucien to throw down. As they walked down the hallway, Demetri questioned Lucien, "Whats up?"

"Evana is going to step down as the crown princess."

"What? Why?"

"Its those politicians, those people are not 'comfortable' with her marrying a businessman."

"What? So? You can just resign." Demetri pointed out.

"Yes. But they are not happy with that as well. According to the opposition, I am the most unsuitable person to marry her. So, they gave her a choice- me or the throne."

"And she chose you? What is wrong with her?" Demetri asked and Lucien punched his arm, "Hey!"

"Okay okay! But if they were so opposed to marriage, then you guys could have just continued to live in sin... and when Evana was pregnant, they would have to allow for marriage or have the baby born out of wedlock."

Lucien rolled his eyes, "What do you think? They didn't think of that. But anyway, they have all been making things difficult for her unanimously. So, Uncle Alexander asked her if she wanted to step down because Isidora was willing to take her place. He'd already asked her apparently."

Demetri frowned at that, "Dora is too young for the throne or to decide if she wants the throne or not!"

"I know. And me and Evana both tried to talk her out of it. But, you know how she can be. Anyway, Uncle Alexander also believes that by the time Isidora is old enough to fall in love, they should have made some adjustments to the laws."

"But it's too big a gamble to take on something that might not turn out the way we expect."

Lucien shrugged, "We can't help it. Their committee has already regressed backwards, and they are soon going to announce that to ascend to the throne, you have to be married to someone from a Royal family only. Barbaric and a loss to us all.. but that is the reality of it."

Chapter 695: A Suitable Candidate

Evana sighed, her eyes lingering on the sight of her little sister playing with Arabelle, Caius and the twin babies. The carefree laughter and joyful shrieks that filled the air were a stark reminder of the innocence that should define Dora's world. This—this was the life a child deserved, filled with happiness and play, not the burden of adult decisions. Yet, Dora was willing to sacrifice everything, this was a thought that filled her with complicated emotions.

"Why the deep frown?" Nora's voice broke through her thoughts, drawing her back to the present. "You've been kind of lost all day. Did something happen between you and Lucy?"

Evana looked up at Nora and grimaced. She needed the advice though she felt ashamed to ask for it. "I... I don't even know where to start."

"From the starting would be good." Nora pointed out, making Evana smile a bit as she began, "I've been asked to step down from the throne."

Nora raised her eyebrows then, "Really? Why? Weren't they all rallying in your favour until recently."

Evana smiled, "Uh huh. That was until they realized that I would not be so easy to handle as they imagined."

"So basically, they are scared for their as*es and have started to view you as the common enemy?"

Evana nodded, "Yep. You got it. You know about the recent bridge tragedy right? They wanted me to cover up the investigation results."

Nora raised her eyebrows, "Did they? But weren't the records made public recently?"

"Uh huh. Someone from my office leaked them. I even punished them by demoting them and sending them to work outside the country in one of our embassy."

Nora chuckled at that. "Ohhh! That must have hurt them."

"Yep, And so they retaliated by pushing me into a corner. And, now I am not being given a chance to fight back because they are attacking me and Lucien."

As Evana explained the entire passing of the new law, and surpassing her and her father's of the same, she could not help but sigh. This move had been unanticipated.

She wondered what Nora would say. Maybe it was better to break off with Lucifer. But even the thought of that, filled her with dread. She might become Queen if they broke up but she would be a dead queen."

"Of course, she'd been looking for ways to circumvent this checkmate but her father's solution was not of much help. She did not want Dora to suffer.

There was a moment of silence as the two sisters stared at Dora before Nora sighed, "I don't think it is a bad option."

Evana was shocked to hear this and whipped her head around to stare at Nora in disbelief, "This is not her fight!"

Nora shook her head and spoke up, "Listen... they are forcing you to step down by passing the law because they think Dora will be easy to manipulate. But she is not and we know it. Also, her temperament is different from yours. You are more pacifying. You would rather sort things out, talk things out. But our Dora is a bit unreasonable. The day she comes into power, those people will be on their knees begging for you."

"But, coming to power, what about her dreams? With you and me, already having abdicated the throne, things are going to be bad for Dora. She will have no one to rescue her, if needed."

"Well, we are not going to be wasting our time until then, are we? You know how to work well behind the scenes, Evana. Do that. So that when Dora takes the throne, she will not have a difficult time."

"But that law...about the marriage has already come into effect..."

"With you stepping down, we will have secured some time for ourselves to find ways to overcome that as well. Don't worry."

Outside, Caius pulled at Dora's hair as she sat outside, staring at the sky, "Why are you sitting here glaring at the moon. Did it do you any harm?"

Dora grimaced and rolled her eyes, "I am not glaring at the moon. I am striking a deal."

Caius sat beside her and questioned, "What deal?"

Isidora rolled her eyes and sighed, "Here's the thing, can you keep a secret?"

"Of course, tell me."

"So, I am going to become the next crown princess of Estania."

"What? Why? What about Evana then?"

"She has to step down due to politics if she wants to marry Lucy."

"Ohh. So are you sad about it? Do you not want to become that?"

"Oh, I want to become that. These people, they have made my sisters miserable all the time. Due to their thirst for power. They think that because I am too young, they might be able to manipulate me. They are so wrong."

Caius rolled his eyes as he heard the determination in her voice, "Oh my! You sound scary."

"I am scary! I am going to make them regret their foolishness. But I am also scared. That is why I am signing this deal with Mr Moon."

"What deal?"

"That he has to send a handsome prince to rescue me, when the time comes. Someone like the Frosts."

Caius chuckled, "Are you still stuck on having someone like a Frost."

"Yep. And I am going to need that more than ever now. I don't want to wind up alone."

"Hmm. Well, I can't be your prince. But I can promise to never leave you alone. And I am Frost. So, why not make a deal with me?"

Isidora glanced at him then, "What deal?"

"I'll come to your rescue whenever you demand it and wherever you demand it. In return.... ummm you will owe me a favour."

Isidora narrowed her eyes at him. "A favour? What kind of a favour?"

Caius shrugged, "I don't know that yet. But since you want a deal, I am offering one."

Isidora cocked her head and narrowed her eyes before nodding, "Okay. I can consider that. But, I have the right to reject it, if I don't see it fit."

"Deal."

Chapter 696: A Proposal

Her Highness Crown Princess Isidora Rosalind Sterling was nothing if not practical. In fact, her friends had sometimes accused her of being too practical, even unemotional. Yet tonight, as she sat alone by the edge of the swimming pool, gazing up at the expanse of stars, she felt a rare wave of pensiveness and helplessness.

She was going to be twenty one soon. Which meant, it was time for her to become the Queen of Estania. She was ready and she knew it. But there were somethings that she needed to do, before doing that. The first thing she wanted to do was fall in love and know heartbreak. Because if she ever did fall in love, it would definitely end in heartbreak.

Even though they'd been able to change many things over time, her father and Evana9 as a minister had been unable to change the law for Royal marriage. All of them knew of course that the ministers believed that this would be the most effective way to control her. But she had no intention of letting them use that.

She smiled and played with the ring in her hand. It was a promisory ring that she'd brought for herself. To remember the promise she'd made to the young Dora. That she would snatch all happiness from the hands of these money grubbing politicians. Unknown to them, while they were focused on her, she had been gathering information about them. Information that would not just bring them to their knees in front of her but keep them there.

Her own thoughts befuddled her. On the one side was her innocent childish side, who still dreamt of her own lover and a happy marriage while the other was the one who had been taught to analyse things and approach everything pragmatically.

Her moment of silence was suddenly broken by the sound of hurried footsteps and noise. She straightened up and stared at the door as a man suddenly burst on to the terrace. Suddenly, there were security personnal blocking the entrance and closing the door as the man walked towards her. Isidora watched as the man hurried towards where she stood, probably not even realising that someone was here other than him.

As he paused to take a breath, Isidora could not help but admire the man's beauty. And he was beautiful, at least by the moonlight. His jaw looked so chiseled, that it might as well have been sculpted and his slightly tousled hair... it made her wonder if he'd been in bed, sleepig soundly before he just jumped up, wore a suit and decided he was going to...the admiration however, disappeared when she realized who the man was...

Prince Kael Ignis. The youngest son of the royal house of Ignis. So, the rumors that she'd been hearing were true. Prince Kael Ignis had been exiled from the small island Petravi. Presumably to study but the consensus was that he was too much of a playboy, had even seduced his own older brother's ex fiancé, which meant that his parents wanted him out of the way, while they searched a wife for the crown prince. One who would not fall for his younger brother's charms.

"Are you staring at me?"

Isidora widened her eyes as she realized that while she'd been shocked by the man's identity, he'd realized that he was not alone. She narrowed her eyes, " Staring? More like glaring. You just ruined my peace with your entrance."

She watched as the man's lips kicked up in a smile and he said, " Aww. I'm sorry." As he said this, he walked closer to her, opening his arms for a casual hug, " Here, let me help you with a hug...Oh my, you are such a beauty..."

Isidora stepped back as the man smiled at her. No wonder he was known as the Pied Piper. He had a killer smile...As she stepped back to escape him, however, she lost her footing and slipped backwards...

Prince Kael reacted quickly with a reflexive dive. His hands caught her by the waist, pulling her back from falling into the water. However, as she flailed about to catch her balance, the ring in her hand, slipped from her grasp, falling into the water with a soft splash.

For a moment, she could only hold onto the man as she flailed about before pulling herself away from the man as she stared into the pool," Oh gosh! Look what have you done! My ring!"

Hurriedly, Dora started to march towards the door determined to get her own security personnel so that she could ask them to bring her ring out. However, her path was blocked by the man," Where are you going?"

"My ring dropped in the water. I need to ask someone to get it."

"No no. You can't go outside."

"Why not?"

"Because.. just because. Wait a minute."

The next moment, Isidora found her senses blocked. Because on her face was the man's suit jacket. As she pulled it down, from her face, the man had already jumped into the water.

Isidora's eyes widened as she realized what had happened and she hurriedly walked back towards the pool. Within a moment, the man jumped out, dripping water all over as he walked towards her. She blinked. Well. There was another reason he was so popular with the girls. The man did not just have a God like face. He even had a God- like body.

He shook out his hair then, and water spraying in all directions should have made him look like a shaggy dog but somehow looked even more attractive. Her heart fluttered as she took in his soaked appearance, the sheer audacity of his actions leaving her impressed.

He reached her side and as she extended her hand for the ring, he knelt down dramatically on one knee, and raised the ring, "Will you do me the honour of giving me your hand?"

Isidora's eyes widened as he caught her fingers and brought them to his lips.

Chapter 697: A Proposal(2)

Isidora blinked, momentarily speechless. The unexpectedness of the situation, combined with this man's allure, had probably left her dumbfounded. At least that was what she told herself had happened when the man brushed her knuckles with his lips and she felt her heart flutter. She managed to find her voice though as she pulled her hand back.

"Well I must say, you're quite bold. You're the first man to propose to me..."

"What? Are all the men here blind?" He asked dramatically, as if horrified on her behalf and she could not help but giggle as she shook her head, "Let me complete my sentence first. The first man to propose to me without even knowing my name."

He put a hand to his heart then and let out a long sigh, "Is your name not Fairy? I was pretty sure you were a fairy queen or something."

Isidora laughed and quickly plucked her ring out of his hand before winking at him as she leaned down and placed a finger under his chin, "Maybe I am, maybe I am not. But you didn't ask. That is such a shame, Prince Kael."

With that, she turned back and walked towards the smaller door on the side, that would lead her into the small emergency stairway instead of the circus that was ongoing outside.

As the door closed behind her, she could hear his voice calling out, "How do you know my name, fairy?"

Isidora giggled and rolled her eyes as she hurried back to her room. Meeting Prince Kael had been quite interesting and that man was charming in an alluring sort of way. But he was a playboy wasn't he? So of course he should be charming. It would be difficult to be a playboy if the guy was not good looking and all that extra schmuzz.

Pushing out thoughts of him, Dora sighed and threw herself tiredly on the bed. Just then, her phone rang and as she glanced at the caller id, she could not help but smile, "What?"

"Well, where are your manners, Princess Isidora Rosaling Sterling?"

Dora giggled and answered, "They drowned."

The man on the other side laughed and she could not help but shake her head, "Do you even know what time it is?"

"It's' nearing midnight, I guess."

"Not here! There! Why are you at the Ungodly hour of five am?"

"Hey! Don't remind me! I have a presentation in two hours. Sigh! Why did I choose to study medicine?"

"Because you are a masochist Cai Frost, who wanted to torture himself."

Cai groaned over the phone, "Hey! You're being too chirpy tonight. What good thing happened?"

Isidora stopped grinning then and raised her eyebrows! Da*n the Frost instinct! Was she supposed to tell him that she was happy because she had just flirted with a handsome man. That would sit well.

"Nothing happened! And I am always chirpy."

"Nope! You are mostly grumpy. Sometimes mildly happy, but never chirpy."

"Shut up, Cai! And get to the point. Don't think that by questioning me, you will make me forget that you probably called me for a reason. Otherwise you would never even think of your poor 'aunt'.

"You are not 'poor'." Cai snorted before continuing, "And how is this fair? If I call you aunt then I'm the bad guy, but if you call yourself my aunt, then it is okay?"

"Because I am me. Anyway, spill."

Cai sighed and answered, "I am going to be off the grid after tonight for a few days. Just... if anyone calls to question you, keep them off my back, will you?"

"Where are you going that you have to hide from Eramsi and Ava?"

"I am not hiding! I'm just going on a time off. Come on! I'll check in with you every day, okay? So you know I am not dead and buried somewhere."

Isidora nodded her head, "Okay, okay. But only for five days. That is it!"

"Thanks Dora! You're the best! Bye, until then! And I'll see you soon."

Isidora shook her head and put down her phone. Maybe one of these days, she'll pull a Cai and disappear for a few days, climbing strange mountains and all. Or whatever it was he did.

Placing the phone on the side, she then closed her eyes and prepared to sleep. Tomorrow was an important day after all. They had a specialist coming in for a lecture. She'd definitely like to attend that. And then, later, their class was going to go for a field trip for the next few days so that was going to be fun as well.

Maybe she would find love on this trip. Though she doubted it. All her 'friends' were actually only her acquaintances who were mostly intimidated by her. She knew they definitely called her Ice Queen behind her back. She wondered what they would have to say when they realized she really was royalty.

With her thoughts a jumble between being called Ice queen and Fairy Queen, Isidora fell asleep amid plans to go find someone to fall in love with. And in the subconsciousness of her mind, a man kneeling on the floor with a ring extended seemed to be the one at the top... His twinkling blue eyes and tousled black hair, making her heart flutter in her sleep.

However, the next morning, the dreams of the night were forgotten as Isidora hurriedly raced towards the seminar auditorium, wanting a front seat. The professor coming in today was apparently a financial genius who'd come up with many fiscal plans to get countries out debt...

Unexpectedly, before she could run into the auditorium, her way was blocked as a figure appeared in front of her. "My fairy queen! You have no idea how much I missed you."

Isidora blinked at the man who was smiling at her, or rather she blinked at the dimple on his cheek, which was attractive before reminding herself, "Nope... This one is not suitable." and she quickly tried to side step him with a murmured, "Excuse me."

However, as she moved, so did he, blocking her away, "I'm not letting you pass until you tell me your name..."

Chapter 698: Not Nice

"Seriously? What do you think you are going to do? Block everyone from going inside?" Dora asked as she gestured with her head towards people who were now waiting for them to empty the doorway.

The man had the gall to smile as he said, "Not everybody. Just you. Everyone else's suffering will be on you. I'm sure you wouldn't want to inconvenience others and if I continue to stand here longer, I think there is a possibility that you would simply tell me your name, getting me out of my misery. Or even if you don't someone else might."

"You are going to blackmail me for my name? That is not very nice."

The man shrugged and winked at her, "I am not very nice. So, your name, my fairy queen?"

Isidora felt her heart flutter at this. No one had ever really flirted with her like this. They would usually back off when she sent them a look. An insidious voice spoke in her head then- to take a risk. She was

going to need to settle down. If she missed her chance for a first love, at least she would not miss the chance for some fun. And she could just be very sure that Prince Kael Ignis would know how to have fun.

"Come on, baby. You know my name." Kaen urged, making puppy eyes at her.

Unable to help herself, she answered, "Dora."

"Dora.. What a cute name..." Kael murmured as he stepped aside, letting her through. She gave him a smile and quickly walked away as she reminded herself that she was not supposed to be tempted. Dar* it! This was definitely Lucien and Evana's bad influence on her. Evana had fallen for the 'not nice' Lucien and reiterated the story to her with that stupid look, and now her head and hormones were playing tricks on her!

Finally, having walked a bit further away, she breathed a sigh of relief, only to almost jump and miss a step as she heard his voice near her ear, "Dora... my dear fiance. Would you go on a date with me?"

Kael gave her a look so surprised that if Dora had been someone else, she would have definitely been convinced that she'd become engaged to him. "Last night. Don't you remember? I knelt before you and you took the ring..."

Dora opened her mouth to protest, then snapped it shut, opened it before closing her mouth again and then opening...

"Dora, sweetheart, you are looking like a little guppy fish."

Dora puffed her cheeks, before blowing out a breath, before glaring at him, "That was my ring."

Kael's face lit up with an exaggerated look of realization. "Ah, I see! So should I order a different ring for you, then?"

Dora rolled her eyes, trying to suppress the smile tugging at her lips. "Absolutely not," she said, turning away from him. She made her way to the front of the room, hoping to put some distance between them. But, as she expected, Kael followed her and sat down right beside her.

She sighed, giving him a pointed look. "Can you please not sit with me?"

Kael grinned, leaning back in his seat as if settling in for the long haul. "I'll move, but only if you agree to go on a date with me this evening."

Dora shook her head, refusing to be swayed. "Not going to happen."

Kael raised an eyebrow undeterred as he answered, "We'll see. So, Dora, what do you.."

Before he could say more, the lights in the auditorium dimmed and those on the stage brightened as Dora shushed the man next to her with a gesture. "The lecture is about to begin."

Throughout the lecture, Dora tried to pay keen attention as the professor on the stage pointed out the various flaws in the plans that the countries who had suffered bankruptcy in the past they had made and how they could have circumvented the situation if they'd had timely help.

However, even as her mind should have been focused on absorbing every word, she could feel the man's gaze on her continuously. It was thoroughly... electrifying. Every part of her was attracted to this man's magnetism.

As the professor paused in the lecture, she leaned sideways, "Will you stop staring at me?"

"Will you say yes?"

"What kind of a blackmailer are you, Prince Kael? Does this suit someone of your stature?"

"Call me Kael."

"No."

"Why do you have to say no to me all the time?"

"Fine. Fine. I will go on a date with you, but on one condition."

"Come on, Dora! Look at me? Do I look like someone you should be setting conditions for? I am temptation incarnate. Why do you want to... Okay okay. My my... you made my heart flutter with that look."

Isidora grimaced. She'd glared at him to make him back off, not so that his heart would 'flutter'

"Okay, then. My Fairy queen. I will wait for you at Lover's Garden Cafe, seven p.m. Sharp. Do't be late."

Dora hurriedly nodded and turned back to listen to the lecture, when that man had finally stopped pestering her. However, even with the man not glaring at her continuously, she found it difficult to concentrate. Prince Kael Ignis was like no man she had ever met—mischievous, persistent, and utterly shameless.

Her heart raced at the thought of the upcoming date, even as she questioned her own sanity for agreeing to it.

When the lecture finally ended, Dora stood up, hoping to slip away unnoticed. But Kael was faster. He stepped in front of her, blocking her path with a playful grin.

She sighed, "Now what? Are you going to blackmail me at every step?"

"Of course not. I just meant to say, goodbye, Dora. I'll see you soon."

She rolled her eyes but couldn't suppress a small smile. "Just don't be late," she quipped, turning on her heel and walking away before he could respond.

Chapter 699: Not Nice

Prince Kael Ignis, leaned back in his seat as he looked at the perfectly set up table. Dora. What a cute girl. She was different from everyone else. That was for sure. He looked at the time and wondered if she

would be late or early. It was still fifteen minutes to seven. If she was early, that would mean she was as interested in him as he was in her. And if she was on time, then she was neutral. If she was late, then she definitely liked him and wanted him to pamper her.

Of course, the thought that she might not like him had never occurred to him. After all, since the day he'd been born, all women had fawned over him, willing to throw themselves at his feet. He smiled. But he liked that she tried to resist him. He knew he had an effect on her. The current between them was almost tangible.

Just then, his attention was caught by a rowdy group of people on the other side of the restaurant. Those people were also university students and a look passed between him and the leader of those boys, as if in challenge. He raised his brow and gave the boy an enigmatic smile...

As the minutes ticked by, Kael's anticipation grew. He pictured her walking through the door, her expression defensive as it usually was.

But as the clock struck seven, and then seven-fifteen, a flicker of doubt crept into his mind. He brushed it aside with a confident smile, she was just playing hard to get. Well, he would pamper her then. He could do that much.

But as seven-thirty came and went, and the waiter discreetly checked in with him, that flicker of doubt grew into something more unsettling. Kael leaned back in his chair and came to a disturbing conclusion. The thought that she might not come had never seriously crossed his mind. After all, who could resist him? But as the reality of the empty seat across from him set in, he couldn't ignore the truth—Dora wasn't coming. He, Prince Kael Ignis of the Royal family had been ghosted.

The realization stung more than he expected and as he stood up, he could feel that group of boys staring at him as he left. Once outside, he clenched his hands. He could find out which apartment in the dorm was her. It would be a piece of cake. And once he went there, he would question her, what she meant by doing this.

And she better have a good reason for not coming. Though the only possible reason he would find excusable if someone near her was hospitalized or if it was a medical emergency. But then, as he got into his car, his temper cooled.

He had to accept that he'd almost coerced her into agreeing to the date. So, he should have maybe expected this for being overbearing. But even as the logical side agreed, the ego that had been bruised and he needed answers...

"You ghosted me!" Dora opened her eyes at the sudden accusation and smiled. She knew it. He would come looking for her. Leisurely, she glanced at the time. It was already eight thirty pm.

"Did I?" Dora asked him as he stood there glaring at her. "I don't think I'd call that ghosting. I just did not pay the ransom you had asked for."

"You could have said no." Keal leaned over Dora, thoroughly irritated that he was standing there all agitated while she continued to lay there on the lounge.

"Could I have? But I wanted to go on a date with you." Dora said, her face the picture of innocence.

Kael blinked. What? She wanted to go on a date with him but then, why didn't she come for it? Why have him wait for so long and then have him come here to the terrace looking for her.

She straightened up then and moved her legs to the other side of the lounge. The entire movement was so graceful that he was distracted for a moment before he realized she was once again walking away from him. With a frown, he followed her and then came to an abrupt stop. There, beside the terrace wall was a table set up. He watched as she lit the candles and invited him to sit, while taking a chair herself.

He remained there frozen and she raised her eyebrow at him, "I thought you wanted a date with me. You have a problem with the venue I've chosen?"

Isabella stared at him and smiled as he shook his head. She liked looking at him all confused. This man was too smooth for her. So, it was better to keep him off balance.

Of course, she hadn't missed their date just so that he would come chasing here. She wanted this man. But he was a royalty. And always happy to play with the media. On the other hand, she had come here on borrowed time. No one here knew about her real identity. She didn't see the need to play with fire and invite trouble by giving someone a chance to click her picture with him.

Also, why did she have to do everything he asked of her?

Kael shook his head, a slow, appreciative smile spreading across his face. He was used to having everything his way, but this, this was something new. He took a deep breath as he finally moved to sit across her.

"I have to say, you've definitely caught me off guard. This is... unexpected, but I think it's a brilliant move. And I like this place. The place where I proposed to you and our first date. So romantic. And private."

Dora looked at him then as she poured some wine and leaned back, "Hmm. I like privacy. I have no intention of going out with you. All your fan girls might attack me. Sorry but I value my life."

Chapter 700: Side Effects of a Date

"Aren't you going to invite me in?" Kael pouted dramatically as he stood at her door staring at her with hopeful eyes.

Isidora smiled and shook her head playfully. "Nope. First date privileges only extend as far as dropping me home," she added with a teasing smile.

"But that means we only climbed down a few flights of steps. That is not satisfactory! I mean it is not even a drive." He exaggerated the statement, crossing his arms as if deeply offended.

Isidora shrugged at that. "Your satisfaction is not my problem," she said with a mocking grin. "Now, I'll be going. Bye. Good night."

Before she could turn away, Kael caught her wrist, pulling her close as he leaned in. "Tell me, do first date privileges not include a goodbye kiss?" His voice was low and suggestive as he stared at her, the hopeful puppy look changing into something more sinful.

Dora felt her heart begin to beat faster at the closeness. She could feel the warmth of his breath on her skin, and it sent a thrill down her spine. These few hours with him had made her realize and accept reality. She was totally enchanted by this guy. He was not just good-looking, but he was also really attentive and had a sense of humor that was as charming as it was disarming, keeping her engaged and leaving her wanting more.

And she did want to kiss him. The thought had been lingering in the back of her mind all evening. She had been thinking about that since she'd seen the way he'd been licking that dessert spoon, his tongue swirling around the sweet treat in a way that had made her pulse quicken.

Raising herself on tiptoes, she quickly pressed her lips to his soft, warm lips for a moment before stepping away. "There. You have your kiss now."

With that, Dora quickly opened her door and slipped inside, closing it in his face. She leaned against the door for a moment, trying to catch her breath and steady her racing heart as she patted her cheeks.

It was when the door closed that Kael's easygoing expression changed to a determined one, his eyes glowing with the light of a challenge. He wanted this woman. In his life. And in his bed.

Pushing his hand into the front pocket of his jeans, he turned around and walked away whistling, knowing that he would have what he wanted very soon. The kiss just now might have been short lived but it was only the first of many. He smiled to himself, confident that this was just the beginning.

Dora was on cloud nine and she had lost her mind. At least, that is what she told herself when she found herself standing in front of the mirror, staring at her reflection as she dried her hair. She looked utterly foolish. She was red in the face and grinning. Probably when she was little and Seb Frost would play with her. How long had she been smiling like this? She hadn't even realized she'd been doing that.

Shaking her head at her own foolishness, she dried her hair, ready for bed. It had been a good day overall. In fact, it had been one of the best days she'd had in a long time.

She had barely lain down on the bed when her phone beeped with an incoming message. She groaned softly, wondering who could be texting her so late.

Lazily, she turned around to check it... and almost dropped it onto her face as she read the message. Her eyes widened as she processed the words on the screen.

What the f...! Who sends an "I miss you" message to a first date not an hour after dropping her off? And that too with a picture of his bed... She could hardly believe what she was seeing. And as if the first sentence of the message wasn't disconcerting enough, he'd even added the cheesy line: "I wish you were here."

Was he wishing she was in his bed? The audacity! The nerve! And yet...What an a**... Dora blinked. Why was she grinning again even as she was feeling angry? And why did her cheeks feel hot? Dammit! She was appalled by her own reaction, but couldn't deny the thrill she felt. She was actually falling for this man's cheesiness.

Hurriedly, she typed back, "Really? Lie down on the bed... and I might come to you."

She waited an entire minute with bated breath, and grinned when she saw his name begin to type... and then sent the rest of the message: "...in your dreams."

Her message was sent at the same time as his arrived, asking if he should come pick her up. She laughed out loud at his persistence and shook her head when, the next minute, he sent a broken-heart emoji in response to her second text. As if he'd have a broken heart with something like this.

After smiling at that for a moment, Dora decisively closed the chat, checked for updates from Cai, and then turned her phone to airplane mode. Time to sleep. She sighed contentedly, feeling a warmth spread through her chest.

However, sleep seemed to elude her as Dora lay on the bed, thinking of the man... Images of his smile, his touch on her wrist, and his voice kept playing in her mind, making it impossible to relax. Was this what was meant by instant attraction?

She'd heard Nora, Evana, and the others talk about how they were attracted to their husbands from the very first time to now. They had always made it sound so magical, so effortless. But she shook her head at the idea of anything long-term. She could not have a love marriage, so thinking about that was out of the question. Nope.

And love, of course, took time to grow and develop, so she knew what she was feeling for Kael was probably lust. She had to be realistic, after all. But knowing herself, she would have to tread carefully to not confuse the two. This was uncharted territory for her, and she couldn't afford to make any mistakes.