

## Benefits 711

### Chapter 711: A Charity Event

Dora looked at the gown she had donned and then turned her head to look at the mannequin on the side. The mannequin who was now wearing her most prized possession, Kael's t-shirt. "Mr Mannequin. What do you think? Will the owner of this t-shirt be shocked tonight when he sees me and realizes my identity?"

Catching the light on her phone, she was almost tempted to call him. Even though he was pouting and throwing a tantrum like a little child, Dora found it difficult to be angry at him. It was just so charming of him. Like a little kid, he messaged her each day and found the silliest reasons to visit her before marching away.

First it was the blankets and the tshirt. Then it was because apparently all the butter flavoured popcorns in the markets had gone out of stock and the only left over packet was in her pantry. The third night it had been under the guise of protection where a crazed prisoner had escaped the prison and was now on the loose and would directly come there to attack her.

And yesterday was because he'd left his socks here in her room. Socks that he had purposely hidden in the couch just for that reason. Tonight, of course, she knew he wouldn't come. He'd already messaged her saying that he was going to be busy tonight. Of course he was. He had to attend the charity function.

With a sigh, she turned on the phone and her heart fluttered at the home screen. He'd even done this. Changed her homescreen from a picture of herself to a picture of him and her, sitting right here, looking like chipmunks with their faces stuffed with popcorn.

She tapped the nose of his picture and shook her head, "Okay okay. I am going to let you win. Tomorrow, at the annual ball, I will announce to everyone that you are my boyfriend and I like you."

Dora sighed. She could barely believe that she'd fallen for him so soon. It had not even been a month and yet, she was willing to compromise and take risks for him? It reminded her of what she'd once asked Evana. That if she'd known about Lucien's earlier intentions, would she still have gone to him. Her answer had been a resounding yes. So, she, Isidora Sterling, had also gone her older sister's route and fallen for the good 'bad' boy.

She giggled at that. It really was true. Kael was the 'bad' boy, his reputation much like Lucien's. And yet, just like him, once he'd found the person he liked, he's chosen to not look around anymore.

"Alright, prince Kael Ignis. Let's see how you handle this bomb that I am about to drop on you."

With one last look, Dora walked out of her room.

Outside the venue, Dora turned to look at Tasha and questioned, "Has the Prince of Petrovia arrived?"

Tasha raised an eyebrow, "You seem particularly interested in the prince. Is there something..."

Dora rolled her eyes and thanked the lord that her makeup would be hiding her natural blush and said, "I just don't want to be too early."

Tasha nodded, "Okay okay. I won't tease you. Yes. He has arrived, just a few minutes ago."

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Inside, Dora cast a look around the room and sighed. An hour. It had been an hour since she'd come here and had yet to catch sight of Kael. She was almost tempted to call Tasha and ask her if the man was still here or had left.

"You seem to be looking for someone, Princess Isidora."

Dora smiled at the sound of his voice and quickly turned around with a big grin on her face. Had he not recognized her? But the grin quickly evaporated as she met the eyes of the man standing before her. She blinked as the man extended his hand, introducing himself, "It is an honor to meet you. I am Rafael of Petrovia. I hope I am not interrupting your evening."

"Not at all, Prince Rafael," she replied smoothly, trying to maintain her composure and hide her disappointment. "It's a pleasure to meet you. I was actually looking for someone, but it seems I've found an equally intriguing person."

Dam\* it! Why didn't she think to ask which Prince of Petrovia did they mean. But who could have imagined that Crown Prince Rafael would be the one attending the event instead of Prince Kael.

Before she could find an excuse to slip away, however, Isidora spotted the organisers of the event making a beeline for them. Her heart sank.

As expected, the organiser quickly caught upto them and asked, " Princess Isidora, Prince Rafael. I am sorry to interrupt. But we were hoping that the two of you would do us the honor of opening the dance. Seeing you two together, we couldn't let this moment pass. She shot a look at Prince Rafael, hoping against hope that the man would refuse but of course he didn't. Instead, he extended his hand once again, " May I, Princess?"

"Of course. It would be an honor."

As they stepped onto the dance floor, Rafael gave Dora a roguish grin and said, "Princess Isidora, I must apologize in advance. I've been told my dance moves are so enchanting, they might just make the entire ballroom forget to breathe. I hope you're ready for that kind of attention."

Isidora looked up in surprise before giggling. It seemed prince Rafael and Kael did not just almost look the same. They also had the same sense of humour.

"I suppose I should thank you for letting me brace myself. But I wonder what you will do when you realize that every eye is on me."

Rafael chuckled and shook his head, " Well, I don't have to worry about that. Because, I know for sure that my eyes are going to be only on you..."

Isidora shook her head and as he twirled her around wondered if they had the princes take special flirting classes in Petrovia. They were experts!

#### Chapter 712: Admiring

Rafael glanced at Isidora as he sipped his drink, his thoughts momentarily drifting. She was an intriguing woman, and as he had expected, more than worthy of being a queen. There was something about her—a captivating blend of beauty and brains—that he found himself admiring more than he intended to. Her

allure was undeniable, almost magnetic, and he found himself drawn to it in a way he hadn't anticipated. It wasn't just her looks, though they were certainly striking; it was the way she carried herself, the confidence that radiated from her. She wasn't shy about sharing her opinions or even too diplomatic as was the habit of those in politics, and that only added to her appeal.

He'd spent the entire evening by her side, fully aware that he should be mingling with the others, engaging in the usual pleasantries. But no matter how much he told himself to move on, to circulate through the room, he simply couldn't tear himself away from her. It was a little embarrassing, really, how she seemed to have this effect on him. He almost didn't want the evening to end, a thought that caught him off guard.

As they talked, her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm. "The advancements in cybersecurity have been the challenge," she said, "with every step forward, the threats have evolved too.

Rafael could not help but agree. While the threats around their borders were visible, the threat on the internet were real and yet not visible. They could not guess who and what would be a threat, demanding constant vigilance and research and development. He could not help but agree, "You're right. It's a never-ending battle. But it's not just about the technology; it's about the people behind it. A single weak link can compromise an entire system."

"Exactly. And it's not just the big players we have to worry about anymore. Even small-time hackers have caused massive disruptions if they find the right vulnerability. That's why I believe in a proactive approach—building a culture of security awareness from the ground up. And getting those old coots on the council to understand that is like banging my head against the wall! If it were up to them we would be..."

She paused then and he couldn't help but grin and complete her sentence, "If it were up to those old coots, we would be living in the stone age. Isn't that what you were about to say?" Isidora nodded but then leaned forward, "But you said this okay, not me! So if you ever claim that I said this, I will refuse.

Rafael laughed, "Of course, Princess Isidora! I dare not allude to you saying something like this. But... let me tell you a secret." He leaned forward, as if telling her a secret, and spoke, "I had the exact same argument recently with my father. On the one hand those people claim that they want us to take our nations into the new era. But on the other, the object to change, guarding the old ways like dragons guarding their gold. And it is truly amazing that we share the same views. I never expected you, or anyone, to have such an in-depth knowledge about this. It is truly amazing."

"Princess Isidora, I think our nations should have a chance of working together in the future with us at the hem."

Dora raised her glass then, silently agreeing, "To future cooperation and the exciting possibilities it holds!"

Rafael clinked his glass against hers, smiling. "To future cooperation," he echoed.

Dora actually felt happy as she agreed to work together in the future. If she and Kael were going to make this official, then of course there was a much greater chance of them being together.

As Dora sipped her drink, she paused. And if... what she was starting to feel towards Kael was about to turn real, they might get even closely linked in terms of family. Thinking of this, she placed her glass back on the table and said, "You can just call me Dora. My friends call me that. We can skip the formalities when we are not in public.

Rafael chuckled, leaning in slightly. "Well, only if you call me Rafe. And actually, I'd rather call you Isis.<sup>1</sup> You're a Goddess in your own right, not just a gift from her."

Dora giggled at this. "You know the meaning of my name?"

"Of course. What kind of a Prince would I be if I didn't know about the Royal lineage and future rulers..."

"What if you make a political guffaw?" Rafael and Dora intoned together, laughing, as Dora exclaimed, "It seems our studies have also been the same. Isis, huh? Hmm. I don't find the name as objectionable as being called Issy or something like that... But my boyfriend might not appreciate you calling me a Goddess."

Rafael's eyes widened in surprise. "You have a boyfriend?" The revelation caught him off guard, while also making him feel a twinge of regret. She was already taken...

"Not officially, yet. But soon. I think I am going to propose to him."

"You're going to propose to him? What kind of a weak a\*\* boyfriend is this?"

Dora laughed as she thought that Rafael was calling his own brother a weak a\*\*. "Oh he is not weak. Its just that, I've been hiding him from the world and he feels like a dirty mistress- his words not mine. So, he wants me to claim him in front of the world."

"Well, it sounds like he's a lucky man. And I suppose, if he feels like a dirty secret, proposing is a strong way to claim him. So, when are you planning to do this?"

"Tomorrow."

Rafael widened his eyes, "Tomorrow? So soon? Well then, I wish you all the best, Isis. I hope once he feels secure, he can treat you like the Goddess you are."

Dora laughed at that. "Thank you, Rafe. I will make sure to pass on your message to him. And now, I need to go before my assistant has a panic attack since I've been sitting here all evening... See you soon."

Rafe nodded and stood up, watching her leave. Sigh. Some men were born with all the luck in the world.

meaning of Isidora: gift from Goddess Isis.. so he is referring to this when he says he'd rather call her Isis the goddess

#### Chapter 713: Dilemma

Kael stared at the message on his phone and sighed, a swirl of emotions churning inside him. This was new territory for him. When it came to family, he had always believed in an eye for an eye. Dora had hurt Kit, used him, so she deserved whatever was coming her way. Whatever he dished out.

But now, after spending so much time with her, Kael couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't adding up. According to Kit, Dora had drained every bit of his allowance on shopping sprees and fancy outings, all without even knowing who he really was and his connection to the Royal house of Ignis.

Yet, when she'd met him, she'd recognized him instantly. But instead of using that knowledge to her advantage, she hadn't tried to exploit him at all. In fact, this one month was the easiest dating experience he'd had. She was not clingy, not predictable and being with her was almost restful.

That didn't make sense. Women like her—gold diggers—they were always scheming, always looking for the bigger payout. Maybe she thought she could get more out of him if she played her cards right. Was that why she had insisted on staying out of the media's spotlight? To pretend she wasn't interested in all the fame and fortune that came from being with him?

And maybe, just maybe it had worked. Because now that his plan was almost successful and she had agreed to come to him in the evening and confess in front of everyone, he was having doubts.

Kael leaned back in his chair, running a hand through his hair as he tried to make sense of it all. His plan had been so straightforward at the beginning—lure Dora in, let her think she had won the affections of a Prince, and then expose her in front of everyone. She'd humiliate herself, and Kit would finally have his revenge. It was supposed to be simple. But nothing about this situation felt simple anymore.

The more he thought about it, the more his doubts gnawed at him. He couldn't ignore the fact that Dora hadn't acted like the typical gold digger he'd expected. She wasn't constantly asking for gifts or making demands. In fact, she seemed content with the little things, the quiet moments they shared. He had never imagined that he would enjoy those moments as much as he did, but he had.

And that was the crux of the matter! He was falling for her. He, the one whom no one had been able to get a second glance from was falling for a known gold digger. He must be crazy, he thought as he doubted his own brain.

Rebelling against the family was one thing, but being foolish was another. What was wrong with him?

Standing up, he stared to pace as he read her message and then threw it aside. It was better if he stopped thinking altogether. Anyway, once Kit's revenge was done, he would pursue her for the physical relationship, make it clear that she could only be his mistress and nothing else. Once she agreed, then he would shower her with all the gifts, money and jewels, she could think of.

As if enlightened, he then realized his problem and suddenly stopped the pacing.

All these doubts were nothing more than a result of his own frustration. He had spent weeks with Dora, growing closer to her, but he had kept things strictly aboveboard, resisting any temptation to take things further. He was overthinking because he hadn't yet scratched the itch, so to speak.

He was confusing genuine feelings with physical desire. Once he had her in his bed, under him, all this confusion would disappear. He would see her for what she really was—another conquest, another woman who could be bought and kept at arm's length. He had done it before, countless times, and there was no reason why Dora should be any different.

He wasn't falling for her. He couldn't be. It was just lust, plain and simple, muddling his judgment because he hadn't acted on it. That was the only explanation that made sense. Once he had her, he would regain control.

Satisfied with his conclusion, he stood up to get ready. A few hours and then everything would come to an end. Tomorrow, he would be free to have her. She would be his, but only on his terms. And once she understood that, everything would go back to how it should be. No more doubts, no more second-guessing, no more silly games of pretending to be cute and missing her or taking her blankets and what not.

Reaching for his phone again, Kael switched it back on and sent a quick message to Kit: Everything's in place. Tonight, will be the end of it. He smiled to himself as he hit send. Yes, tonight would be the end of his doubts—and the beginning of Dora's real education in how the world worked.

As he walked towards the shower, lost in his own thoughts, he failed to check the latest news on his phone. If he had, he would have seen the headline flashing on the screen: "Royal Romance? Princess Isidora and Prince Rafael Spotted Together, Sparking Rumors!" And maybe pictures of the girl he thought to be a gold digger, talking with his brother easily.

But it wasn't meant to be for soon after his shower, he left his hotel, determined not to rethink everything.

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Kael could barely move his eyes from the door. Despite the many people almost fluttering about, wanting to gain his attention, he was only focused on one person: Dora, who had yet to make an

appearance. He was tempted to check his phone for the hundredth time. Had she chickened out of confessing her feelings for him?

Did she think that she could gain more by leaving him waiting. His eyes hardened. He was not one to play games. On the off chance that he lost today's bet and she did not come here, he would abandon her without a backward glance. He could tolerate games but only to a limit.

Just then, she made an entrance and his breath caught...

#### Chapter 714: A Game

"If you break my trust, I'll break your heart." Dora winked at Kael with a playful glint in her eyes, before turning around to face the inside as she stood in a circle of girls. The music blared through the speakers, a mix of bass and beats that rattled the walls of the college dorm and she moved lightly to the music, feeling on cloud nine.

Dora grinned as she turned back once more, and saw Kael's eyes fixed on the back of her dress. Of the lack of it. Though the butterflies in her stomach were on the rise. For when she had chosen this daring dress, she had not thought to participate in this game!

The game was simple—at least in theory. When the music stopped, the girls, standing in a circle would lean back, trusting the guys behind them to catch them before they hit the floor. A game of trust, they called it, but it felt like more than that. But she was thrilled for he had volunteered to stand there behind her. She had no wish to feel someone's hands on her.

She trusted him well enough to know he wouldn't let her fall, but the thrill of uncertainty made her pulse quicken. Today, everything seemed to be a thrill for her. She'd already spoken to the DJ about coming onto the stage for a special announcement.

But there was something even better planned back in her room. Tonight, she was not just going to make everything official publicly. But she planned to take a step further. All these days, they'd been flirting on the edge of taking their relationship to the next step. It was now time to take it further.

From this moment on, there would be no turning back. She was going to have an official boyfriend and if things failed to work out in the future... she shook her head. Nope. Not thinking of the future. She was going to live in the moment. In this moment with Kael.

The music cut off suddenly, and for a heartbeat, the room was filled with nothing but the sound of everyone's collective breaths. Dora took a deep breath as she let herself fall backward, trusting completely in Kael to catch her.

The world seemed to slow down as she fell and for a moment, a wayward thought made her question what she would do if he broke her trust. But then, just as she knew he would, Kael's hands caught her. She could feel the warmth of his palms against the bare skin at the edge of her dress on her waist, the touch sending a shiver down her spine.

For a moment, she stayed there, suspended in his grasp, acutely aware of the way his fingers brushed against her, making her heart race.

"You okay?" Kael's voice was low near her ears and when she looked up, their eyes met.

"Perfect," she whispered back with a hint of a smile. Okay was an understatement. She was ecstatic. Over the moon. He helped her push herself upright and she felt the lingering heat of his touch even after she stepped forward, making her bounce in anticipation.

Around them, some of the girls laughed as they found themselves either on the floor or still standing, hesitant to trust, thus being disqualified from the game while the others cheered or booed for them.

Once again, she swayed to the music and as she looked at him, she knew this time, he was planning something. She could see the mischief in his eyes. As the music stopped, she let herself fall back again and felt her heart thud when she realized his plan. This time, his hands had slipped under her dress and were now spread possessively on her hips as he held her. He pinched her lightly and her eyes widened as she straightened.

Around them, there was a loud cheer and Dora looked around in wonder. It seemed they were the only ones who had succeeded in this round... as the other girls had either fallen or remained standing.

The cheers around them grew louder, and Dora found herself grinning despite the flush creeping up her cheeks. Kael's hands lingered on her hips for just a second longer before he let go with a wink.

"Looks like we have our winners!" The MC's voice boomed through the speakers, drawing everyone's attention to the center of the room. "Give it up for Dora and Kael! The ones with the unbroken trust!"

As everyone cheered, the MC continued, "Alright, everyone," the MC continued, "we're going to take a short break to set up for the next round of games. But don't go anywhere! The DJ is about to drop some beats, so hit the dance floor and show us your moves! Also, later we have a special performance by our very own winner," Dora Sterling! So, until then, lets' go!"

Dora felt Kael's hand slip into hers, pulling her gently toward the crowd.

"Come on," he said, his voice barely audible over the music. "Let's dance."

She didn't need to be asked twice. Dora followed him, their fingers still intertwined and as he pulled her into him, she looked up into his eyes. However, her smile evapoprated when she saw his grim face. "We just won a game. So, why are you making a face as if someone harmed your favourite pet?"

Kael looked down into her shining eyes and felt a tug of that guilt. Almost angry at her for making him feel it, he bit out, " Why are you so trusting? Do you not have a shred of self preservation. How could you throw yourself backward without any regard for your own safety. What if I didn't catch you? What if I was distracted?"

Dora's smile faded, replaced by a look of confusion as she stared up at Kael. His words felt like a bucket of cold water and she could not help but feel... she didn't know what that felt like. But she looked up into his eyes, "There's no 'what if' when it comes to trust, Kael. Either you trust someone, or you don't. And the other person keeps it or breaks it. No place for an in between."

#### Chapter 715: Trust

Kael watched Dora walk up the stage, his heart pounding in his chest. He felt a surge of panic, almost like the ground was giving way beneath him. His mind raced, cursing himself for being such a coward. He wanted nothing more than to bolt from the scene. But, forcing his feet to stay rooted, he waited as Kit joined him, a smirk playing on his lips.

"I can't believe this," Kit said, eyes twinkling with amusement. "You really do have charm, Kael! I mean, she's actually going to confess to you in front of the entire crowd? Amazing."

"I don't want her to confess." Kael suddenly muttered.

Kael's confession seemed to ignite something in Kit. His eyes narrowed, and his playful smirk morphed into a scowl. "What do you mean, you don't want her to confess?" Kit's voice was low, barely controlled. "Isn't that what you planned all along? Why are you wanting to back out now?"

When Kael remained quiet, Kit's eyes narrowed, "Are you having second thoughts now? It is too late to back out now, Kael. Don't even think of it! I can't believe you've fallen for her charm too! How could you be so weak. I always thought you were stronger than this!"

Kael stepped forward, his resolve hardening. He had to stop Dora. There was something deeply unsettling about the whole situation, and he couldn't shake the feeling that he was about to make a monumental mistake. But he'd barely taken a step when Kit's hand on his arm stopped him, "You can't do this! You can't back away now! I won't let you."

Kael moved his hand away, "Stop it, Kit! I'll have Dora apologize to you for the hurt she caused but this might just be..."

As he moved toward the stage, Dora's voice suddenly filled the room. The first notes of her song were soft, almost tentative, but as she continued, her voice grew stronger, more assured. Kael turned to look at her then. She was singing a love song. She was confessing her feelings through a song.

He felt his heart stabilise. Yes. This was perfect. She could do her confession through a song. That way, he would not have to accept or reject her confession in public. They could later talk in private.

Kael watched as Dora's song drew to a close, and tried once again to walk to the stage. The crowd erupted into applause, the sound echoing all over but Kael barely registered it. His gaze was locked on Dora, who stood at the center of the stage, her face a mixture of relief and apprehension as she looked for him in the dark sea of crowd.

Kit's voice cut through the applause, dripping with contempt. "This isn't a confession, Kael. She's making a fool out of you. You're going to lose this bet, Kael."

Kael's anger flared, and he turned to glare at Kit. "The stupid bet is off," he said through clenched teeth. "I'm done with this. I'm going to stop her."

Kit's hand shot out, grabbing Kael's arm and holding him back. "Stay put," he growled. "You're not going anywhere until you deal with this. If you make a move now, you'll be responsible for what happens to me."

"Kit! What do you mean?"

"It means that I have been waiting for this moment! To watch her make a fool of herself. And if you stop her, I will kill myself! And you know I can do that. So, choose Kael. You want to spare her the humiliation or spare my life."

With that, Kael took off his hand from Kael's arm and stepped away, as if inviting him to go ahead and stop Dora.

On the stage, Dora tried to look for Kael, hoping that he was roughly standing in the same place as he had been. But the glare of the spot light on her, made it impossible to see the crowd.

She clutched the mike in her hand, the butterflies in her stomach having somehow morphed into elephants who were not stomping around. She'd spoken countless times in front of crowds double this size, but tonight was different..

She cleared her throat and began, "I sang this song for someone special to me," her eyes scanned the crowd as she spoke. Finally, a roving spotlight had come on. She wanted to see his expression when she spoke so she was thankful to the light man as she continued. "I wanted to tell him how much he means to me and how much I care."

"I never imagined I'd be the one standing up here like this," she said with a small, nervous laugh. "Honestly, I thought I'd be the one receiving it instead of doing the other way round. It's kind of funny how things turn out."

She glanced around as the crowd cheered and shook her head, "But you know what? I wouldn't trade this moment for anything. I'm more than happy to let go of those silly things and just be real with you. I'd rather be here, being honest and genuine, than stuck in my fantasies."

Just as she said this, the spotlight stopped on Kael and her heart beat fastened. Even the lightman had guessed him correctly. Seeing him, she breathed in and spoke up, "I..."

However, before she could make the confession, she watched Kael take several steps back and frowned in confusion. "I love..."

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Kael turned around before she could confess. He couldn't do this. As he turned, he pushed into someone but kept going, hoping that she would stop and understand this for the rejection it was...

But she pressed on, like he knew she would, "I love you Kae..."

His steps slowed down and the world seemed to stop for him. Kael clenched his hands, unwilling to turn around. Soon, the entire place turned silent. It was happening. Something he had carefully planned was now happening as Kael heard the whispers begin...Starting today, he would remember this moment as the biggest mistake of his life.

#### Chapter 716: Humiliation

Kael turned around, hardened his heart. It didn't matter. It was only a matter of tonight. Dora was strong and could endure this. Let Kit win this time and feel satisfied. Tomorrow, he would convince Dora to be his again.

Even as Kael assured himself that Dora was his and they would be over this tomorrow, something inside him clenched. His eyes met Dora's, even across the distance of a room, he could see that she knew his intentions now. His eyes hardened at the vulnerability there. He could not show her regret. No. He raised his chin and gave her a look, as if blaming her for her own foolishness.

The whispers around the room seemed to get louder by the second as everyone waited with bated breath. Was she really confessing to Prince Kael Ignis? Suddenly, the whispers grew louder, a buzz of excitement and malice rippling through the crowd as they sensed blood in the water.

"Well, this is certainly a bold move," someone whispered while their companion snickered, "Do you think she actually believes she stands a chance with him? The poor dear must be delusional."

Another one, a man with a sneering smile, chuckled darkly. "Or desperate. Either way, this is going to be quite the spectacle. Just because he played a game with her, she seems to think that she can confess."

"Is she really going to do it and continue standing there?" another voice whispered, this one laced with disbelief and amusement. "She's going to make a fool of herself in front of everyone. How pathetic."

Kael clenched his jaw, forcing himself to remain still. This was necessary. But, he realized with a jolt. Why was she only standing there. Why had she stopped her confession? He frowned. She hadn't even taken his name and...

Even though barely a minute had passed, but to him it felt like ages. He didn't want her to confess. He wanted her to spare herself the humiliation. But a part of him suddenly wanted her to say the words. He needed to hear them..

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Dora took a deep breath, trying to steady herself, but the realization hit her like a cold wave. She had been betrayed. Kael's hardened gaze, the whispers echoing through the room—everything suddenly made sense. He was letting this happen. No. He wanted it to happen. Everything that the message had said was true.

Her heart clenched, but she refused to let the pain show. Not here. Not now.

The knowledge cut deep, but she swallowed it down, forcing herself to stay composed.

Seeing her hesitation, the emcee stepped forward, his voice filled with an almost gleeful anticipation. "It seems our lovely Dora has something important to say. Please, do share with us. Come on everyone cheer for Dora!"

For a moment, she remained still, her heart pounding in her chest, letting everyone cheer. What a hoax! They were all cheering her because they wanted to watch a good show. Her eyes narrowed and a breathtaking smile appeared over her lips as she looked into his eyes.

And then, deliberately, she turned her gaze away from Kael, severing the connection between them. Without another word, she stepped down from the podium, her movements graceful and sure. The crowd parted for her, a mix of confusion and curiosity washing over them.

"I think," Dora said, her voice clear and strong as she walked, "that I'm going to go to that person as soon as I say the words, so I might as well get off the stage."

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As he watched her walk towards him, his heart pounded. He could see it in her eyes that she knew everything and yet, she was walking towards him. Was she still going to?

And then she stopped, a few steps away. He could feel the tension in the air, a tight coil that threatened to snap at any moment.

She was going to do it. She was going to confess. Then she spoke, and her words struck him like a blow to the chest.

"I like you, Cai. I missed you so much. Welcome back."

He frowned and shook his head. She had mispronounced his name? And what did she mean by welcome back... And then, as he watched her cover the distance between them, his body went rigid. He must have misheard. His heart raced as she drew closer, and he found himself almost ready to spread his arms, to pull her into him, to tell her that he did like her.

Before he could react, however, Dora's pace quickened, and with a burst of speed, she all but ran the remaining steps. But she didn't run into his arms.

In fact, she bypassed him entirely, her eyes never once meeting his. He turned around sharply to see a man standing right behind him and watched as Dora jumped into his embrace and the man caught her. He heard the whispered words, "Dora! I had no idea you missed me so much. You're trembling all over, baby."

Dora's voice, soft but clear, reached his ears. "Cai, take me home, please."

Kael's chest tightened with a suffocating mix of anger and confusion. He had been so certain that Dora was walking toward him, that she was going to confess to him. But now, she was trembling in another man's embrace. Who was this? His eyes narrowed as he met the man's gaze over Dora.

As Dora continued to hug the man, the emcee's broke out in a loud cheer, encouraging the others, "Well. This is what we call a surprise and the best welcome! Everyone, welcome Caius Frost!"

Loud cheers echoed through the entire hall while Kael frowned. Caius Frost? Who was this person?

His question was answered by the emcee, "For all of you who have been living under a rock, Caius Frost is one of our most distinguished alumni with several awards to his name and several legendary stories, yes girls you remember his nickname, I'm sure...Give it up for the Steamy Frost... Doctor Caius Frost!"

#### Chapter 717: Heartbreak

Caius stirred the hot chocolate and placed it in front of Dora, who sat staring blankly at a distant corner of her room.

Sigh! This was not what he had expected when he had raced over here. At most, he thought she might be troubled about something minor. But it seemed she had just experienced the biggest heartbreak ever. When she ran to him, he had been amused by the enthusiastic welcome, but when he found her trembling all over, he had been more than shocked.

Dora was not someone who would tremble easily. Even as a kid, there had never been anything that could have scared her. So what could have made her declare that she liked him and welcome him back.

He'd found the answer after he'd looked up though. The answer, or rather, the man had been standing right there, glaring at them with what looked like pure rage. He'd almost seemed ready to tear him apart.

But even now, he could only worry about Dora as she had yet to say a word since her request to take her home.

Gently, he ran a hand over her head and asked, "Come on, drink this kiddo." He could see that she was in shock. And beneath that, she was hurt. Just for that hurt that the guy had put there, Caius was tempted to go and have a one on one with him. He'd like to see who won that. But, first, he needed to know what exactly had happened.

Did the man need to be only hit and a few warnings or did he need to get his scalpel out...

Seeing her sit unmoving, Caius clicked his fingers in front of Dora's face, finally catching her attention. She blinked, as if waking from a trance, and looked up at him. Her eyes were red and he knew even now she was trying to hold back her tears.

He picked up the hot chocolate and gently placed it in her hands guiding them to wrap around the warm cup, like one would give to a child, hoping the heat would bring her some comfort. Then, he sat down beside her, "What happened, Dora?" he asked softly, trying to coax her into speaking.

But she didn't say a word. Instead, she pointed weakly to her phone lying on the table. Caius frowned but reached for it, bypassing the lock screen with ease. He didn't have to look for anything as the message was right there for him to see.

Caius clenched his jaw, feeling a surge of anger rising within him as his hands on the phone tightened. That bas\*ard! Even the scalpel was too kind for him! He should use a hammer!

"This..." He stood up. Right away. He would find that man right away and... Before he could march out, Dora held his hand and shook her head, tugging at his wrist.

With a sigh, he sat next to her and calmed his anger, "Is everything true?"

Finally, Dora looked at him, her tears silently flowing down her cheeks, "Unfortunately, yes. You saw the proof, didn't you?"

"I was standing there, all vulnerable, ready to expose myself and he was there, unmoving wanting me to finish speaking so that he could win his bet."

"But you received this message before going on that stage, Dora. You received it in the morning. Why would you do something like this knowing that you'd been betrayed?" Caius asked in confusion. He could see that the message had been sent in the morning. So she'd known it and...

Dora chuckled smearing, "Because I didn't want to believe it! I wanted to give my love a chance. It was all about trust wasn't it? I wanted to trust him so badly that I refused to look at the truth that was staring at me so openly!"

Caius cursed again, not knowing what else to do. How was he supposed to call her stupid when this was the first time she had done something like this.

Before he could say more, anyway, the cup slipped from her hand and she flinched. Hurriedly, Caius grabbed a towel and soothed, scolding, "what is wrong with you? Have you gone into self-destructive mode. Go and change out of the dress so that I can check your wound."

Obediently, Dora stood up and moved to go to the bedroom. Caius watched as she retreated to her room, her shoulders slumped, her steps almost robotic. He let out a heavy sigh, his chest tightening with a mixture of frustration and helplessness. He wished he could do more—say the right thing, offer the right comfort—but all he could do was clean up the mess.

As he wiped up the spilled hot chocolate, his mind raced with thoughts of what to say to her. How could he console her when she was clearly so much in shock? He knew the usual platitudes wouldn't work. Dora wasn't the type to be easily comforted by empty words.

She needed something real, something that would help her process what had happened, but Caius felt at a loss.

Just as he finished cleaning up, the doorbell rang, startling him from his thoughts.

Caius's eyes widened in shock, and a surge of anger coursed through him, when he opened the door. As his hands balled into fists, he had to forcibly control the urge to pound this man into the ground! He actually had the audacity to come here after what he had done!

"You!" Caius spat, his voice low and dangerous. "What the hell are you doing here?"

Kael Ignis seemed to be just as shocked as he stared back. "I am here to see Dora!"

"I doubt she wants to see you." Caius bit out. Just one punch! Just one for now, a little voice inside him insisted.

Kael tried to step into the room but Caius simply blocked the way. As the two men stared each other down, Dora walked out, calling Cai in a sweet voice, "Cai. Is this okay?"

Both the men turned to stare at Dora.

Chapter 718: What The

"Cai, is this okay for..."

Both men turned to Dora, Cai giving her a quick once-over before nodding indifferently. But Kael? He looked as though he was about to blow a fuse. "What are you wearing?"

Cai's eyebrow arched, and he turned back to Dora, really looking at her this time. His eyes narrowed slightly before a faint smile tugged at his lips. Ah, so the real Dora was back. She'd purposely asked him about her choice of clothing, knowing he wouldn't even pay attention to something of that sort as long as he could apply the ointment with ease. And yet, here she was standing in satiny nightwear, looking for all the world ready to seduce...

Cai rolled his eyes as he looked at Kael Ignis. Good thing he'd held back on punching the man. Now he could get a front row seat to watch Dora as she tortured him.

Taking his cue, he snapped his fingers in front of Kael's face, breaking the man's stare. "She's wearing something comfortable, Kael. You know, the kind of thing people wear before bed. Now, if you've satisfied your curiosity, we're calling it a night."

Cai moved to close the door, but Kael pushed his way in, striding over to Dora with a determined look as he stopped in front of her and questioned her, "What is going on? Who is this man?"

Treating him as if he was invisible, Dora turned away, but her wrist was caught by Kael, who pulled her back, "Answer me!"

The temperature seemed to fall then as Dora finally looked into Kael's eyes, letting his see the ice there that he had put. "I don't know who you think you are, but I don't recognize you. And frankly, you have no right to question me." She tried to pull her hand free after that, but Kael's hold was firm, causing her to jerk her wrist out of his grasp with a sharp twist.

As he finally let go of her hand, Dora felt her facade break. The moment you turned your back on me when I was on that stage, you became a stranger. So, stay one, Kael Ignis. You're not even going to become an acquaintance."

Without waiting for his response, she spun on her heel and headed toward her bedroom, not willing to expose herself more to him. However, she wanted to hurt him. Hurt his ego. Before disappearing behind the door, she glanced back at Cai. "Cai, I'm feeling tired. Come to my room once you've taken out the trash."

Cai almost had to bite his lip as Kael whipped around to stare at him after Dora said that. With great difficulty, Cai kept a straight face and extended his arm, opening the door wider, "Mr Trash. Would you walk out on your own or do I really have to throw you out?"

Kael's patience finally snapped as he grappled with the meaning of Dora's words. She was going to sleep with this man? After she had almost confessed her liking to him. The thought of her kissing this man and him touching her, had Kael ready to commit murder!

With a growl, he lunged at Cai, grabbing him by the collar and slamming him against the door. "Who the hell do you think you are?" he snarled, his face inches from Cai's, eyes blazing with fury. "You stay away from her! Do you hear me? If you so much as touch a hair on her I will..."

Calmly, Cai reached up and coolly pried the man's hand from his collar. "The name's Cai Frost," he said evenly, as if he was introducing himself at a casual gathering. "And as for staying away from Dora... Well,

that seems a bit difficult considering I've just been summoned. And who would refuse something like that from a beauty like her?"

He deliberately glanced over at the closed door, a smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. Kael's eyes narrowed and just as he was about to punch the man for real, the man moved faster than him.

With a swift, fluid motion, Cai sidestepped and spun Kael around, pressing him up against the door. The sudden shift left Kael momentarily disoriented, his breath hitching as Cai's grip pinned him in place, his arm pressing on his neck.

Leaning in close, Cai's voice dropped to a low, dangerous tone. "You should be thankful, Prince Kael Ignis. Thankful that Dora hasn't cried over you. Because if she had shed even a single tear..." His eyes bore into Kael's, filled with a cold, quiet menace. "...you wouldn't be standing here right now but buried deep under the earth."

Kael pushed back against Cai with all his strength, as he tried to break free from Cai's hold. For a moment, he found himself nearly immobilized, Cai's strength and control almost overpowering him. But Kael was determined as well, and with a burst of strength, he managed to force Cai back a step. The two stood there glaring at each other, knowing they were equally matched in their standoff.

Breathing heavily, Kael's eyes were locked onto Cai's, as he growled, "Stay away from her. Dora belongs to me only.

"Dora," he said calmly, with a hint of a mocking smile, the aggression disappearing as suddenly as it had come, "doesn't belong to anyone but herself. You can claim whatever you like, Prince Kael, but until the day she decides to say she belongs to someone, I won't believe a word of it. So, you can fight it out with me. But I don't think it would bring you any brownie points with her. After all, you are already in her bad books."

That gave him a pause as he realized Cai Frost really did have the upper hand in this matter. He didn't know what kind of relationship Cai had with Dora. And yet, as he stepped back, he could not help but think back to the way Dora had run to him, clinging to this man as he'd held her close.

And even now, she had been wearing those clothes and invited him into her room...

He glared at Cai with a mixture of rage and frustration, but he didn't move to attack again. Instead, he spoke through gritted teeth, "This isn't over, Frost."

"No, it isn't," Cai agreed, his tone almost conversational. "But you should think long and hard about what your next move is going to be. Because the next time, I won't be as gentle."

#### Chapter 719: What is Wrong With You?

As Cai entered the room after a brief knock, he grimaced. "At least you had the sense to put it under cool water. How's your thigh? Let me see the burn."

Without another word after that moved closer to inspect the wound while bringing out his first aid kit. He donned gloves and then applied the medicine while shaking his head and muttering, "Its a good thing that I cooled it a bit before giving it to you. Or you would have burnt yourself. At least now, its only a little burn. It will trouble you for a few days and then it will be fine."

Dora, on the other hand, paid no attention to his muttering and watched him intently, her eyes lingering on the finger marks on his neck. "Did he hurt you?", she asked tentatively.

Cai looked up then and instead of answering her question, told her "Given that he almost became my uncle, I decided to let it slide and didn't hurt him."

"I wasn't asking about him. And what uncle! He never could be your..." Cai gave her a look that had her shutting up in the lie. She had been thinking long term with Kael.

"Well, you meant to ask. But right now, you are angry at him and therefore won't ask about him. But you are also worried, so you are trying to get information about him."

Dora frowned and looked away. "I don't care about him."

"Of course you don't."

Dora glared at him and said, "You know I hate it when you're sarcastic."

"Well, the situation demands sarcasm. Dora Sterling, you came out dressed like this just because you wanted to make him jealous that you were letting another man stay with you like this. And then you purposely let him think that you were inviting me into your bedroom. What was all that about if not to rebel against him and wishing to hurt him because he hurt you. If it had been my girlfriend appearing like that, I'd have gone all caveman on her, and you know it."

"Because you would have loved her, Cai. But Kael Ignis did what he did because of that stupid bet."

Cai shook his head and this time did not say anything. He'd seen at a glance what that idiotic man was feeling. Things might have started out on a bet but he'd fallen as much as Dora if not more. However, he did need to be taught a lesson. If today, Dora had really been humiliated, then things would have affected her differently. Not just personally but also the political repercussion would have been greater. Kael did not know that but even so, it was wrong and he needed to be punished for it.

As for Dora, she needed to decide when and if she wanted to forgive him. So, for now, he would be here to take care of her, while enjoying this unexpected vacation. With the ointment applied, he stood up and walked to the small cupboard by the side, "I am going to be going outside and sleeping."

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Meanwhile Kael was pacing his hotel room like a caged animal as he waited for the result of the investigation into Caius Frost. Not for a minute had he been able to forget the way she had looked at that man. And it wasn't enough that his brain kept supplying him that image. It had taken on even more imagination and suddenly every moment that he'd shared with Dora seemed to have been taken over by her and him.

Even now, he was thinking of what they were probably doing in her bedroom. Who was that man, damn it!

Just then, he received an email and he quickly moved to check. He needed to find a way to get rid of this man from Dora's life. And then he would make sure that he never returned.

However, his heart sank when he realized that things were not going to be as simple. Caius Frost was the heir apparent of the Frost empire. The oldest child. But that was not enough. No! That man was some kind of a genius in the medical field and was even now doing deep research in neurobiology.

He'd graduated early from this university, just when Dora had enrolled it seemed and left behind him stories of wild se\* parties. But how did Dora know him? Did they meet during one of those wild parties? Was Dora one of his many lovers? But she seemed to hold that man in high regard.

But then he came across something that made him pause. He had been asked to recommend a student to take his place when he left the college. That student had been Dora... So he knew her before coming to this place. And she had followed him here. Dora had followed Cai...

The real shock came, however, when Kael saw series of images shared from Cai's from social media. They were candid photos of him and Dora together, from different locations and different times and captions. It seemed they spent almost every vacation together as well.

Each photo seemed to reinforce the closeness between them, making him feel green with jealousy! Why did she date him when she was already in a relationship with another man. Why pretend to have fallen for him when she was with that Cai?

The jealousy gave way to a sudden hatred. Kit was right. She really liked to toy with the feelings of men. She enjoyed having them admire her and then break their hearts. Unexpectedly, he too had fallen a victim to her viles.

He clenched his jaw, his fingers gripping the edge of his chair as he stared at the screen. The bitterness of betrayal settled over him. Forgotten were his own feelings of guilt, in that moment, with the pictures in his face, he only knew one thing. He needed to expose Dora's real face in front of everyone. And he would do it!

#### Chapter 720: Admiration

"Prince Kael Ignis." As the butler announced his name into the room, Kael shook his head and entered the study, muttering under his breath about the absurdity of being introduced to his own brother. The formality was simply too much.

Rafael watched his younger brother enter the room, observing how Kael threw himself into a chair with all the grace of a petulant four-year-old. Grinning, Rafael said, "Well, well. Someone finally made the time to come see his older brother, hmm?"

Kael scowled at the teasing tone, firing back, "If someone hadn't come to the city without informing anyone, then his brother wouldn't have been too busy to see him earlier."

Rafael's grin widened at that. "Ha. I won't argue with you today because I'm just too happy."

That made Kael frown even more, and he glared at his older brother. "What has you so chippy so early in the morning?"

Rafael raised an eyebrow, countering, "Well, what has you so salty so early in the morning?"

The brothers locked eyes, and then, in unison, they answered—"a woman."

Kael shook his head, raising an eyebrow in surprise. "A woman put that big smile on your face? Wow! This is interesting. So tell me, did you finally find yourself a girlfriend?"

Rafael shook his head and sighed. "If only I could ask her to be my girlfriend. But she..." His voice trailed off, a wistful look crossing his features. Kael's interest was piqued, and he leaned forward slightly.

"Rafael Ignis... this is interesting. The Crown Prince of Petrovia is in love," Kael teased.

"Shut up. It's not love. I just... I think I've found someone who is easy to talk to and truly interesting. But... she's out of my league..."

Kael coughed, struggling to suppress a grin. "She's out of your league? Holy shi\* Rafe! What is she that she is unattainable to you? The CROWN PRINCE?"

Rage shook his head, "Just someone I met. And don't say those words as if they are something esteemed. In fact, being the crown prince might just be the biggest hurdle I encounter in pursuit her."

"So, you are finally going to come down from your high horse and pursue a girl?"

"Shut up, Kael. I won't be discussing these matters with you. I am more interested in how you have woman troubles. Aren't you like the eternal flame attracting the girls like moths, willing to burn around you?"

Kael's mood plummeted as he was reminded of Dora and he muttered, "Just someone who is making me feel things I don't like to feel."

Rafe lifted his brows then and looked at his younger brother carefully, "Has my baby brother fallen for someone as well?"

"If I feel for her, then I would be the biggest fool! She is a playgirl!"

Rafe laughed at that as he leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms. "Oh, the irony. The infamous Prince Kael, Petrovia's most eligible bachelor, after me that is, is finally getting a taste of his own medicine? The same Kael who's left a trail of broken hearts across the continents? This is rich."

Kael shot him a dark look, but Rafael wasn't deterred. "So, let me get this straight," Rafael continued, a smirk playing on his lips. "You, who's known for wooing women like it's a sport, are upset because this playgirl—" he made air quotes with his fingers, "—has turned the tables on you? That's poetic justice if I've ever heard it."

"Don't start with that," Kael grumbled, slumping further into his chair. "She's different, okay? Or at least I thought she was different. Actually, at first, I thought she wasn't much different from other gold diggers, then I thought she wasn't. But then...I can't explain it."

"Different or not different, huh?" Rafael leaned forward, his curiosity piqued. "She really has confused you. I've never seen you like this and never would have imagined that a girl who could send you spinning would even exist. So, what is it? She's not falling for your usual charm? Or is it something more than that? Maybe she's the one playing you, and you're not used to being on the losing side."

Kael stared at Rafael, his eyes darkening with frustration. The silence stretched on for a moment, and Rafael's smirk slowly faded, replaced by a look of genuine surprise.

"She really played you, didn't she?" Rafael asked, incredulity lacing his voice. It was more of a statement than a question, and Kael's tense posture was all the confirmation he needed.

Kael sighed and explained the entire matter starting from how Kit had asked him to help teach her a lesson to how he had approached her and then wooed her to then being dumped for someone else. And how she had been playing him, etc.

So she had you wrapped around her finger the whole time, while you thought you were the one in control. That's... wow, Kael. I never thought I'd see the day when a woman could outplay you like that. I need to meet her."

"Why would you want to meet her?"

"Because she was not just able to ours smart you but still has you tied up in knots. I never would have expected something like this from you, Kae?"

"What do you mean?"

"From the first to the last, you have made assumptions about her without trying to find the truth about her. And when your instinct is trying to warn you about it, you are overriding it because somehow your heart is involved. So, of course, I am going to look for this girl and go meet her..."

Keal stilled as he realized something that he had failed to until now. Could it be that he had been wrong from the beginning and all this was nothing but a vast confusion. Was that why he was so confused? Because his heart was saying one thing and his brain another?

Rafael knocked his knuckles on the table, catching Kael's attention as he said, "You really need some sense knocked into your head? What are you still thinking?"

Keal looked up at his brother, "Okay okay. The wise Prince. I know what to do. I have to be objective. First separate facts from feelings and then come to a conclusion."

Rafael grinned and nodded, "Good answer. Now, can you leave and we can meet for dinner tonight. I have an important meeting."

"An important meeting? Who is so important that you're even kicking me out."

"Its official business."

Kael scoffed, "Official business? Or is it the girl you like?"

Rafael rolled his eyes, "It is not Isis. It is someone else. Someone who has been avoiding meeting us or anyone else for that matter because he doesn't want to be involved in politics."

"Isis? Is that her name? Interesting. Tell me more about her..."

Rafael grimaced but could not help his smile as he looked at his brother. With his chin on his hand, Rafael answered, "She is beautiful. Stunningly so. Her eyes are always shining and she is full of life. But she also has a sense of humour. And she can be sarcastic and blunt but knows how to put people at ease and not cross the line. Also, she is really smart. Her vision of the future is clear and outstanding. And she has a strong sense of justice, knowing and being able to distinguish right from wrong with ease."

"Holy he\*\*! You really are smitten with her." Kael murmured as he heard Rafael wax poetic about the woman.

"Wow! I would like to meet this paragon. Are you sure she is not existing only in your imagination and that is why she is 'out of your league'?"

Rafael shook his head, "She is unattainable, because she already has a boyfriend. She is loyal to him. When I flirted with her, she didn't flirt back. Though she handled it with ease, she slipped in casually about her boyfriend...tactfully reminding me that I should not cross the line."

"She is taken?" Kael asked, feeling for his brother. The first time, his brother truly admired someone and the girl was already taken.

Just then, the butler knocked on the door and announced, "Your Highness. Your next appointment is here."

Rafael looked up, his smile shifting to one of mild anticipation. "Excellent. Please bring him in."

Turning back to Kael, Rafael added, "You're welcome to sit in on this meeting if you'd like. It might be quite interesting."

Kael was about to decline, but before he could respond, the butler entered once more and announced, "Dr. Caius Frost is here."

The name had him stilling and his head whipped around as the man walked inside. He stood up, glaring at the man who entered. What was he doing here? This was the guest he was waiting for?

Caius Frost seemed to sense the hostility and as his eyes met Kael's the atmosphere in the room suddenly shifted. Rafael looked between the two, and frowned.