

Benefits 741

Chapter 741: Out of Hand

"Break up with Cai?" Dora repeated slowly, shaking her head as she tried to gather her thoughts. She opened her mouth to explain, but Kael cut her off before she could utter a word.

"Just hear me out before you disagree," Kael said, his tone more urgent now. He paused, taking a deep breath before continuing, "You and I—we're perfect for each other. Think about it. We have the same likes, the same dislikes. We understand each other better than anyone else. You know that. You enjoy spending time with me. And I love being around you. And let's be real—we're so physically drawn to each other we can barely keep our hands off one another. I was your first, Dora. That means something. You've known Cai since you were kids, but you've never crossed that line with him. Isn't that telling? On some level, you must know you're not meant to be with him."

"Cai is my best friend, and..."

Kael didn't let her finish. "I can be your best friend too," he interjected, his voice softer now, almost pleading. "Just give me a chance, Dora. I can be everything you need. Everything. Just don't be with him. Don't throw this away."

Her heart raced, pounding in her chest as the weight of his words sank in. He hadn't said he loved her, not once. No "I love you," no promises of a future filled with care. And yet she felt his words to her soul. But, she reminded herself. All this began because of something else. And that something else was still unresolved. How could he claim that he liked to spend time with her when his reason for spending that time with her was because of his bet and plan.

She pulled her hands from his, "You're right, Kael. You can be everything but can you be the person who never hurt me? Who didn't break my trust? Who didn't think for a moment before leaving me on that stage to embarrass herself? Put yourself in my position, Kael. Know my place in my country. I was willing to bet all that and more for you. And what did you do? In fact, what can you do?"

Kael bowed his head then. He'd made a mistake, yet. But he had never apologized for it. Even now, in his heart, he'd felt justified to not apologize because... because he believed that she'd had Cai with her. In fact, not once had he tried to make up for his mistake...

Kael's shoulders slumped, his head still bowed as Dora's words hit him with the force of everything he had tried to avoid. His usual confidence wavered as the realization of his mistake, one he had never fully acknowledged, began to settle in.

"Dora," Kael said quietly, "I know I hurt you. I know I didn't apologize when I should have. But I...would you believe me when I say that I never meant to?"

Kael opened his mouth to explain everything, how Kit had mislead him, how the boy had even tried to threaten him with killing himself if he did not let things continue, but as he looked into her eyes, he knew that all of those were mere excuses.

With a deep breath, he looked into her eyes then and spoke softly, "Dora, I'm sorry. I know I should've apologized a long time ago. I know that nothing I say can take away what I did. I'll spend the rest of my life trying to make it up to you, even if it takes that long to regain your trust. I'll do whatever it takes. Just... don't shut me out. Please. Lets' start over?"

Kael bowed his head then, already preparing himself for whatever punishment she decided to give him. After all, he'd already made his decision to make it upto her. If he had to jump through hoops to satisfy her, then so be it.

"Okay," she said simply.

Kael's head jerked up, his eyes wide with disbelief. "O-Okay?" he stammered, unsure if he had heard her right.

Dora nodded, a teasing smile playing on her lips now. "Yes, okay. I'm willing to forgive you. But..." She raised a finger, her voice firm but light, "you're on probation. You'll have to earn back my trust, Kael. Every single day, until I'm sure I can trust you completely."

Kael nodded as he looked at her with shining eyes. Leaning over, he quickly stood up and kissed her thoroughly, making her laugh.

However as Kael stepped back and promised her that she would never regret it, Dora stopped him, "Kael... About Cai."

Kael paused and looked away. Maybe he would have to learn to live with jealousy. What right did he have to ask her to give up on the man who'd stood by her when she'd been hurt by him.

Pouting a little, he looked down at the joined hands and nodded, "Look, I feel crazy jealous of his closeness with you. But I understand I do not have the right to ask you to give him up. Can you just... can you just promise that you won't date him as long as we are together.

Dora laughed and shook her head, "Let me talk, you big doofus!" Kael blinked. Well she was laughing that was good. But was she laughing at him? As he blinked at her, she held his face and said, "I cannot break off my relationship with Cai. Never. Okay?"

The jealous monster inside him raised its head again but Kael had to forcefully suppress it as he looked at her and nodded, "I understand."

"You understand nothing! I cannot break off with Cai because he is family! Caius Frost is my nephew..."

"Huh?" Kael blinked at the words, understanding them and yet not understanding them.

So, Isidora giggled and shook her head, "I am his Aunt. Okay? His grandfather and my father were half-brothers...He calls me aunt and addresses my father as his grandfather."

Chapter 742: The Meeting

"What are you doing here?" Rafe asked, looking up from his diary to find Dr. Caius standing there, his assistant lingering just behind him.

"What do you mean, 'What am I doing here?' We had a meeting, didn't we? Or have you forgotten already?" Caius replied impatiently as he walked into the office.

Rafe nodded slowly. "I remember, but Dora's not coming."

Caius gave a knowing smile. "I'm well aware. Your brother practically kidnapped her from the orphanage."

Rafe's brows shot up. "Kidnapped? Really?"

Caius rolled her eyes in exasperation. "Yes, really. Anyway, Dora or not, we can still proceed. For now, let's just change the agenda of today's meeting. Instead of the cooperation, I want to talk about someone." Caius paused. "I've found the perfect candidate for my first surgery here in Petrovia."

Rafe widened his eyes. That was quick. They'd only started building up the institution and he was already gathering patients? He knew the Frosts were efficient but this was too much efficiency...

Carefully, he nodded, "Okay but... it is going to take time to build the centre here... so, what are your plans? Why don't you look happy with finding a patient?"

Caius shook his head, his expression darkening. "It's more complicated than just waiting for the centre to start running. In fact," he paused, studying Rafe intently, "I need your help."

Rafe frowned. "My help? With what, exactly? Arranging for the surgery in some other hospital? I can try that but..."

Caius let out a heavy sigh, and shook his head, hesitating before speaking again. "The patient is an eleven-year-old girl from the orphanage. She's suffering from a rare genetic mutation. It's caused her brain to stop developing, and over time, it will begin to affect other vital functions. The doctors... they've already told her to start preparing for the end."

Rafe's breath hitched at the weight of Caius' words. "That's... horrible."

"It is. But I believe there's still hope. I've been studying cases like hers, and while it's experimental, I think I can help her."

Rafe nodded slowly, still processing. "You want to operate on her?"

"Eventually, yes. Immediately, no! Though she needs treatment as soon as possible, because it has been found relatively early, I think I can control the gene mutation and counter it's effects with medicine. But going further, I would need to study the genes of her biological parents...

Rafe felt a growing pit in his stomach. "What exactly do you need me to do?"

"You're the closest thing she has to an advocate right now. If I'm going to move forward, I need you to speak with the orphanage, and let them know that you approve of the surgery and medication... Without their approval, I can't do anything. And without the immediate medicinal treatment and surgery... she doesn't have much time."

"You're asking me to convince them to let you perform an experimental procedure on a child?"

Caius nodded. "Yes. I need your help to save her."

Rafe sat back in his chair, rubbing a hand over his face as he processed the weight of what Caius was asking. This wasn't just about medicine or surgery; this was a political and ethical minefield. The girl was a ward of the state—which meant there would be protocols, laws. The orphanage wasn't just going to hand her over for an experimental treatment, no matter how dire the situation might be.

"Wow. You don't ask for much, do you?" Rafe murmured painfully.

"I know it's complicated. But what choice do we have? If we wait, she'll die. The political mess won't matter when she's gone, Your Hughness"

Rafe exhaled slowly, glancing out of the window as his thoughts churned. There were too many factors at play: the potential backlash from the government, the orphanage trustees, the medical board overseeing experimental procedures. If anything went wrong, it could damage not only the reputation of the institute they were building, but also his family's standing.

"Caius, we can't just force this through. If something goes wrong, the repercussions could be enormous. I'll be dragged into legal battles, the press will have a field day, and the orphanage might never trust us with another child again. I have to be careful."

Caius sighed, his shoulders stiffening. "I know all of that, Rafe. Hence I have come to you. The medicine can be administered without raising any alarm bells. That would take about six months. During that time, if you can find the biological parents then we might have a better chance."

"Alright, I think we can do that. Are you sure the medicines you've developed do not have any sort of side effects?"

"Yes.. But you have to remember—we're on borrowed time here. Without intervention, she'll deteriorate rapidly. The medicine can buy us that time. And once we have her parents' genetic information, I can tailor the surgery to give her a real shot."

"If I agree, we'll have to tread carefully. I'll reach out to the orphanage, but I won't give them false hope. We need to be transparent about what we're doing, even if it's risky."

Caius's expression softened slightly, a rare moment of gratitude showing through his usual intensity. "That's all I'm asking for—for you to help me get her the chance she deserves."

As Caius left the office, satisfied with his reassurance, Rafe could not help but sigh. If only he could be as relaxed as the man. But he knew the minefield that he'd just agreed upon and its possible repercussions. And so, he would need to take pre-emptive measures...

Quickly, he dialed a number and as a voice answered, he spoke quietly into the phone, "You will receive the details of a girl. Help me locate her biological parents. I want the answers at the soonest. You understand?"

The next call was to the orphanage to talk to them.

However, as the two people made the required arrangements for a little girl, neither could have imagined that their search for the child's parents might end up raising a storm in everyone's life.

Chapter 743: Someone important

"You really think it's going to be easy for you to be my boyfriend?" Dora asked, her eyes glinting with amusement as she glanced at Kael from the passenger seat.

Kael shot her a look, rolling his eyes while keeping one hand steady on the steering wheel. "I've already met Minister Sterling and your mother. I'm pretty sure they like me. After all, they did approve my dating you, didn't they? And I convince you, most importantly. So, I'm pretty sure the others are going to be a walk in the park."

Dora snorted, "My mama and papa are the easiest people to get the approval from. What you need is the approval of the rest of the family. As far as Demetri and Nora are concerned, you might get Nora's approval because she is a romantic and her approval is Demetri's approval.. But the rest... Let me warn you, that's only the tip of the iceberg. Very soon, you will have the chance to meet Evana, Isabella, Olivia, Ava and Autumn. And then you will question your entire existence."

Kael raised an eyebrow at that. He knew the names of the women. They were all Frosts, and powerful in their own rights. "You mean I don't have to worry about the Frosts but their wives."

"No. You have to worry about pleasing them all." Dora answered sweetly, making Kael almost feel scared.

"Are you really trying to scare me from your family? That is not a tactic I expected from you."

"Hah! I am not trying to scare you but warn you so that you are prepared. But, I can see that you're not nervous at all. But you will be. According to Cai, any and all of them are going to be here anytime.

"Wait," Kael's voice tightened with surprise and sudden trepidation, "all of them?"

Dora nodded with a wicked grin. "Mm-hmm. All of them. At once."

Kael blinked, staring straight ahead as if his future was flashing before his eyes. He could already picture the intense scrutiny. It was almost like the time he was being assessed by his master to become the crown prince...

"So," he said slowly, trying to sound nonchalant, "what happens if they don't like me? Will you break up with me?"

Dora leaned back again, gazing out the window as if considering her answer carefully. Then she shrugged casually. "I won't break up with you. But, you know, them not liking you is not a problem for me." As Kael breathed a sigh of relief at her answer, she continued, "No big deal. They'll just make your life miserable until you break up with me."

Kael gave her a sideways glance, unsure if she was joking or not. "That's comforting," he muttered dryly.

Dora laughed again, patting his arm. "Don't worry, Kael. You've got a little time to prepare... before they completely destroy you."

"Great," he mumbled, rubbing the back of his neck nervously. "Just what I needed to hear."

Dora laughed at that and shook her head, "Relax. You just need to be yourself and take care of me. As long as they see your sincerity, they will not bother you. So, tell me about your Master."

"Are you not scared of meeting him? He is an important person in my life." Kael asked. Even though he pretended nonchalance, it was important to him that the people in Dora's life do not have a problem with him.

"We have been out on one official date and you are already taking me to see him, isn't that a bit too soon? The media will have a field day." Dora asked casually. She was nervous but of course there was no need to show it and let him gloat.

"The media won't be an issue. Master lives a completely secluded life, far from the public eye. Only a few trusted servants are around to take care of him, and they're fiercely loyal. No one outside his circle knows much about him. And trust me, no paparazzi would dare try to invade his privacy."

Dora frowned, "Why's that? I mean, if he's so important, why wouldn't the media be all over this? A recluse like that should be even more of a target for them."

Kael glanced at her with expression serious now. "Because anyone who has tried to poke around in his business has quickly found themselves at the end of their career. He may prefer seclusion, but that doesn't mean he lacks power. In fact, his influence runs deep, and he makes sure his privacy is respected. The media learned that the hard way."

"So, he just... shuts them down? How?"

"Connections," Kael replied with a shrug, though her tone suggested it was anything but casual. "He's tied to powerful people in the right places and I don't mean us in Petrovia or even the Royal family... And after a past incident in his family, he became even more guarded. Anyone who crosses him regrets it."

"Nice. Now I am even more interested in meeting him. He sounds my kind of a person. So, what have you told him about me?"

Kael shot her a glance, "Nothing."

"Nothing? What do you mean nothing? You must have told him something about me when you told him you were bringing him to meet me."

"Nah. I didn't tell him I Was bringing someone along."

Dora sent him a sharp glance then as she tried to read his expression to see if he was joking. But he didn't look to be joking...

"Are you saying you are going to surprise him with my presence? No no! Kael, what is wrong with you? Turn around, right now! I am not going there without a prior appointment."

Kael laughed and shook his head, "Relax! I was just teasing you. I haven't told him anything about you but he knows. When I called him to say I wanted him to meet someone, he said he would be waiting for you. YOU, okay? Not me..."

Chapter 744: Master

As Kael slowed down the car and came to a stop outside the old mansion, Dora could only shake her head at the beauty. It was so beautiful carved, it looked as if it were the part of a the mountain.

She stepped out and Kael shot her a look, "Ready, ma'am?"

Dora raised an eyebrow, her heart racing despite her outward calm. "I don't think you can ever really be ready for something like this."

"Relax.. He doesn't eat humans on Mondays." Kael assured her to which Dora rolled her eyes and pointed out, "That is good to know but today is not Monday. So does that mean I am going to served for dinner?"

"I don't mind a serving of you for dessert... And of course, I don't share...", he whispered close to her ear, making her blush.

"Of all the places to make a dirty joke, you choose to do it outside your master's home?" she hissed at him.

Kael shrugged, "It's the taboo." Dora rolled her eyes and then as she turned to enter the door that had just been opened by a servant, she paused and stared feeling a chill pass through her.

"Is that really his family motto?"

Kael looked up at that and grimaced. He'd almost forgotten it. He read the words, " 'We forgive nothing. We forget nothing.' Yep. It is his family motto. And he does take the words seriously, okay?"

Dora rolled her eyes. "No wonder you wanted to go all out to punish me for what you presumed to be cheating Kit... Its the training."

"I'm just glad that- that is not your family motto."

"Welcome, Your Highness Princess Isidora and Prince Kael. The Lord is waiting for you in the parlour."

They stopped in front of a large set of double doors. The servant knocked once before pushing them open with a slow, deliberate motion.

Dora almost rolled her eyes again. So much formality. The house and the formality almost made her feel as if she'd been transported into some historical era. And she could feel the change in Kael's demeanor. He suddenly seemed to have become stiffer, any playfulness evaporating from him. The change in him, made her feel a bit cold. It reminded her of the night when he'd stared at her and... she shook her head. No need to remember the past.

For now, she took note from his stance and straightened her own features. She was a princess after all.

"Master," the servant announced, bowing his head slightly, "Prince Kael and Princess Isidora are here."

The man raised his head, his sharp, piercing eyes locking on Dora first. He said nothing for a moment, just studied her with an intensity that should have unnerved her. But she was used to it. She simply let the man stare and returned the stare. Well he could look at her then so could she... And as she stood there, she had the weirdest thought. Somehow, she'd expected the man to dress as a military man or something... But he looked like Professor Dumbledore1... just in modern dressing...

As she stared back at him, the corner of the man's lips raised a bit and he smiled, "Forgive me Princess for I have a bad back and cannot curtsy to you."

Dora blinked, surprised by the man's unexpected warmth, especially after his intense stare. His smile seemed genuine, even if his eyes held something much sharper beneath.

"There's no need for formalities, my Lord," she replied, stepping forward. "You're older than me, and I'd prefer we keep things comfortable." She gave a small, genuine smile, her earlier stiffness melting away as she added, "Besides, we're the only ones here, right?"

The man's smile widened just a fraction, as if her words had entertained him. "Comfortable," he mused, leaning back slightly in his chair. "You remind me of your sister in looks but she was more diplomatic while you have the tendency to speak plainly."

"I'll take that as a compliment.", Isidora said though she wasn't sure he meant it as such...

"It was meant as one. Please sit. Kael, you too."

Kael smiled and as he pulled the chair for Dora, asked his master, "I thought you didn't see me."

"I would rather not have seen you, bra*! My hair is all grey because of you."

"Master lies. Its because you are ancient..."

The older man laughed at that and shook his head, "You've become audacious, hmm? Don't forget, just because your lover is here, doesn't mean I will overlook your naughtiness."

Kael shrugged while Dora almost blushed at being called his 'lover.' That was such a... ridiculous term...

"So, Isidora," he began, "you've managed to do what no one else has in all these years—tame the wild prince."

Dora raised an eyebrow, glancing briefly at Kael, who merely smirked. "I wouldn't say I've tamed him," she replied. "I'm not sure anyone really can."

The old man chuckled, the sound low and thoughtful. "Perhaps not. Still, it seems he's changed since you came into his life."

Kael tilted his head slightly, meeting the man's gaze without flinching as he said, "You say that like it is a bad thing."

"In your case, I wouldn't be sure, kiddo. So, Dora, what do you see in him? He's reckless, audacious, rebellious, worrisome and all the bothersome things that you can possibly think of. So, have you been affected by blindness. I do know a good doctor who might be able to help..."

While Kael protested all the adjectives attributed to him, Dora giggled at the teasing. The old master was an interesting man. Everything around him seemed cold and grim. And the warnings she had received were also indicative of this. And yet, here he was being all warm and welcoming.

But she decided that she actually liked the man. He was not shy about grilling her or even grilling Kael who's almost been buried under the old man's sharp words. And yet, there was something about him that almost screamed that he was not all that warm or welcoming to them. He reminded her of the cunning ministers in the court, who were always plotting to keep their interests safe even if it meant hurting the others. It was an unfair judgement, she knew. And so, she kept it to herself.

Chapter 745: The Darkness(Corrected Version)

"My Lord. The guests have left safely. Would you like to rest now?"

Lord Rupert Minney looked up from his recliner at the servant, his tired eyes briefly narrowed in consideration before he shook his head. "Not yet."

"But Master, you've been up all day... Your body is...", the servant tried to protest, but was interrupted.

"Dying! I know. You don't need to remind me," he snapped, his voice cutting through the room's quiet air. But almost as soon as the words left his mouth, the old man sighed, the frustration giving way to a softer tone. "I am the happiest today."

The servant eyed his master curiously. "Is it because Prince Kael brought someone to meet you? I know you've been worried about him, even if you don't always show it." Of course he'd already guessed it. Usually, by the time lunch rolled around, his master barely had energy to finish his own food. But today, he looked like his old self.

Lord Rupert sent a sharp look towards his servant, though his stern gaze softened soon after. He sighed again, longer this time, as if releasing a long-held tension. "You really are astute. Yes. I am happy that Kael brought a woman over."

The servant's smile widened, bowing respectfully before continuing, "And the staff are all thrilled to see you so lively today, Master. What do you think about Princess Isidora?"

The older man smiled faintly, a distant glint appearing in his eyes, as if a memory had been stirred. "I think she is an amusing woman. She reminds me a bit of my daughter... Though I pity her..."

The servant's brow furrowed in confusion. "Pity? Why, Master?"

Lord Rupert sighed once more, this time heavier, more deliberate. There was something mysterious in his expression as he shook his head, offering no further explanation. The servant took the hint, bowing once again before quietly slipping out of the room, leaving Lord Rupert to his thoughts.

Once solitude returned, Lord Rupert leaned back in his recliner, closing his eyes as if savoring the stillness around him. He clasped his hands together and, in the silence of the room, offered a sincere prayer of gratitude to the Lord above. Ever since he'd discovered that his time was running short, that the cruel truth of his illness gave him only a few months to live, his deepest wish had been to witness one thing before departing this world: to see Kael fall in love. And today, it seemed that the good God had finally answered his prayers. Now, he could fulfill his promise to his dead daughter and be ready to die in peace.

Reaching for the phone beside him, Lord Rupert dialed a familiar number, his fingers trembling slightly as they pressed the buttons. Once the line connected, his voice was firm and clear. "I want every little detail on Princess Isidora."

The voice on the other end sounded momentarily surprised. "Princess Isidora? Of course, sir. But she has only recently started dating Prince Kael... Is there a reason to hurry?"

Lord Rupert's grip tightened around the phone as a flicker of irritation crossed his face. He did not like being questioned! Thus, his words came out sharper this time, almost as if watrnign the man . "Yes! I want every little detail on her. Everything—what she likes, what she dislikes, her strengths, her weaknesses. I want to know her vulnerabilities. You will be rewarded most generously for this job. In fact," he paused, his voice growing more ominous, "find me her biggest weakness, and I will make you so rich that you will never have to work another day in your life."

The person on the other end was pleased enough that he immediately promised, "Don't worry, my lord! I will do everything I can to find out, even if I have to die and reborn again, I will get the information you want! You can count on it.."

Satisfied with the reassurance, Lord Rupert disconnected the call while the benign smile on his face slowly disappeared. Replacing it was a look that resonated with his family motto: Never forgive, never forget.

Anyone who knew Lort Rupert in his younger days would have guessed what the look meant- Destruction.

"Princess Isidora..." he murmured quietly to himself, "It is such a shame that you chose Kael as your life partner. Now, because of him, you have invited trouble to your doorstep. Such a pity..."

He fell silent for a moment, his gaze distant as if already envisioning the inevitable ruin that would come.

Decisively, he tapped his walking stick on the floor three times, and soon the servant reappeared next to him. Quietly, the older man was then helped up and guided by the servant to his room.

However, instead of returning to his bedroom, he shook his head, "Take me to the other room."

"But master..."

Lord Rupert sent the servant a look. All these people really did start to think that he could not take decisions for himself because he was sick? He would...

His thoughts, however, tapered off as he walked into the room that was further down the hallways. Slowly, he entered the room, while the servant waited outside. No one was allowed to enter or even peep into this room.

Inside, Lord Rupert, picked up the diary that had been left on the table as if the writer had just gone out for a break and carefully, blew the dust off the diary and read the words.

"Father, Forgive me for not being strong like you. But I cannot live my life like this. I love the prince with all my heart but he doesn't love me back... How do I live like this? What is the point of this life if I cannot even have his love...Goodbye..."

Placing the diary back as it had been, the man reiterated the promise he'd made, "He could not love you, hmm? Then I will destroy the one he does love."

Chapter 746: Aiden and His Ladies

"Just how many women have you had?" Dora's voice broke through the comfortable silence at the dinner table. She leaned forward slightly, her eyes locked on Kael as she played idly with her fork, before placing the little piece of salad into her mouth.

Kael, mid-bite, nearly choked on his food. He coughed, set down his fork and looked up at her in surprise. "Had? Where is this question coming from? And what do you mean by 'had'? Didn't Master just tell you that you're the only woman I've ever brought to meet him?"

Dora raised an eyebrow, unconvinced. "Yeah, I might be the first serious girlfriend you've had, but let's be real—you were a playboy through and through before me. No way you're some innocent saint, Kael. We both know you've been with other women. No need to pretend."

He leaned back in his chair, arms folding across his chest. "As far as I'm concerned, you are the only woman that matters. Anyone before you is forgotten and whoever came before doesn't mean anything. You're the only one I've been with—"

Dora cut him off with a knowing laugh, shaking her head. "I might have believed that... if it wasn't for the woman standing behind you, glaring at me like she's ready to tear my head off."

Kael's body went rigid. The casual confidence he had moments before vanished, and his eyes widened as he slowly turned to glance behind him. His expression shifted the moment he saw her, his face draining of color. He whipped his head back around so fast Dora thought he might get whiplash.

"That was quite a reaction," Dora mused, biting her lip as she leaned forward, wanting to take this chance to tease him even as she felt she felt jealous of the woman already.. "Just what kind of time did you spend with her that makes you want to avoid her like the plague?"

Kael cleared his throat, but there was a tightness in his voice now. "Dora... it's not what you think."

"Oh?" She tapped her fingers on the table, her amusement growing as she watched him squirm. "Then what exactly is it? Because she doesn't look like someone you barely knew or have forgotten."

Kael girmed and sent her a look. "I haven't seen her in years! Of all the times and all the places, she had to be here. Okay, here goes, her name is Lily. And I have never slept with her or even considered sleeping with her."

"Then? She hates you because you didn't put out?" Dora asked straightaway as Kael shook his head and opened his mouth to explain. But before she could Dora tapped her fingers at him, signaling him to be quiet as she smiled and murmured in a low voice, "Someone has decided to come greet us."

Before he could even brace himself to come face to face with her, "Prince Kael," she drawled, her voice dripping with contempt. "Won't you introduce your newest toy to me?"

Dora stiffened at this. Did people really have to lack basic manners. Her fingers curled slightly around the stem of her wine glass as she sent Kael a look. He was the one she was speaking to after all.

Kael immediately stood up, his chair scraping against the floor with a sharp sound, and stepped in front of Dora as if to shield her from the woman's venom.

"Lily," Kael's voice was firm, edged with warning. "Don't start. This is beneath you. You're a professor now, remember? Maybe you should act like one."

Lily's lips twisted into a mocking smile, her gaze flicking dismissively between Kael and Dora. "Oh, don't flatter yourself, Kael. I have no intention of acting anything other than how I feel. And I feel disgusted," she sneered. "Dragging around yet another little trinket like she's something special. How long before you discard this one, hmm? Or maybe she's different because she doesn't know yet?"

Before Kael could respond, Dora cocked her head, studying Lily with a cool gaze. "Ahh. I was wondering where I recognized you from. You're from Petrovia National University, aren't you?"

Lily's eyes flashed with irritation, clearly unimpressed by Dora's attempt to cut in. "Oh, please," she scoffed in an acidic tone. "So you've heard of me? I suppose you've read one of my groundbreaking papers, or are you just pretending to be interested in things you clearly don't understand? You're wasting your time with him, sweetheart. Kael might look like the perfect catch, but trust me, he's nothing more than a bored little boy playing at being important. You're just the latest distraction, and trust me, he'll drop you the moment something more interesting comes along."

"You're right. Tell me, Miss Lily, how is your research coming along on the meta physical sources? I think it is stuck, isn't it?"

Lily looked at Dora as if she'd just spoken in an alien language. "How do you know about my research?"

"I know. And I also know it is stuck. But I've only now discovered the reason. Its probably because you spent all your time being bitter or fuming."

Lily's eyes narrowed, her sharp gaze cutting into Dora as if trying to make sense of what she'd just heard. "What are you talking about?" she hissed. "My research is going perfectly fine. You don't know anything about it."

Dora smirked, her posture casual but her words sharp. "Oh, but I do. See, I happen to have a habit of digging into things—and people—when they catch my interest. And if you had done even a fraction of that kind of research on the people you were about to insult, you might have saved yourself this embarrassing situation."

"What are you even talking about? What sort of nonsense..."

Dora leaned back in her chair, her fingers lazily twirling the stem of her wine glass. "I'm talking about the fact that you've just insulted Princess Isidora of Estania," she said smoothly. "You know, the same woman who might very well be responsible for one of the largest grants your little research department has ever seen."

The silence that followed was deafening. Lily's face drained of color, her mouth slightly agape as the realization hit her. She glanced quickly at Kael, who simply sat back down at this. Actually, he'd become used to Lily's biting ways but Dora showing her her place was so entertaining.

"Princess Isidora..." Lily's voice faltered, the name clearly registering now as she pieced it together. "I... I had no idea..."

"That much is obvious," Dora replied, her voice still sweet but with a biting edge. "But that's what happens when you walk around fuming, too busy holding grudges to bother doing proper homework. Had you looked me up, maybe you would've known who you were speaking to and if I was a toy or not."

Now, why don't you save us both some time and take your leave? You can thank me later when your grant gets approved, assuming, of course, if it does..."

It took her a few moments as she stood there, her hands clenched at her sides before she scoffed, "Princess Isidora! You might be a princess but even then, that does not change the fact that you are sitting here with a man who has ruined the lives of countless women, not even sparing someone who'd looked up to him since childhood!" She then turned to glare at Kael, "What? Do you not have the courage to tell her everything? About how you caused the death of your master's daughter?"

After dropping that bomb, she stomped away, leaving a stunned silence in her wake.

Kael looked at his plate then, his hands clenched under the table. Dora looked at him carefully, but even as she wanted to ask him, she could see that things were not so simple.

Dora rose from her chair abruptly, pushing her unfinished plate away and ordered, "Let's go, Kael."

"Dora, let me explain," Kael began, his voice strained. "What Lily said, about—"

But she shook her head, holding up a hand once more. "Not here, Kael. Not now. Whatever it is, I don't want to hear it here. In fact, I don't want to hear it at all, unless you're ready."

Kael paused and looked at her then, feeling a bit shocked, "Are you not going to question me?"

Dora shrugged, "Not really. I know you're not trustworthy and all, but I do believe that you are not capable of murdering. And that woman accused you of murdering your master's daughter. I am sure that the old man would not have welcomed us if what she said was true. So...let's go, Kael. We'll go somewhere else and eat so that we don't get indigestion."

Amazed and totally in awe of the woman who was leading him forward, Kael sighed. Just what had he done to earn her trust? Nothing... But he vowed. Never would he give her a reason to not trust him...

Chapter 747: Stop Thinking

"Can you stop thinking about that, even just for five minutes?" Dora asked, her tone light as she poked at the takeout container in front of her. She popped another chicken nugget into her mouth, closing her

eyes as she savored the flavor, chewing slowly as if she had all the time in the world. Kael couldn't help but smile at the sight of her

But the smile faded as his thoughts darkened. He frowned and set his fork down. "How are you not thinking about it?" His voice was edged with frustration now. "Aren't you even a little worried? You're sitting here, eating nuggets like it's no big deal, and I might be responsible for killing someone. Does that not faze you at all?"

Dora opened her eyes and rolled them dramatically. She leaned back in her chair, taking her time before responding, clearly amused by his anxiety. "You really want me to stop enjoying this perfectly crispy, tender, and ridiculously well-seasoned chicken," she said, holding up a nugget like it was a prized trophy, "just to freak out over something that may not even be true? Seriously, Kael?"

Kael stared at her, bewildered. "I don't understand how you can be so calm about this."

Dora sighed and put down the contained before looking up, "Because you're so worked up about it. I told you, Kael, if you want to tell me something about this entire matter then tell me. If you don't want to say it then don't. It is entirely upto you. I don't mind being kept in suspense."

Kael sighed and shook his head, "I want to tell you but I can't. I promised someone. And I cannot break their promise without taking permission."

"So, don't break the promise! Come on, come here and break the seal for this... I want to try out the rice next."

"Aren't you even jealous that I might have had someone in my life that I am protecting even now? Hiding things from you?"

Keal thought back to all those things that he'd been told about women being in love. How they were clingy, always jealous and possessive. Wanting to interfere in every aspect of the man's life. Why was Dora not like this? In fact, she was none of the above!

Scowling, he questioned her, "Why are you not jealous?"

There she was, enjoying her food again! She looked up at his question and Kael blinked. She looked like a cute little dumpling with her cheeks all puffed up...

As she chewed, he could not help but stare at her face. He wanted to kiss her, he realized. Instead of worrying over this matter and even arguing with her, he wanted to kiss her thoroughly.

Finally, she asked, " Why would I be jealous? Any kind of a relationship you had was in the past. Do you have such feelings for anyone else?"

"Of course not."

"Then there is nothing for me to be jealous about, Kael. Now, in the future if you were to care for someone, hide things from me, then I might care... And I am warning you that you might not like it then."

Kael smiled then and leaned forward, quickly licking the small drop of the gravy that clung to the corner of her lips and nodded, " Okay. I'll take that. Thank you, Dora. I'll just tell you this... The entire matter about her... has nothing to do with me, okay? It involves another prince."

"Rafe? The only other prince is Rafe, right? So, whatever happened has something to do with Rafe but you are shouldering the blame? Tell me more..."

Kael shook his head and mock glared at her, " Rafe has nothing to do with anyone's death, okay? And why are your eyes suddenly sparking with a light of curiosity? Hmm? So, as long as it was me, you couldn't be bothered but if it is Rafe, you want more?"

Dora giggled, " That is because when it comes to you, it is personal. But with Rafe... it involves tasty tea1..."

Kael shook his head and grabbed another take out container and started to eat heartily, feeling his stomach settle.

Dora smiled when she watched his appetite return and then turned back to her phone. Whatever the matter, her people would find out the reality of the matter, if need be....

Kael and Dora stared at the three unopened boxes of take out and groaned. What had they been thinking? Getting so much food. Now the two of them were too full to move that they'd simply cuddled onto the couch with him spooning her from behind.

Kael nuzzled her neck, breathing in deeply, feeling contented though it had nothing do with the chicken.

His hand slid over her belly before moving to settle on her breast. "What are you doing?", she asked almost sleepily.

"Just exploring."

Dora giggled and he found himself hardening at the sound. There was something magical in this. "Something else is also interested in exploring, huh?"

Without a word, Kael caught her hip and pulled her closer between his thighs, throwing his leg over her hip, "He's just looking for some warmth..."

"Is he? Then what is keeping him from seeking it?" Dora asked softly, pushing herself against it.

Kael groaned and stopped her from moving against him, "Stop... I'm too full to move... I think we should go slow..."

"Are you already an old man, Kael Ignis?" Dora taunted and he looked down at her, moving her with a slight move of his hands so that she was not facing him, her face buried in his chest. "Are you really going to taunt me into having se* with you? Because, let me tell you, it is working remarkably well."

Before Dora could laugh again, Kael leaned down and caught her lips in a deep kiss. His hands continued their slow exploration of her, tracing every line and every curve, teasing her with light touches all over as she tried to move closer to him...

Chapter 748: An Enemy

Lord Rupert Minney scowled at the stack of papers in his hands, flipping through the pages with increasing frustration. He had spent the better part of the night poring over these files, expecting to find something—anything—he could use. But to his utter disbelief, there was nothing. Not a shred of scandal, not even the faintest whiff of impropriety.

Princess Isidora Rosalind Sterling, heir to one of the strongest royal families in this part of the world was as spotless as a white sock! It was absurd. A woman in her position, a princess no less, hadn't managed to get her hands dirty at all? No whispered rebellions against her family, no rumors of treating her servants poorly, no secret wild parties held behind palace walls. Not even so much as a parking ticket. The files were maddeningly clean. If they had handed him blank pages, it would have made no difference and would have actually saved him some time and sleep more.

How could this be? The girl was only twenty. She was young, rich, and privileged—there should have been something. A youthful indiscretion, a hidden vice, even a secret lover—anything that would hint she was more than the dull image these files presented. Instead, they made her sound like a cloistered nun, not a modern princess. A boring, prudish widow of eighty would have had more life in her than this!

Rupert pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to quell the rising tide of irritation. This was the girl Kael had fallen for? That spoiled, headstrong boy who had everything handed to him on a silver platter—this was who he had chosen?

"What is the meaning of this? I asked you to find dirt on her, and this is what you bring me? Do you think I will hand you over the money for something like this? She must have something. Three years away from the limelight, living quietly at university, and not a single blemish on her record? No dating rumors? No scandals? Nothing?"

Detective Preston cleared his throat nervously, fidgeting with the edge of his clipboard. "Well, sir... there was one rumor. We couldn't confirm it, but it's something."

Lord Rupert's interest piqued, and he leaned forward slightly. Finally, a lead. Something he could work with. "Go on."

The detective shifted uncomfortably. "There were whispers that she might have been in a relationship."

Rupert's thin lips curled into a smile at the revelation. So, she wasn't as pure as she seemed. Perfect. A secret lover would be just the ammunition he needed. "An ex, you say?" Rupert's voice dripped with satisfaction. "Good. Very good. Who is he? A commoner? Someone inappropriate?"

Preston swallowed, looking more uncertain by the second. "Actually, sir... the rumor is that she was dating Prince Kael. And it seems to match. He was there around that time last year..."

Rupert's smile faltered. He stared at Preston as though he hadn't heard him properly. "Kael?" he repeated slowly, incredulously. "She was dating Kael?"

"Yes, sir," Preston nodded weakly. "But, uh, we haven't been able to confirm that either. It's just a rumor at this stage."

For a moment, Rupert sat in stunned silence, his mind working to catch up with the revelation. Princess Isidora and Kael had been dating? That would explain their easy camaraderie and understanding that he had observed. But all this was useless to him. What he needed was to find a way...

While he was thinking, the detective continued, "But, of course, we are unable to confirm this because of two reasons. One, Prince Kael has no records of contact with her since his return. There have been no phone calls, messages, emails or even direct messages on social media. The two are not even following each other on social media. Secondly, Prince Rafael."

That caught Sir Rupert's attention. "Rafael? What does he have to do with this?"

"There is whisper amongst his personal security. Prince Rafael has expressed his admiration for Princess Isidora on multiple occasions. We've even received news that he had considered giving up the throne to pursue her. These are some of the pictures of Princess Isidora and Crown Prince Rafael at a charity gala, a few months ago. It is said that the two spent the entire evening together."

"Many people also discussed about the possibility of a romance but the public relations team from Estania buried it."

Lord Rupert leaned back in his chair, his mind racing as he processed the new information. Princess Isidora and Crown Prince Rafael? Now that was interesting. His initial plan had been to find dirt on Isidora use it against her and Kael. But this... this was far more promising. If Rafael had expressed romantic interest in the princess and even considered giving up the throne to pursue her, it presented an entirely different kind of opportunity. He could exploit this to his advantage, driving a wedge not only between Kael and Isidora but also between the two brothers.

A slow, calculated smile spread across Rupert's face as he formulated a new plan. If he could stoke the flames of whatever feelings Rafael had for Isidora, it wouldn't just be a matter of creating jealousy between Kael and the princess. It would turn brother against brother, setting the stage for a larger, more destructive conflict.

"Rafael, you say? Good. Very good! You can collect your rewards from the butler outside."

As the detective left, Sir Rupert picked up his phone and dialed a number, "Secretary? What is this about the trade agreement I hear between Petrovia and Estania? Hmm."

He paused and then smiled, "No. I don't think I like the clauses much. Why don't we slow things down and change things a bit. We need to make sure that Estania understands that Petrovia has the upper hand. Hmm?"

Lord Rupert laughed, "Of course. You're right! I knew a smart man like you would get the hint about what I mean... Yes yes.. Me? No no. No need to mention me. I'm just an old senile man. Just take the credit for it yourself. You would be deserving of it!"

Chapter 749: Problems

"What's the hold-up with signing the agreement? Wasn't everything supposed to be finalized today?" Dora asked, her voice sharp with impatience as her eyes narrowed at the minister, who sat across from her, his face creased with frustration.

The minister sighed heavily, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "They refused," he muttered, as if still in disbelief. "We were all there, prepared to sign, and their minister flat-out rejected it at the last minute. Said they were getting a more lucrative offer from another party."

Dora's eyebrow arched sharply, her tone now cutting as she leaned forward. "Did they conveniently forget that this agreement is part of the tripartite deal between Estania, Petrovia, and the William Sterling Foundation? Or do they think they can just walk away from an international commitment because someone else is waving a fatter check in front of them. Or do they think because Cai has started the work already, he won't care?"

The minister shrugged his shoulders and said, "The minister claims that since it was only a verbal discussion between Prince Rafael, you and Dr Frost, Petrovia is not bound to honour it as nothing was done officially. Your highness, I think you need to talk to Prince Rafael. This is the biggest project that you've undertaken and so close to your coronation. If people suffer losses at this time, then all the work you've done in the past will be besmirched."

Dora sighed. What could be the reason for this? Well, it was indeed better to talk things out or it would be a disaster... Shaking her head, she called her assistant, "Tasha, arrange a meeting with Prince Rafael. Let him know it is urgent and that he try to respond at the soonest."

A few minutes later, Tasha returned with a troubled expression, "Prince Rafael is not on the mainland. He has gone to visit one of the smaller islands off the coast and is expected to return next week. The assistant said that he can arrange us going there if it is urgent. A video conference is also not possible because the network reception there is not good apparently."

"Alright, let them know we want to meet him tonight. And arrange to leave now."

As Tasha hurried away to make the arrangements, the minister could not help but continue to whine, "Your Highness, you have to secure this or it might have more than a political effect. Many of our manufacturers have already taken loans to be able to increase their manufacturing and meet the demand that was supposed to rise with this. And if this does not go through, we will have high ration of products with no where to sell them."

Dora nodded, "You need not worry about that, minister. I'll handle everything. Just keep this information to yourself for now. It shouldn't spread out. We do not want unnecessary speculations to do more harm. Am I clear?"

"Of course, ma'am. It was a good thing that we had not yet announced the signing of the trade agreement or else things would have been a bigger mess. I'll take you leave now, then. Goodbye, your highness."

As the minister hurried away, Dora could not help but shake her head. What could Rafael mean by backing out at a time like this? And then deliberately being away and having them chase there...what kind of a game was he playing?

For a moment, she was tempted to ask Kael but then shook her head. There was no need to involve him in this. At least not yet. But they would need to cancel their date tonight...

With a sigh, she hurriedly messaged him that she needed to work and returned to work, already missing him.

"Why does Princess Isidora want to meet urgently?" Rafe asked in surprise as he was informed of the news of her arriving soon.

The assistant hesitated and then informed, "They did not mention but I think it might have something to do with the financial minister refusing to sign the agreement,

Rafael raised his brow at that, "What do you mean the minister refused to sign? I've already approved of the conditions, haven't I?"

"It seems he claimed that we are being offered better conditions from somewhere else. And so, he tried to renegotiate the contract. When the Estanians refused, the minister agreed to not sign the contract."

Rafael banged his hand on the desk as he glared at his assistant. "Why didn't you tell me then? Get me in touch with the minister! Who does he think he is that he can override my promise and orders and do what he wants?"

"Sir, the minister was probably trying to get us a lower price. Also, if the offer is true then we could benefit from it..."

"Whether the offer is good or not is not the point! Do they take me for a fool? Estania has the highest quality of the medical supplies, and they were willing to offer it at a much more competitive rate! Do you think Dr Frost is a fool that he will care about the cost of the product for us? We are focusing on encouraging quality medical tourism on a reasonable basis, if the quality of our supplies is questionable then who will come to Petrovia! Get me that minister, now!"

"I understand this, sir. But the matter is out of our hands now. They are trying to use this trade agreement against you. For now, until the matter is solved in the house of ministers, we can't do anything."

Rafael sighed and stood up, "Dam* it! These people really do think that they can do what they like! I am going to go teach them a lesson! Summon them all for a meeting tomorrow!"

"Sir. But we have to proceed inwards to handle the tribal matters tomorrow. It is why I asked Princess Isidora to come here tonight itself."

Rafael sighed. He would have to handle this very carefully. While he knew that Isis was a smart and understanding woman, he could not come across as a weak ruler. This was a dam* minefield!

Chapter 750: Going Somewhere

"Prince Rafael." Dora stepped out of the chopper and hurried towards the man standing on the shore before calling out to him. Extending his hand, he quickly took Dora's hand and led her into the house.

"Princess Isis. I am sorry for inconveniencing you to come all the way here on such short notice."

Dora smiled and shook her head, "Every time you call me Isis, it feels like you're talking to someone else. And I would have blamed you for this unexpected trip, but the view of your coastline from the chopper is quite mesmerizing so I'll let it go this time."

Rafe laughed and shook his head, "Then I am thankful to it. Come on inside, I've asked the chef to prepare the best of locally available food so that we can have dinner before we get down to business."

Dora rolled her eyes as she walked along Prince Rafe, "Well, at least we don't have to negotiate on an empty stomach. And I am sorry for barging in on your vacation."

Rafael grimaced and pulled out a seat for her before moving to the other side of the table," Don't worry, this is not actually a vacation. Actually, I am going towards the jungles tomorrow for a meetign with the head of the tribals. There seems to be some kind of unrest here, with some smugglers trying to get to them etc."

"Ahh! Then, is it safe for you here?" Dora asked carefully. She'd heard of the tribal clans of Petrovia. They were the kind one would pray to not run into if they ever found themselves stranded at an island.

Rafe smiled," As safe as can be with the rebellers always lurking..."

Soon, the conversation turned to general matters of national security, etc while the food was served and the two people ate heartily.

Unknown to Dora or Rafael, someone was already trying to create rumours as the news of Princess Dora joining Prince Rafael on his vacation in the dead of the night started to circulate, with a long-range picture of Rafael extending his hand to Isidora as she walked out of the chopper.

Kael glared at the picture on his phone and then the text that she'd sent cancelling their date.. She'd gone to meet Rafe on the official business? She could have just told him so and he would have accompanied her, Kael thought. This was, she would not have had to cancel their date.

Taking out his phone, he tried to call her but the phone continued to ring, with no answer. Shrugging, Kael instead called his personal pilot to prepare to go to the island, so that he could surprise Dora, howeverm the pilot refuted due to the change in weather conditions.

Kael sighed and threw aside his phone. It seems he was really not destined to meet Dora tonight. With a slid of his thumb, he brought up her picture and sighed. "I'm missing you, baby. I hope you are missing me too."

Unaware of the storm that was brewing outside, Rafael and Dora had already moved onto the discussion of the trade agreement and what things could be done to iron out any new problems arising from this.

Assured that this was not a ploy from him to get even more subsidised rates, Dora nodded with a sigh, "Next time, we'll sign the agreement between us before involving the others."

Rafe laughed and shook his head, "I doubt that will go well with the ministers."

Dora shrugged, "I am not here to care for their feelings. My sole focus is on Estania's growth. Anyway, thank you, Rafe. For the dinner and the quick meeting. Now that we both know that things are as we see them, I need not worry. I will take your leave now..."

However, as they stepped outside, the blowing wind told another story altogether.

As they stepped outside, the gusty wind whipped at their hair and clothes, carrying with it the scent of the ocean but also a biting chill that hinted at an incoming storm. Dora squinted into the distance, her eyes instinctively searching the dark horizon. "It's worse than I thought," she murmured, glancing over at Rafe, who had a grim expression as he checked his watch.

One of Rafe's attendants hurried over from the edge of the house, his face pale with concern. "Your Highness, the storm has intensified. I'm afraid the chopper won't be able to fly out tonight. The pilot has already grounded it until the weather clears."

Dora sighed, her shoulders sagging. "So, we're stuck here then?"

Rafe nodded, though his smile was still warm. "It looks like you'll have to bear my company a little longer. I'll ask the staff to prepare a room for you."

Before Dora could respond, Rafe's sharp gaze suddenly shifted over her shoulder. His eyes widened, and in one swift motion, he grabbed her arm and yanked her to the side just as a small, wild creature darted out from the underbrush, missing them by inches. The animal scampered past, disappearing into the shadows.

Dora stumbled into Rafe's chest, her heart pounding from the sudden movement. "What on earth was that?" she gasped, looking up at him, still held close.

Rafe's arms instinctively tightened around her waist, his breath a little unsteady from the adrenaline. "Some kind of wild animal," he muttered, scanning the area cautiously. "Probably spooked by the storm."

From a distance, the faint sound of a camera shutter clicked as a man happily started snapping pictures..In the darkness of the night, the camera captured the moment—Prince Rafael holding Princess Dora protectively in his embrace, their bodies close as the wind whipped around them.

On the other side, Dora and Rafe hurriedly stepped away as Dora thanked Rafe for saving her. Meanwhile, the figure hidden in the trees lowered his camera with a satisfied smirk, already planning how to leak the images to the press and how much more he could earn from this news.