

Benefits 751

Chapter 751: No Fight

"What do you mean they didn't argue at all?" Sir Rupert demanded, his brow furrowing as he turned his piercing gaze toward his informant. The news of Prince Kael's unusually calm reaction to hearing about his lover spending the night alone with his own brother, Rafael, didn't sit well with him.

Given Kael's history and the depth of his possessiveness, any hint of his Dora being linked with another man should have sparked an intense, irrational response. Especially Rafael who had always been his natural rival. Kael's reaction should have been explosive, marked by an interrogation or at the very least, a display of cold disdain. Yet, according to the informant, nothing of the sort had occurred.

The informant, shifted uncomfortably under Rupert's intense scrutiny and cleared his throat before responding. "Sir, from what I was able to gather, Princess Isidora returned earlier this morning and met Prince Kael for a late brunch. There were no signs of tension between them, and they seemed to enjoy their time together. However, they didn't have much time, as Prince Kael had to leave shortly afterward for an important business conference in the afternoon."

"Yes, I'm well aware of the conference," Sir Rupert interrupted, a hint of impatience creeping into his voice. "But Rafael and Isidora are a hot topic of conversation everywhere right now! Everyone is talking about them. Why, then, did these two not argue? Surely he would have been at least a little cold toward her, if not outright furious? His lover spent the entire night on a deserted island with another man! Is he not the least bit bothered? Did you consult the body language expert?"

The informant hesitated, as if weighing his next words carefully. "Yes, sir. There was nothing of the sort in their body language to indicate that they were not in perfect harmony with each other according to the expert as well. They both behaved as if there wasn't anything amiss between them. No heated words, no distant glances. They had a pleasant meal together, shared some light conversation, and then went their separate ways, as if nothing unusual had happened."

Sir Rupert's frown deepened as he dismissed the man. This was beyond interesting. Prince Kael showed no sign of jealousy or frustration? Not even a subtle shift in his demeanor? How did the leopard change his spots? It seemed he had underestimated the relationship between these two. Or rather he had underestimated Isidora Sterling who had somehow helped Kael overcome his past. Very good. But the point was how much stronger was the trust and how much pressure could it take? Only time would tell. This was just the beginning.

Picking up his phone, Rupert made another call, his mind already devising his next move. "The trending topic? What's the point of a few pictures taken in the dark of night? The buzz will fade if not sustained. If you want to make the most of this, you need more compelling material. Dig up photographs from past events, meetings—anything that can be used to construct a narrative. Have someone edit them to create the illusion of a deeper connection between Rafael and Isidora. Present it as a tragic love story thwarted by their societal positions. Find images where they appear lost or distant, and merge them as if they're gazing longingly at each other. You're capable of this. Do I need to spell out every detail?"

He paused, listening to the response from the other end before nodding in satisfaction. "Yes, make sure to stoke the flames. Every netizen should be rooting for their love to overcome all odds."

As he ended the call, Sir Rupert's mind continued to race with ideas. He knew he needed to create a more dramatic and compelling scenario to keep Rafael and Isidora in the limelight. Particularly now that Prince Kael would be absent, it was the perfect opportunity to sow seeds of doubt and tension.

Leaning back in his chair, he began to formulate his next scheme. He dialed a number he hadn't used in years. A sultry voice answered after a few rings.

"Cassandra," he said, his tone brisk, "I need you to orchestrate a high-profile charity gala for this weekend."

Cassandra's surprise was evident, but she quickly recovered. "A charity gala? That's quite sudden. It will be difficult to get dates and RSVPs from guests..."

"That is what you will be paid for. The charity function needs to be organized on behalf of Prince Rafael for the William Sterling foundation for research in neurological diseases. For the gala, you will ask the people to donate any precious things from their collection which they can buy at the charity auction. And then later you will buy the item that has been donated by Princess Isidora..."

Having explained his plan, Sir Rupert leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. He'd like to see the bonds break and the brothers fight. Only then, he would be at peace when he died.

As he thought this, his body was racked by coughs and he spit out blood as he tried to steady himself. And yet, there was no fear within him. All he wanted was to ruin Kael before he went to the other side... And for that, if he had to fight death he would!

He had to make one more call before he could retire for the day... And yet, he needed to make time for it. He did not have the energy for it.

After a few minutes, he dialed a number he knew would not be available to talk at the moment, and as expected, met a voice mail. Putting on a concerned expression, he spoke into the machine, "Kael! What is this I am hearing on the news? Rafael and Isidora? How is this possible? Is it true? Crown Prince Rafael likes Princess Isidora. Is that why you went after her? Because of the past you now want to take what Rafael likes?"

Chapter 752: Dilemma

Kael closed his eyes on the airplane, trying to escape the relentless torment of his thoughts. The images from his past and the agonizing memories of the previous night seemed to swirl around him in an unending loop. Among all the people Dora could be linked with, why did it have to be Rafael? The realization gnawed at him. Things between him and Rafe had barely come to an understanding as the two of them had buried the past without ever talking about it, just to come to a truce. And now this.

The truth was he did trust Dora. He'd learned his lesson the hard way after believing Kit's lies about her and then being suspicious of her over Cai. He had come to realize that Dora was genuine, her loyalty unshakeable. That she was too honourable to cheat him or even lie to him. And yet if she had been involved in the rumours with anyone other than Rafe, he might have been able to overlook it or deal with it much more easily.

But it was Rafael. Rafe was someone who was used to getting things his way. As the crown prince, everyone had to heed to his whims, even his own younger brother. And yet, even as their parents had tried to maintain a balance, things had not always worked out, which had led to the two of them becoming too competitive. While Rafael was the favoured one, Kael had proven himself to be better in everything. While Rafael worked hard to learn things, things came to his younger brother easily, sometimes without even having to try.

Slowly, they'd started to compete over everything from academics to sports to even women as they entered teenage. It was the last that had almost damaged their relationship forever.

The fact that they'd fallen for the same woman, a gold digger at that had almost destroyed them. She'd played them against each other using their rivalry for her own gains. And the worst part was neither of them had really 'loved' her. But that was a matter of the past. From there on, he's started to steer clear

of any women that Rafe might have an interest in and vice versa.. until the matter of Master's daughter had stood between them.

That thought took him back all those years and now images of the past started to overlap with images from the news that he had seen, seemingly sucking him into a sickening vortex.

Kael's thoughts were pulled back to the present when the airplane lurched suddenly, jolting him from his spiraling memories. His eyes snapped open as the turbulence shook the plane, a stark reminder of how fragile his mental state had become.

Determined to escape the relentless swirl of his thoughts, Kael pulled out his cell phone. He needed something to distract him, something that could anchor him back to the present. Scrolling through his messages, he found the ones Dora had sent from the island last night, messages that hadn't been delivered until this morning when he'd almost lost himself in despair.

Yes. The truth was that he'd been unable to sleep last night with the thoughts of Rafe with Dora torturing him and Rafe trying to seduce her. He might trust Dora but his own brother was another matter...

The first message was a picture of her pouting at the camera and a caption, "I'm marooned here on an island and yet, you are not here. We should be together."

Next, she shared a picture that she'd caught of the lightning from her window, "Nature's Fireworks." Even the sky is angry that I didn't bring you along. I'd rather snuggle into you with the thunder as background noise. The pillows and blankets are too cold."

And then she'd complained that her messages were still undelivered because of the bad network. She'd even promised him that she would not turn off her phone tonight, in case he receives the messages in the middle of the night and decides to reply.

Lastly, she'd sent a good night message with 'lots of kisses' and that had been it...

An idea struck him then. Since she'd sent him messages to be delivered later, he could do the same. He knew of course he could use the wifi in the airplane and yet, this would be more fun.

With a smile, he clicked the picture of the whiskey in front of him and sent it to her, "I'd rather be drinking you."

Next, he peered outside to see the grey clouds they were passing through and clicked another picture, "The sky is sad that I didn't bring you along."

With a grin, he then clicked his own picture, mimicking her pout and pose, "I'm stuck here in an airplane without you. We should go on an airplane to an island together to get stuck there."

As he pressed the send button, he shook his head. Never would he have believed anyone if they'd told him he would be this silly when in love. But here he was...

He stilled. He was in love... Why had he not realized this until now? Or more like why had he not accepted this fact until now? He scrolled upwards, magnifying her picture as he said, "So, princess Dora, you are a thief huh? You've stolen my heart and I didn't even realise?"

However, all his thoughts and happiness from discovering that he was in love evaporated when the airplane landed and he heard the voicemail from his master. His hands clenched. What did he mean that he was vying for Dora because Rafael was interested in him! Dam* it! He'd met her first and fallen for her first.

Clutching his phone in his hand, he resisted the urge to smash it against the floor but instead breathed in deeply and walked out of the airport. Of all the people, the one person he could not explain things to was master. Because then, he would have to tell him the truth.

Chapter 753: A Meeting

"Princess, the Crown Prince is here to see you," Tasha whispered, her voice barely audible as she shot a furtive glance toward the outer office, where Dora presumed Prince Rafael was waiting.

Dora's frown deepened. "He's here? Did you schedule an appointment with him?"

"Me?" Tasha's eyes widened in disbelief. "After all those rumors? Do I have a death wish? Do I want to get fired by the Prime Minister? Of course not! I refused the moment his office called to request a meeting. I told them you were too busy, even made up a whole string of excuses. But here they are—

showing up without warning, no less!" Tasha's voice was tight with frustration, her teeth visibly clenched.

As she waited for Dora to answer, Tasha could feel a headache coming on. Ever since they had arrived in Petrovia, managing public relations had turned into an absolute nightmare. The princess' supposed "blind date" with Prince Kael had somehow made the trending topics, even though the whole event had been meant to fly under the radar.

What was supposed to be a simple introduction had become a circus, with the media spinning rumors faster than her team could extinguish them. Unexpectedly and uncharacteristically, Princess Dora had given them the go ahead to announce a courtship between her and Prince Kael. Working hard to align everything for a smooth reveal, the Public relations had been thrown off course now, no thanks to the scandalous rumors involving Prince Rafael and her began circulating.

They'd tried every means to suppress the entire matter, but someone kept feeding the gossip mills and people's imaginations with endless material, creating doctored images and wild stories that painted a far more salacious picture of her relationship with Rafael.

But now, Prince Rafael had arrived. And not quietly either. NO sir. He'd brought his entire envoy with him, as if they were going to discuss marriage. If he wanted to meet, couldn't he have come quietly. Why create so much fuss and attract unwanted attention to them. The tabloids were having a field day for sure. It had reached the point where every time they tried to suppress one rumor, another popped up. At first, they tried to suppress it and fight back, attempting to preserve her spotless reputation, but it was like battling a wildfire with a water pistol. The gossip only grew wilder, and now, the entire PR team was at their wits' end and could only wait for the rumors to die a natural death.

And now, Prince Rafael was here. And he hadn't come quietly, either. No, he had brought his whole entourage, like they were here to discuss something important, maybe even marriage. If he wanted to talk, couldn't he have come quietly? Why bring all this attention to them?

"Let him in," Dora said with a sigh, knowing it was too late to avoid the situation.

Tasha, however, was still not convinced and hesitated. "Or I could tell him you're unavailable? Maybe say you've caught the flu? or maybe even Covid. That should give you a relief of some days." she suggested hopefully.

Dora chuckled softly and waved her away. "Whatever rumors were left are already spreading like wildfire. It's too late to avoid it. I might as well meet him now." She gave Tasha a small smile. "Go ahead and let them in."

Tasha shook her head and pointed out, "You know at this rate, it would be better if you just went ahead and had a wild affair with crown prince, since people already believe it. I'd really like to catch hold of the person spreading the rumors! He's made our peaceful life into a circus!"

Dora laughed at Tasha and said, "Well, someone needs to keep you on your toes! I am too tame for you."

Tasha shook her head and hurriedly walked out of the office, before returning with Princess Rafael in tow.

The moment he saw her, "Isis," he greeted her, offering a small bow. "I apologize for showing up unannounced and without an appointment, but the matter is urgent."

Dora waved away his apology with a slight smile. "No need to apologize. It seems urgency is the theme of the day. Please, have a seat."

Rafael nodded, taking a seat opposite her and wasted no time in getting to the point. "We need to discuss the press conference scheduled for next week. I believe it's in both our best interests to cancel it. With the rumors about us still swirling, I don't think it would be wise to face the media right now."

Dora's brow furrowed slightly. "Cancel the press conference?" She leaned back in her chair, studying him for a moment. "Wouldn't that make things worse? It would only add fuel to the fire, make people think we're hiding something since we are not appearing together in front of them?"

"But if we do not cancel, aren't you worried about the pressure? The last thing we need is for those vultures in the press to twist our words or use the event to push their narrative further. Once we appear together, every move, every gesture, every look will be amplified and stated as if we are yearning for each other. And if we avoid looking at each other, then...I just don't want to give them any more ammunition."

"Speaking of rumors," she said slowly, "I can't help but notice that while my team has been working tirelessly to contain the damage, your side hasn't exactly been doing much to suppress or deny any of it. I mean they could have simply stated that there was nothing of the sort like my team did, but refusing to comment left a lot of things open to be interpreted, right?"

Rafe sighed. "I understand that Isis, but denying them would not have made people believe. They would still rather believe us to be star crossed lovers than accept the truth. Anyway, what does Kael have to say about all these rumors?"

Chapter 754: Rumors

"Kael? Why would Kael have anything to say about it? I don't think he even has time to keep up with all the rumors..." Dora frowned, her brows drawing together as she met Rafael's questioning gaze. There was something in his expression—an edge of worry that made her pause.

"Are you sure Kael doesn't know about the rumors?" Rafael pressed, his tone just a bit too cautious.

Dora shrugged casually, but her mind was already racing. "Honestly, I have no idea. He hasn't mentioned anything to me."

Rafael hesitated, his wariness deepening. "You two haven't been talking?"

Dora glanced at him, her tone light as she tried to diffuse the tension. "We talk every day. In fact, around this time—" Her words trailed off as her phone vibrated on the table, the screen lighting up with Kael's name. With a mischievous grin, she held it up for Rafael to see. "Speak of the devil."

Before Rafael could react, she answered the call with a bright smile. "Kael! Are you ready to come back now? Today was the last day, wasn't it?"

The moment Kael's face appeared on the screen, he softened at the sight of her smile, but just as he was about to respond, he noticed something—or rather, someone—walking to stand behind her. Even before the figure fully emerged into the frame, Kael's expression faltered. He didn't need to see the man's face to know who it was.

"Kael!" Rafael's voice boomed playfully from behind Dora as he bent down to show his face on the screen, his grin wide. "Have you forgotten your brother already? Not a single phone call! If it weren't for the security checks, I wouldn't even know you were still alive."

Kael's smile stiffened, his usual ease faltering as he stared at his brother's face close to Dora's. The truth was that, he had been deliberately avoiding Rafael, the rumors swirling in their circle becoming too much for him to handle gracefully. Dora had been his only solace—the only one who hadn't pried or tried to give any explanations. In fact, she had not even thought to question it as if believing he would not doubt her.

"Well," Kael finally responded, forcing a chuckle, "I've been busy—unlike someone who's been living it up on an island pretending to be negotiating."

Rafael laughed, the sound light-hearted as he shook his head. "So you have been keeping tabs on us. Anyway, I'm glad you're coming back soon. It's been too quiet without you."

As Rafael straightened from his position behind Dora, he gave her a friendly tap on the shoulder, signaling his departure. "I'll leave you two to it," he said with a grin, waving as he exited the frame.

Dora returned his wave before focusing back on Kael, who had grown unusually quiet. His distracted expression caught her attention, and she tilted her head slightly, concern flickering in her eyes.

"Kael?" she asked softly. "Everything okay?"

Kael blinked, pulling himself back into the moment. "Yeah," he murmured, though the tension in his voice was unmistakable. "I... I think there's someone here to meet me."

Before Dora could respond, he added quickly, "I'll call you later, okay?"

Her grin faltered for just a second, sensing that something was off, but before she could question him, he'd already disconnected the call, without even waiting for her to say goodbye.

She tapped her fingers on the table as she disconnected the call. Something was the matter for sure. Prince Rafael could not have come here 'urgently' just because he wanted to cancel the conference. Then the only other thing they had talked about was Kael...

Could it be that he had come to talk about him? But Kael had been fine.. Until he had spotted Rafael just now. She picked up her phone to call Kael and question him, to clarify the entire situation, but before she could, she received another call.

"Hi and bye."

"Hey hey hey! What do you mean, hi and bye?", the other voice on the phone called out.

Impatiently, she glared at the phone and muttered, " Fine, Hi and Bye, Cai. I need to call someone for now."

"Isidora Sterling! If you dare to hang up on me, I will not share the latest news with you."

Dora paused and put the phone back to her ear, " This is not fair, Cai! I need to make an urgent call."

"Are you calling Kael?" Cai demanded.

"Yes! See, now you understand. So, don't be angry, okay? I'll call you later..."

"Hey! I will definitely be angry! You are ignoring me for your lover." Cai complained making Dora pause, " Okay okay! Stop pouting. What is it? Are you going off the grid again?"

"No. Actually, this time, I called to talk to you. About the rumors."

Dora grimaced. "Those dammed rumors have reached you as well?"

"Uh huh! And I really wish I could be a fly on the wall to see Kael losing his shi* and going all possessive over you."

Dora stilled. Rafe wondered about Kael's reaction and so did Cai. But Kael had not given any reaction. At first she had believed that Kael was unaware of the news but his conversation with Rafe had shown that he at least knew where Rafe had been. And she herself had mentioned it that night...

Carefully, she asked, "Why would Kael react like this? He knows that I am with him only..."

Cai scoffed over the phone, "What happened to your EQ? I thought people's IQ fell when they were in love but your EQ's disappeared too. Do you not know your Kael? From the moment I appeared in front of him and you ran towards me, he's been wanting to kill me. If we were in the ancient times, he might have challenged me to a duel and killed me several times just to make sure only he could win you over."

"It was only when he discovered that you are my aunt that his murderous aura has come down a bit.. What are you laughing about?" Cai asked with a frown as she laughed abruptly.

"You called him My Kael."

"I called him Your Kael." Cai corrected and shook his head... Logic had left the chat apparently....

Chapter 755: Focused On The Wrong Person

"Princess, one look here, please!"

"Your Highness, over this side!"

"Your Highness, is it true that you and Prince Rafael are in love?"

As Dora stepped out of the sleek, black car for the Charity Auction Gala, she paused just long enough to offer a polite wave to the sea of flashing cameras before making her way inside. The barrage of questions and the constant shouts of her name didn't faze her—she had grown used to this public performance. What truly bothered her was the news she had received only moments before: she would be partnering with Prince Rafael for the inauguration of the charity auction.

Her mood, already sour, worsened at the thought. The entire event had been hastily put together, and yet, no one had thought to inform her office in advance about this crucial detail. It was infuriating, the way they used these ridiculous rumors to their advantage, as though they could exploit the swirling gossip without a care for her feelings. Did they not realize the strain this placed on her?

She had already made her contribution—a valuable artifact for the auction. She was here to spend a significant amount on various items, and her mere presence was enough to bring the event the publicity it needed. So why did they feel the need to push even more demands on her, despite how much she had already given?

"Your Highness!" another voice shouted from the crowd. "Why not give up your throne to be with your love?"

Dora clenched her jaw, her frustration mounting, but maintained her graceful composure as she continued forward without a glance back, while she wanted to snap something at them.

"Is power so important Your Highness that you would give up love? Your sister gave up the throne for her love! Why can't you?" Another reporter shouted and this time she stopped

Her heels clicked sharply against the polished stone steps as she turned to face the crowd of reporters. The flash of cameras intensified as the eager journalists leaned forward, sensing a moment they could pounce on. But Dora's expression remained composed. She was angry, yes, but she'd never lose her dignity.

With a calm, but cutting tone, she spoke, authoritatively, "My sister did not give up the throne. She entrusted the future of Estania to me because she believed in my strength to carry it forward, to protect and nurture our people. Her decision was made out of love—love for our country. And that is my love, too. My first and greatest devotion will always be to my people and my nation."

A wave of silence fell over the crowd, the previously shouting voices now hushed as she continued to show her power. These people had all forgotten that she was not just a princess. She was the future Queen.

"As for the rumors involving Prince Rafael," she added, her words growing sharper, "they are exactly that—rumors. I understand that scandal and gossip draw attention, but I do not play into the fantasies

spun by idle minds. And I would like to ask you this, would you dare to question Prince Rafael about this? If you dare, ask him to give up his throne to pursue some grand love!"

As Dora turned back and resumed her graceful stride, the reporters were momentarily stunned into silence. But it didn't take long for the sound of hurried whispers and hushed comments to rise behind her. The journalists, ever hungry for a story, had already begun to twist her words, their microphones raised as they gave their rapid takes.

"Princess Dora's love for her country appears to be the very thing standing between her and Prince Rafael's relationship," one reporter spoke eagerly into her mic, casting a dramatic tone as if she were revealing a royal secret. "While she firmly denied any involvement, the pain in her eyes told a different story—a story of sacrifice and loyalty."

Another voice quickly followed, building on the narrative. "Yes, despite her graceful composure, it's clear the Princess is torn between duty and personal happiness. Could it be that her sense of responsibility for Estania is keeping her from pursuing true love with Prince Rafael?"

"Would it be Prince Rafael who would have to sacrifice his throne and his responsibility towards Petrovia?"

Dora wanted to scream. Or rather, she wanted to go out and wring those reporters' necks! Of all the things they had caught onto, the truth was the last! What pain in her eyes! It had been anger! Those idiots needed to take classes in studying body language!

And yet, as she walked into the venue, she could not help but check her phone again. She'd lost touch with Kael since yesterday when he'd told her he'd call her back. Could it be he really was bothered by the rumors and had been trying to hide this from her? The thought made her uneasy.

As she stared down at the phone, she looked up to see a woman dressed in a flashy golden gown walking towards her, "Princess Isidora. Thank you for gracing us with your presence. It is such a pleasure to have you."

Placing her phone, back in her purse, Dora walked into the venue while continuing to chat with the woman while worry for Kael continued to disturb her peace of mind.

Finally, busy with all the people trying to talk to her, and get information about the scandal, she was unable to check her phone. At last, when a brief lull in conversation presented itself, Dora managed to discreetly slip her hand into her purse, her fingers brushing the screen of her phone. But yet again, before she could check the phone, she was invited to the podium for the cutting of the ribbon.

And that is how, she ended up missing a message from Kael telling her that he would land in Petrovia soon. But at this point, standing next to Rafael, unable to escape her duty, she would not have been able to do anything to go to him.

Chapter 756: What I Found

"Look, look, guess what I found!"

A woman decked in expensive clothes and jewels practically burst into the bathroom stall, pulling her friend along with her. Her excitement was palpable as she waved a phone in front of her friend's face.

Her friend glanced at the phone with a mix of disbelief and irritation. "What? It's just a cell phone. Are you seriously so desperate for money that you're resorting to stealing phones now? Give me a break."

"No, no, it's not like that at all!" the first woman insisted, her eyes wide with excitement as she waved the phone in front of her friend. "This isn't just any cell phone—it belongs to Princess Isidora! She must have left it here just moments ago!"

Her friend's eyes widened with interest, her skepticism giving way to curiosity. "Wait, are you serious? Princess Isidora is the hottest topic right now. If we can dig up any information from this phone, any insider news at all, we could make a fortune. We wouldn't have to waste our time attending these boring parties with the old men anymore. We could just sell the scoop and be set for life."

"Exactly!" The first woman's enthusiasm was barely contained. "That's why I dragged you in here. You're a tech wizard, right? Can you help me figure out what kind of patterns or codes she used on this phone? I'm sure there's valuable information hidden in there."

Her friend nodded, her fingers already moving expertly over the phone's screen. "Alright, let's see what we can uncover. If there's any juicy gossip or confidential details, we need to be ready to grab it before anyone else finds out."

After several minutes of trying different combinations, the first woman's eyes lit up as she finally deciphered the pattern and unlocked the phone. She and her friend exchanged a glance, their faces a mix of anticipation and nervous excitement.

"Alright, now what?" the second woman asked, peering at the phone's screen.

The first woman hesitated for a moment before suggesting, "Let's check the messages. There might be something useful there."

Her friend shook her head firmly. "No, messages are too risky and not so sensational. If we're looking for something that will really make us rich, we need photographs. Intimate ones, preferably. If we can get any compromising pictures of Princess Isidora and Prince Rafael, we'd be rolling in money. First photos then messages, okay?"

As the gallery loaded, they were met with a series of images. The first few were standard—photos of events, parties, and landscapes. But then, their eyes widened in shock as they stumbled upon a selfie of Princess Dora and Prince Kael.

Prince Kael! Not Prince Rafael! The young prince had his arm around Princess Isidora and his chin on her shoulder as they both stared at the camera, their foreheads touching.

The two women stared at the image, their mouths agape. "This isn't Rafael," the first woman finally managed to say, her voice trembling. "This is Prince Kael. The press has been reporting on the wrong prince!"

"Or maybe, both the princes have been courting her! We've really struck gold this time!"

Quickly, they moved to click a picture, but before they could, the phone started to ring, almost giving them a heart attack as they quickly silenced it. "I think they've discovered her phone is missing. Let's just quickly take this picture and place the phone back. This one picture should earn us a decent amount."

Hurriedly, as soon as the phone stopped ringing, they clicked a picture of the picture on her phone and then quickly placed the phone back outside near the mirrors where it had been left. They'd barely

placed it down when a security woman entered the room, looked around, grabbed the phone and walked out.

The two women breathed a sigh of relief at almost being caught but then high fived. It had been a success. " We need to get out of here soon. If someone realizes that we were here with her phone for too long, it wouldn't be good for us."

With a nod of understanding, they quickly walked out of the stall, unaware that the same security guard who had just entered the bathroom was still standing there outside the door.

Soon, as the phone was returned to Dora, she noticed the message that Kael had sent her and smiled happily. See, he'd really been busy and that is why he hadn't been able to contact her. And now he was back.

As she started to make up excuses for leaving, her assistant soon came up to her and whispered something. With a smile, she stood up and apologized, ' Miss Cassandra, I have to leave unexpectedly due to some urgent work. Please excuse me."

The woman tried to stop her, since the auction had not yet started, but Isidora simply left, while the junior assistant stayed behind," Don't worry, Miss Cassandra. Our princess won't give up on a noble cause. I will be here, in her stead to bid on the auction items. She'd already shown an interest in the things she wants."

Back inside her car, Dora quickly took out her phone and the first thing she did was to change the pattern of her phone's lock. "Was it a success?"

"Yes. Those women are already trying to sell the pictures." Tasha said as she showed her the email the women had sent out to various media outlets.

Dora smiled, "They are smart to not mention Kael. Now, they can get more money from them..."

But Tasha frowned, "This could go really bad, Princess Dora. It is too huge a risk that you've taken. If the publicity turns against you..."

"I don't care, Tasha. I will not let rumors spread. If they cannot take it that me and Rafael are not together, then I would rather they paint me as characterless for playing with the two brothers. At least this way, my name will be linked to Kael as well."

Chapter 757: A Rough Week

"What's the hold-up? Why haven't they opened the gates yet?" Kael muttered under his breath, frustration simmering as he sat waiting to disembark. He'd had a rough week and now having to sit here was not something that he was happy about. Additionally, as part of the royal fleet, his plane was always given top priority during travel. Yet today, delays plagued them—one issue after another, as if the world had conspired against him.

"I'll check on it, Your Highness," the flight attendant responded nervously. "But from what I've gathered, there's been a problem on the ground. The authorities are involved."

Kael's brow furrowed. "Authorities? What authorities?"

"The police, sir. They'll be here shortly," the attendant added, her voice dropping lower as if speaking too loudly might summon the very officers she was talking about.

"The police?" Kael's voice hardened, "Why on earth would the police be involved?"

From beside him, a soft, trembling voice broke the tense silence. "They're here for me. They have to be. Why else would the police come here?" The woman sitting next to him clutched his hand tightly, her fingers icy despite the warmth of the cabin. Her eyes, wide with fear, darted toward the exit as if she expected officers to burst in at any moment.

"They're not here for you," he reassured her the woman. "Everything from that time was dealt with. It's all in the past. The case is closed, and no one is coming after you."

"But what if it isn't? What if they've found out I've returned? They could—" the woman continued to speak but this time, Kael sent over a sharp look at her. There was no need to mention the buried past, especially in front of strangers. Though his crew had all signed NDA's it was too easy to break them off in the face of good money.

"Listen to me. You've done nothing wrong. You're safe here with me. I'll go see what's going on. Stay here."

As he rose to leave, she tightened her grip on his hand, her panic flaring as she looked up at him with pleading eyes, her nails digging into the back of his hand. "Don't go," she whispered urgently, her voice shaking. "Please, Kael. They might try to do something to you."

Kael paused, leaning down to look into her eyes, his expression softening even further. "No one's going to do anything to me, or to you. I'll just speak to the crew, figure out what's happening. You stay here and try to relax, okay?"

The woman reluctantly let go of his hand and then turned to look out of the window, as if keeping an eye out for the police. Kael took a deep breath as he finally walked away. He had not expected her to join him on this return trip! He'd spent all day yesterday trying to calm her down, but instead she'd actually hidden on his plane to return here. Kael grimaced. Even though he'd assured her that he would handle everything, he wasn't sure.

He frowned as the flashing lights of the police cars reflecting off the glass. But it wasn't the officers that made his stomach drop—it was the woman who stepped out with them, grinning like she had just won a game. Dora.

His eyes widened. Damn it! She shouldn't be here.

Kael cursed under his breath, his mind scrambling. Even as he wanted to get to Dora, the woman inside would be a much bigger problem if she were to be seen by Dora.

Quickly turning to the flight attendant, he ordered urgently, "Don't let her come out. Whatever happens, keep her inside the plane. Understood?"

Taking a deep breath, Kael stepped down from the plane, his shoes clicking on the metal stairs as he descended toward the tarmac, where Dora had already spotted him.

As if reading his thoughts, Dora jumped from the slow-moving car before it had fully stopped. He hurried down faster, as he watched her almost run towards him. She looked too beautiful in the gown... like an angel.

He barely had time to brace himself before she threw herself into his arms. He caught her effortlessly, her familiar frame colliding with his chest as she wrapped her arms around his neck. She hugged him tightly, and he could feel her heart beating wildly. Despite the weight of the situation, his body instinctively responded, hugging her back with the same intensity.

"Well, hello there, handsome," Dora said teasingly, her voice muffled slightly as she buried her face in his shoulder. "You didn't think I'd miss your grand return, did you? I've missed you."

Kael smiled as he felt her nuzzle him and tightened his hold on her, "You like like a runaway bride in that ivory gown..."

Dora looked up at him and grinned, "I think I should look like a bandit bride. I am all dressed up, ready to kidnap my groom."

"I'm all yours to kidnap." Kael muttered before bending down to kiss her. He'd thought to avoid that, but he couldn't. He needed her to feel calm.

As they stepped back, he remembered the woman in the airplane and quickly caught Dora's hand. "Let's go."

Dora frowned as she turned to look back at the airplane and sighed, "You don't want to wait for your things?"

"Nah! I'd rather spend time with you. I'll have my assistant get it for me."

Dora grinned but let him lead her to the waiting car as she teased him, "Spoiled brat."

"If wanting to be with you makes me a spoilt brat then so be it."

Dora shook her head, but somehow, she couldn't help but turn back to look at the airplane behind her. She didn't know why, but she somehow felt as if someone was staring at her... And it didn't feel like normal curiosity from strangers about her identity.

But as they drove away, she could only shake off her head at this. If there was someone or something hiding, she would discover everything eventually.

Chapter 758: Distracted

"You look distracted," Dora muttered, glancing up from her phone to observe Kael as he stripped in front of her. The charity auction had finally come to an end, and she was already anticipating the news of her and Kael making the trending topics from the leaked picture. That would be the perfect gift for him, especially if the rumors really did bother him as much as he pretended they didn't.

Kael caught her gaze as he unbuttoned his cuffs. He turned his back to her, walking toward the dressing room as he replied, "Just thinking about work."

He reached for the hem of his shirt, but before he could pull it off, he felt Dora's arms snake around his waist. Her chin came to rest lightly on his shoulder as she leaned into him, her eyes meeting his in the mirror. "Your hands are trapped, mister," she whispered teasingly into his ear.

He grinned, the corner of his mouth quirking upward. "Well, considering you kidnapped me, it only makes sense I'd end up tied up, right?"

With a playful glint in her eyes, Dora grabbed his discarded tie from the chair and dangled it in front of him. "Then maybe I should tie you up. It might help with the interrogation."

Kael raised an eyebrow, his smile deepening. "Interrogate me, huh? And what exactly would you be interrogating me about?"

She nuzzled her chin against his shoulder, her voice dipping lower. "You're distracted, you're lying about something, and you're not meeting my eyes. The last time you were like this was right before I had to admit how much I liked you and you planned to betray me. Of course, at the time, I hadn't realized why you were being like that."

Kael froze for a moment, his body going still as her words sunk in. Was he really that easy to read? He exhaled slowly, knowing there was no point in pretending anymore, but trying to get more time.
"Maybe you should go easy on me this time, detective."

He watched as her eyes met his in the mirror and the smile on her face disappeared.

"What are you hiding, Kael?"

He turned around, still in the circle of his arms, "A lot of things that are sitting heavily on my mind, but I cannot break the confidence of someone else so I cannot tell you."

"Is this about Lord Rupert's daughter?" Dora asked carefully, looking up at him. She already didn't like that he was not yet willing to share that matter with her and now there was more. At this rate, was she willing to make more concessions for him?

"Yes. It is related to that. And just give me another week's time and I will resolve it, okay?"

Dora sighed and nodded. A week, she could give.

As she was lost in thought, Kael pulled her to him, feeling relieved that he didn't need to hide this from her and nuzzled her close, "I must be losing my touch if you are distracted while hugging me?"

Dora looked up at him and smiled as she winked, "I still need to interrogate you don't I? So, I can't take advantage."

"Really? What do you need to interrogate me about?"

She hooked her finger at him and he bent down a bit as she said, "Do you know that I was at a charity auction just now when I received your message?"

"Hmm. I heard something about it. So?"

"So, I bought something that Rafe donated." Kael widened his eyes at that, the surge of jealousy quick through him. He tried to hide it but Dora, who was actually looking for it this time, saw through it. Ha! Caught!

He let go her then and moved away and she let him as she watched him discard his shirt, "What did you buy?"

"I won't tell you." Dora grinned and added, "But, I will enjoy it as much as I can."

The jealousy this time was sharper and as Kael held the handle of the wardrobe in his hand, he was sure he might just pull off the entire door at this rate.

"Kael, are you not worried about the rumors between me and Rafe? I mean my buying this item might as well, fan the rumors. Though, I don't really care about the rumors, after all, what is the harm in being linked with a handsome man..."

Before she could continue her teasing, Kael spun around abruptly, his eyes darkened with a fierce intensity. Before she could even process his expression, he stomped over to her in a few long strides, gripped her waist and pulled her flush against his chest. Without a word, his lips crashed down onto hers, kissing her with an urgency that sent a shiver down her spine.

The kiss was heated, possessive, and full of unspoken tension. Dora's initial surprise quickly melted into desire as her hands instinctively tangled in his hair, pulling him closer. She could feel his frustration, his jealousy, in the way he claimed her lips, demanding her full attention. When he finally pulled back, both of them were breathless.

"Donate whatever it is you bought from Rafe. There is no need to fuel those rumors," Kael growled, his hands still gripping her waist tightly, as if afraid she might slip away.

Dora blinked up at him, her lips still tingling from the kiss, but a grin tugged at the corners of her mouth. "Oh my," she teased, voice still breathless, "you are jealous, aren't you?"

"I'm not just jealous," he said, his voice low and rough. "I don't like you even saying another man's name. Heck! I don't like Cai and he is your nephew! How do you think I feel about Rafe's name being linked to you?"

Dora was quiet for a moment before she caressed his cheek, "Then why didn't you just tell me?" she asked softly, no longer teasing.

Kael's eyes flickered, a trace of hesitation there before he sighed, leaning into her touch. "Because... I didn't want to burden you with it. I trust you Dora and I don't want to waste our time discussing rumors but... they do bother me, okay?"

Chapter 759: All Talk

"You're jelly!" Dora teased, slipping out of Kael's arms with a light, teasing laugh, her eyes gleaming with mischief as she darted out of the dressing room. Her voice carried back to him in a playful sing-song, "And, I do like jelly, so I approve."

With his shirt still unbuttoned, Kael followed her out of the dressing room, forgetting that he was supposed to freshen up and then almost stumbled when he saw her lounging comfortably on the bed, her arms stretched out behind her, propped up against the pillows. The sly smirk on her lips told him she was up to something. "You look mighty pleased with yourself."

"I am pleased. Very pleased" Dora stretched, her body moving gracefully, catching his attention as her gaze met his. "And you want to know why?"

"I do," he said, quirking a brow as he approached her. He leaned against the bedpost, arms crossed, trying to maintain his composure and stop himself from touching her. They needed to talk and he needed to stop himself from pouncing on her.. "May I ask why?"

"Because I like it. I like you being jealous for me." She tilted her head slightly, a teasing glint in her eyes. "I have to admit, it's a very satisfying feeling. You getting worked up over me? I might just fan those rumors a little more."

"Fan the rumors, hmm? Just you wait, then. I'd like to see how good your bottom looks when it is red." Kael threatened.

"Are you actually trying to threaten me with a spanking?" Dora asked with narrowed eyes.

Kael raised his brow then, as if telling her if she thought he wouldn't do it.

In the next moment, she rolled over, and got on her hands and knees, presenting her a** to him, "You can try to get your hands on that, baby. But its not going to be easy."

All thoughts of restraint flew out of his head then, with her shaking her a** tempting him. With a growl, he almost pounced on the bed but in the next moment, she'd already rolled and jumped out of the bed with a laugh, "You think it's that easy?"

Kael shook his head, "How can you move so agilely with even the gown restricting your movement."

Dora shook her head as she continued to step backward and he continued to advance, "It's the training. I have to know how to protect myself at all times. That means moving quickly in dress and high heels."

"Interesting. And what else do you have training in?"

Dora paused when her back connected with the wall and looked into his triumphant eyes.

She raised her chin and beckoned him closer with her fingers, and just as he was close enough to lean in, cage her between himself and the wall, she slipped away, "I also know how to tame wild studs...I mean horses of course."

Kael turned around with a sigh, leaning against the wall as he stared at Dora, who was now on the other side of the bed, grinning with a mischievous and challenging look on her face.

The challenge in her eyes only made him want her more, and the game they were playing was both infuriating and thrilling. He shook his head with a slow smile, knowing that she was deliberately testing his limits.

"You're quite the escape artist, aren't you?" he said, his voice low and playful as he took a step forward. "But you know what they say about wild studs—they don't stay tamed for long. And what do you think happens when the stud decides he doesn't want to be tamed?"

"Then you ride him...So tell me, do you want me to 'ride' you?"

The heat intensified and as both Kael and Dora stared at each other, until Kael was finally withing touching distance again, "You're playing with fire, Dora. And you know what happens when you get too close."

She raised an eyebrow, her grin widening. "I happen to like fire. It's warm, unpredictable... a lot like you."

"Or a lot like you." This time, Kael pounced, not giving her a chance to escape. Purposefully, he pretended to move left and just as she moved opposite, he caught her, around the waist, pulling her to him, "I've caught you now."

"Kael!" Dora laughed breathlessly, her eyes wide with amusement as she stumbled against him, their bodies pressing together for the briefest moment before she tried to twist free. "I thought we were just playing!"

"We are playing," he whispered, his voice low and teasing as he leaned down, his lips brushing against her ear. "But I don't play fair."

As Dora twisted around, their eyes met and time seemed to pause. Her arms came around his neck, her fingers threading to his hair. She liked being so close to him so why waste the opportunity?

"Cheater," she murmured.

"You started it," Kael replied, his lips barely an inch from hers. His hand moved to her lower back, pressing her closer. "And now you're stuck with the consequences."

Dora smirked, her eyes flashing. "Oh, I don't think I'm stuck at all."

He closed his eyes and touched their foreheads, "Dora...don't link your name with anyone else okay? I hate it. I hate it even more so when it is Rafael."

"Why not? What does it matter if you who I am linked with, as long as you know that you are the only man in my life."

"Because its... Rafe.. We have a history okay? Its not like the Frosts, where all the brothers trust each other and all that? I don't trust Rafe and with good reason, okay?Just like I am on probabtion with you, he is on probation. Tell me, during this time, has he done anything to refute the rumors? Do you think he cannot do that? Does he not have the power? But he is doing nothing about it? Why do you think that?"

Chapter 760: Confide

"So, is that why you turned into a playboy?" Dora asked Kael, her eyebrows raised as she listened to his full story about how he and Rafe had both been deceived by the same woman. Yet, it was Kael who had taken all the blame—shouldering the weight of it in front of their parents and everyone else. After all, the crown prince's reputation had to stay spotless.

"Kind of," Kael admitted, his voice carrying a hint of resignation. "The truth is, to protect his identity, I had to be the one to take the hit. Someone had to, and it couldn't be him."

Dora frowned, her frustration bubbling up. It always seemed like Kael had been forced to clean up Rafe's messes. "So, you just let them pin every mistake on you? Even when it wasn't your fault?"

"That was the pact," Kael said, his tone turning cold. "The crown prince had to remain unblemished. Whether it was academics or anything else, if Rafe messed up, he'd use my name. Slowly, he got comfortable with it. He'd drink and party, and people would assume it was me. If he wanted to play around with women, well, it couldn't be the crown prince seen as a playboy—it had to be the youngest prince. There were even rumors I'd been with three women in one night."

Kael paused, his lips twisting into a bitter smile. "Let me assure you... it wasn't me. Or at least... it wasn't only me."

Dora looked into his eyes, reading the pain that lingered beneath the surface. The unfairness of it all made her angry. But Kael had lived through it. He had taken on the burden alone for the sake of the

royal family, for the crown prince. And it made her ache for him. She understood that certain things had to be kept under wraps, especially given Petrovia's political unrest in recent years. But it didn't sit right with her that Kael had paid the heaviest price.

As a crown prince, this should have been Rafe's burden—or at the very least, a shared burden. But it had been Kael's to shoulder alone.

Trying to lighten his mood, Dora cupped his face, offering him a teasing smile. "Are you trying to tell me you were never a playboy?"

Kael smiled faintly and kissed her palm. "Don't worry, I'm not trying to claim complete innocence. Just that it wasn't always as bad as people think, okay?"

"Okay..." Dora nodded and rested her head against his chest. "Then? What happened?"

Kael went silent for a moment, and Dora's thoughts drifted back to her encounters with Rafe. He had never come across as someone so irresponsible. But something must have happened to change him. Something significant.

Then Kael spoke, his voice dropping into a darker tone. "Then someone died."

Dora stilled, her breath catching. "Someone died?" Her voice was barely a whisper. "Your master's daughter?"

"Yes. The only other person who knew about Rafe using my identity was Master Rupert. He was the one who had planned it all from the start."

Dora's heart clenched as Kael continued. "She was in love with me. Or at least she believed she was. But somehow, she ended up getting involved with Rafe. He pretended to be me, raising her hopes, leading her on. She was young, innocent. She didn't know what kind of games he was playing."

Kael's eyes darkened as he spoke. "One night, she came to me... and tried to seduce me. I rejected her. But it wasn't just a simple rejection. I was still hurting from the twin betrayals, and I was raw. When she

showed up in my room, I was harsh. I told her I had never flirted with her and that she had the wrong person. I had guessed it was Rafe, but I didn't say that. I just told her she was mistaken, and that she needed to leave."

His voice broke slightly, and he took a shuddering breath. "I didn't know. I didn't realise just how vulnerable she'd been. Just how much of herself she'd exposed to that person she was chatting with on the phone. She'd sent... pictures. When she realized that it wasn't me, she could not comprehend it. She left my hotel room and...died."

"She died..." Dora whispered, her mind racing to piece together the gravity of it. "What... what happened to her?"

Kael ran a hand through his hair, his face shadowed with guilt. "She was found the next morning. She'd thrown herself into the river near the estate. When they pulled her out, it was too late. The entire thing was ruled as an accident, but I knew the truth. Rafe knew the truth."

Dora felt a chill run down her spine. "And your parents believed you were responsible?"

Kael nodded grimly. "I didn't give them a reason not to. I told them she'd come to my room and that she was upset when she left. I didn't lie about that. But I also didn't tell them about Rafe's involvement. I couldn't... He was broken over it too. It was the first time I saw him truly crushed. He didn't mean for any of it to happen. He thought it was just another game in the beginning and then later, when he'd realized that he was truly in love with her, she was already dead."

"No one knew. But the two of us. It was the breaking point for both of us. After that, Rafe couldn't stomach pretending to be me anymore. And I refused to let him. But it was too late by then. The damage had already been done."

"Rafe... he's changed since then. He's tried to make amends in his own way, but he's never outright admitted what he did to anyone but me. I think he's ashamed. I think he regrets it. But it's not enough for me to trust him. It is why, when I see your name with him, I can't help but be angry..."