

## Benefits 801

### Chapter 801: You

Lily blinked, her breath catching as she stared at the scene before her. Was she supposed to be angry, or just laugh at the absurdity? Here she was, losing sleep over him—wondering if he was still hung up on Jasmine, or worse, using her as a substitute. Yet there he was, already out with another girl, looking carefree before the sun had even risen. Less than ten hours after their 'date'.

Lily blinked. She had been blinded by her childhood impression of him. It had been years since Jasmine passed away! She should have known that he would grow into a different person! His parents had probably done their best to help him move on. Unlike hers, who had tried to turn everything into a shrine for Jasmine.

She wondered if she should go into the diner now or not. And then felt angry at herself. This was the reason she had cried all night and now she was hesitating about going to the one place that served her favourite food? Like hell she was going to let him ruin it for her. In fact, if she went inside now, she could see firsthand his guilty expression and then cure herself of her childhood crush.

He did not give a guilty expression as she entered the diner, letting the bells above the door ring loudly. In fact he gave no expression because he did not even see her there.

Lily walked toward the counter, determined to place her order and act like she hadn't just spotted him. Her pulse quickened as she moved past his table, half hoping he'd look up and see her, that maybe he'd feel guilty for what she'd witnessed. But he didn't look. He was too focused on the woman sitting opposite him, his attention completely absorbed by her.

Last night, that same focus had been one of his most attractive qualities—the way he had listened so intently, as if she were the only person in the world. Now, watching him give that same intensity to someone else, it was just... irritating. Lily found herself willing him to glance her way, to give her some sign that he felt bad for being here. But nada!

With a huff, she reached the counter and placed her order, feeling more frustrated than ever. She could have stormed out, but no—she wasn't going to let him ruin her morning or her love for the diner's muffins. She needed to see this through, even if it meant ignoring the lump of disappointment forming in her throat.

When the server brought out her box of muffins, she caught it, paid quickly, and turned sharply—too sharply. She collided headfirst into someone, the impact sending a jolt through her body. Her forehead smacked against a solid chin, and she let out a startled gasp.

"Ow," she muttered, rubbing her forehead as her eyes moistened from the pain, only to hear a low chuckle above her.

"You've got a solid headbutt, I'd say," a deep voice said with amusement. Lily froze for a moment, her gaze lifting. When did he come here. He'd just been there at the table now. And he was even grinning.

"I'm so sorry..." she began, mortified, but before she could finish, he took her hand away from her forehead and, to her surprise, rubbed the spot himself. "Let me see. We don't want any permanent damage, do we?"

Lily blinked in confusion, her heart pounding as Cai rubbed her forehead like it was the most natural thing in the world. She frowned, the sudden intimacy catching her off guard, but even more unsettling was the fact that he didn't look the least bit guilty. His easy smile and playful demeanor were miles away from the remorse she had hoped to see.

"Move out of the way," she muttered, pulling her head back as she felt a mix of irritation and bewilderment. Why wasn't he apologizing? Why wasn't he at least acknowledging what she had seen?

Cai stepped back, his grin faltering just a little. "Hey, no need to be so prickly. My chin suffered too! And now I know you are not a morning person. Anyway, please join me," he said, motioning towards a nearby table. His voice was casual, almost too casual.

Lily hesitated, her gaze flicking toward the table where she had seen him with the other woman. It was empty now. Of course. He didn't look guilty because he didn't even know she had seen them together.

"No," she said firmly, stepping past him. "I'm not interested."

But before Cai could respond, Lily's peripheral vision caught movement outside the diner—the woman. She was coming back, walking towards the entrance.

She bit her lip, considering her options. If she left now, she wouldn't get the answers she wanted and not be able to catch him red handed. And why should she be the one to run away?

"Fine," Lily said suddenly, surprising even herself. "I'll sit. Just for a minute."

Cai's eyebrows lifted, clearly caught off guard by her change of heart. He blinked, but quickly recovered, flashing a charming smile. "Great," he said, pulling out a chair for her. "Let's sit down."

As she settled in, her eyes subtly flicked to the diner window, watching the woman pause outside when she noticed Lily sitting with Cai, the surprise on her face visible even through the glass. Would she come in or would she walk away?

Unexpectedly, the woman did not even pause to think over and simply walked towards them. Lily smiled. Perfect. Now, she could simply watch the show.

The woman came to their table and stopped. But instead of ripping into Cai about his two timing ways, she spoke up, "Caius Frost! How could you! No wonder you were in such a hurry to get rid of me! You'd spotted her and that is why you wanted to get rid of me! You must be the very pretty Lily that he has been talking about."

Chapter 802: Aunt But...

"This is so funny!" Meredith giggled as Lily recounted the events of that morning.

Lily glared at her. "I won't give you a muffin if you keep laughing."

Meredith shrugged off the threat, her laughter bubbling up again. "I'm not laughing at you! I'm laughing at the circumstances. Just picture it—what if you had confronted him? You walk in, upend a glass of coffee on his head, and shout, 'You bastard, you cheat! How can you two-time me?' Then he'd stand up, all soaked like a little puppy, and introduce you to her, saying, 'This is my aunt!'"

Lily rolled her eyes at the ridiculous image Meredith painted, but a small smile crept onto her face despite herself. "She really doesn't look like an aunt, you know... And it was nice meeting her..."

Meredith looked at her and sighed," At this point, I almost hope that she was not his aunt but his girlfriend. Or at least she was not nice to you."

Lily looked up from her book then," What do you mean?"

"He is the reason you were crying your eyes out, weren't you? Last night?" Lily stilled. She had not realized that she'd woken up Meredith.

"I... My parents came to visit me... And my mother saw me with him." Meredith sighed.

Even though she had never met Lily's parents, she knew that they had done a number on her. And understanding the history of this man, she could already imagine what kind of poison her mother might have spouted. Looking at Lily, Meredith sighed and spoke her mind,"It is a good thing that you are not going to see him again. You are already in too deep."

Lily stilled. "Meredith? I thought you would say that I should simply ignore whatever my mother said and simply go out with him."

"So your mother did try to dissuade you from going out with him.... Even though her reasoning for this is probably screwed, I think she is right this time. Stay away from him. Gosh! I never thought I would ever agree with your mother over something."

Lily had already made up her mind. Even though she had not yet replied to Cai or told him her intention, she had decided that she would never see him again. But hearing Meredith say something like this, her heart felt uncomfortable.

"Why? Why do you think I should not see him?"

"Because you are already too deep in sweetheart! You've always looked up at him as if he were a paragon of virtue. He was the perfect man you judged every date against. And you've only been on one date with him, if we don't count this morning, and you were already feeling cheated. You guys are not exclusive. It was just a date, and yet, in your mind, you are already exclusive. Combining this, with your entangled past, it is better to keep your distance."

Lily gulped and realized that Meredith was indeed right. She was saying all the things that she had thought. So, why did she feel so bad about it?

Meredith clicked her fingers in front of Lily as she saw her distracted face, "Tsk ts! Don't tell me you're suddenly feeling all rebellious and want to date him just because everyone is warning you against him."

Lily gave a tired smile then and shook her head, "No. I am not thinking of rebelling."

However, she could not help but think of this morning... their second date.

After Dora had left with her take away food which she had forgotten, he'd sat there looking at her, and feeling self conscious, she'd turned her head down, concentrating on eating as if it were some sort of a mathematical problem that needed all her attention.

And then he'd said those words, "Did you not sleep well?"

Her head jerked up then and she met his eyes. How did he know? Were her eyes still looking all swollen? But before she could ask him, he answered her, "Your eyes are all red. And here you are at the crack of dawn. So, it means that you did not sleep well. Hmm. Were you thinking of me, maybe?"

"I slept like a log." She stated with a blank expression and continued, "I usually get up at this time."

He'd laughed then. And she'd realized that she probably did not even know anyone who laughed so openly like that. "Ruthless! Well, I did not sleep because of you."

Her breath hitched and she looked into his eyes. Was he serious or was he joking. But then, he'd simply winked at her and she'd thought to herself that she was probably overthinking things.

Lily returned to the present now. Meredith was right. She was already in too deep. With a deep sigh, she brought out her phone and hurriedly typed out a message, "Hi, Cai. I think we shouldn't see each other again. It was nice catching up with you after all these years, but I believe our paths are not meant to cross."

She paused, biting her lip as she contemplated whether to send it. The weight of her decision hung heavily in the air, but she pressed "send" before she could second-guess herself. As soon as she did, a mix of relief and sadness washed over her.

Lily stared at the screen for a moment, her pulse pounding in her ears. She quickly blocked his number, her thumb hovering over the option as the number turned red. But then, the weight of finality sank in. She hesitated, feeling a pang of regret.

Why was this so hard? There was a chance that he wouldn't even reply to her. So there was no need to block him. But then she shook her head. No. It was better this way.

She looked at the phone again, her breath catching in her throat as she considered deleting his number altogether. But as she hovered over the option, she couldn't bring herself to do it. There was nothing wrong with keeping his number, right?

Chapter 803: Heavenly

"She's too pretty. This is going to be a problem," Cai muttered, staring down at the tiny baby girl in the crib with a worried frown.

Dora laughed softly, nudging him. "Only you would think having a beautiful baby girl is a problem, Cai. Most people would be overjoyed."

"Uh huh, but I'm telling you, it's going to be a problem," he insisted, nodding towards the sleeping baby. "Just look at poor Ines. She's the next oldest, and already Uncle Seb is constantly polishing his rifle, preparing for the 'future' like he's expecting suitors to swarm the place any minute. He's even teaching her how to use it!"

Dora smirked, leaning back in her chair. "Well, whichever poor guy falls for Ines won't know what hit him until he's been shot, strung up, and left to dry in the sun. At least she'll know how to defend herself."

Cai chuckled, though his eyes still lingered on the baby, his expression a mix of adoration and concern. he really wanted to hold her but she was too tiny. And she looked like him which made her ever more adorable. "True, but Uncle Seb isn't the worst of it. At least he's just threatening to defend Ines. You've got Ian and Gabe practically planning to put their girls under house arrest until they're thirty. Can you imagine?"

Dora shook her head, laughing. "They can puff and bluster all they want, but let's be real—the Frostie women will never allow it. Between them teaching the girls to outsmart and outfight the boys, there's not much those two can do. The girls will probably beat the boys to a pulp before they even think about dating."

"Exactly," Cai said, grinning now. "The poor guys won't stand a chance. They'll be too scared to even look at them funny." He leaned over the crib again, his grin softening into something more tender. "But this one... she's going to cause some serious heartbreak one day. I can already see it. But don't worry. You'll have an army of brothers to dote on you!"

Dora rolled her eyes but smiled, nonetheless. "An army is right. With you starting the next generation of Frost, and Vinny and Ines already stepping into their teens, it's only a matter of time before the younger ones join in wreaking havoc. Now, the youngest of the Frost clan has arrived." She glanced at the baby, her light brown tufts of hair and bright, sparkling eyes. "And she's already going to have you wrapped around her tiny finger, isn't she?"

Cai didn't even bother denying it, his expression softening as the baby's little hand twitched in her sleep. "Yeah," he admitted quietly, reaching out again and gently trying to get her tiny fingers to uncurl and grasp his finger. "She's already got me. There's no going back."

Dora raised an eyebrow, clearly amused by how serious he looked. She remembered he used to have the same look when he was practising suturing. "So, Mr. Overprotective Big Brother," she teased, crossing her arms and leaning toward him, "any thoughts on what they should name this little heartbreaker?"

Cai scratched the back of his neck, glancing at the baby with a thoughtful expression. "Well, I was thinking... maybe Lily?"

Dora gave him a look, her eyebrows shooting up as she crossed her arms. "Lily? Really? That's what you've come up with?"

He shrugged, looking slightly guilty. "What? It's a beautiful name! Sweet, simple, kinda perfect for her, don't you think? She is like a flower so..."

Dora shot him a pitying look that had him shrinking his neck and focusing on holding the little one. After all, she knew that Lily had ditched him and thrown him away without giving him a reason. But he still thought it was a pretty name... even if it was not meant for this little angel here.

"Okay! Get the camera ready." Cai said as he leant forward, carefully picking up the little girl.

'You have to pay for picture privileges." A voice sounded from the door as Demetri and Nora returned from having Nora checked post op. Cai smiled and held the baby close to him, loving how light and warm she was in his arms," Hey! I am her older brother! I have all the rights. As for paying... Well, I can pledge my fealty to protect her whenever needed."

Nora grinned and walked back to the bed, carefully caressing her baby's head before sitting down," That is good enough! She's going to need a capable big brother. So, have you guys come up with name suggestions?"

"You really haven't come up with names?" Cai asked in amusement. It seemed impossible that these two had not already agreed on names. But, looking back, he could guess why.. The number of times they'd lost a little one even before it was born...

Cai looked down at the baby, who was beginning to stir. Her tiny eyes fluttered open for the first time, and his heart melted completely. "Well," he said softly, still mesmerized by her wide-eyed gaze, "I think I have a suggestion."

Dora nudged him with her foot, clearly warning him not to suggest his ex-girlfriend's name. But Cai ignored her, his attention fully on the baby. With a small smile, he gently placed the baby in Nora's arms.

"What do you think of the name Ourania?" Cai asked, watching as Demetri's eyes widened slightly. "It means 'heavenly.' And I think it suits her perfectly."

Dora stared at Cai while Demetri and Nora exchanged a look as they stared at the little one until Nora smiled softly, clearly pleased with the suggestion. "I like it. Ourania Frost... sounds like a name destined for greatness."



As Demetri and Nora cooed over their little girl, Dora dragged Cai out of the room as she shot him a look. Thankfully, he had not really suggested the name Lily. Or she would have been forced to cast him out. But that one moment had shown her something. He was not over Lily...

Chapter 804: Hi

Hi, Lily."

The quiet voice seemed to come out of nowhere, making Lily nearly jump. If it hadn't been a woman's voice, her hand would've already been on her pepper spray.

She turned quickly, her eyes widening as a figure stepped out of the shadows. It took a moment for her to recognize the woman, and when she did, she gulped. Instinctively, she curtsied. "Your Highness."

The princess raised an eyebrow. "I wasn't aware you knew my identity."

"I didn't. But the photos of your engagement with Prince Kael made headlines. I recognized you from those." She stopped herself from admitting she had spent far longer staring at the man beside Isidora in the picture. And not the one she was getting engaged to. The one in the background...

She couldn't believe herself that she was still hung up on him. And yet, he had not even bothered to send a reply to her. Or question. She knew because she would habitually unblock his number and check. However, she could not blame him. Hadn't she been the one to forcefully break off and tell him that their paths should not cross. Then why did she blame him?

She shook her head at the questions. Now was not the time for distractions. Why did Princess Isidora look for her? And she was sure that Her highness was here for her or else why would she be waiting in the dark?

Her first thought was that something had happened to Cai. But then, she shook her head. Why would she come to her if something happened to him.

"I can see you have a lot of questions. And I will answer them... in time. But first, why don't we talk over a cup of coffee?"

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As Lily sat opposite Princess Isidora, the warm aroma of coffee filled the air, but it did little to settle her nerves. Her hands clutched the cup, seeking the comfort of its warmth. She wasn't sure what to say—what could you say when you were sitting across from royalty in a quiet café, out of nowhere, and in the middle of the night? And for no reason apparently. She definitely did not have anything in common to discuss with her.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Princess Isidora broke the silence.

"I have a proposition for you," she said, setting down her own cup and folding her hands neatly in her lap. "A job."

Lily blinked, almost choking on her coffee. She set the cup down, her fingers twitching nervously. "A... job?" She couldn't mask the confusion in her voice. What on earth could Princess Isidora want from her?

"Yes," the princess replied smoothly, as though offering jobs to people was the most natural thing in the world for the princess. "As a housekeeper."

Housekeeper?" She echoed the word as if she had misheard it.

Isidora smiled faintly, the kind of smile that gave nothing away. "I know you're still finishing your internship at the hotel," she said, leaning forward slightly. "And you have another year to go, don't you?"

Lily nodded slowly, wondering how much the princess actually knew about her life. It wasn't like they had crossed paths before, except for... well, except for him. She pushed that thought aside. Not thinking about him. Nope.

"I have a home," Isidora continued, "Far from here, in my home country, Estonia, a property that needs to be maintained throughout the year. It must always be ready to welcome guests of the crown and host banquets or events when necessary. It requires someone with expertise in hospitality, and since you're studying just that, I believe you would be an ideal fit."

Lily's brow furrowed. None of this made sense. Why her? She wasn't anyone special, and she certainly wasn't prepared to manage a royal residence. Like the princess said, she was still learning "But why me, Your Highness?" she asked, shaking her head, trying to wrap her mind around the unexpected offer. "Surely you have plenty of people who are more experienced and trained—"

"I do," Isidora interrupted, her voice soft but firm. "But this isn't just about experience. I need someone I can trust. Someone who won't gossip or leak private details to the press or others who might exploit them or even my family. The person will answer to me only." Her eyes narrowed, just slightly, as if making a point. "And because I know you personally... I hope you can be that person. Addedly, the place is quite isolated due to the mountain range it is placed in... which means we need someone who is willing to be cut off for a while. And Cai told me that you would like that..."

Lily opened her mouth, but no words came out. She was utterly astounded. Of all the things she had imagined this late-night meeting could be about, this was nowhere on her list.

Isidora seemed to sense her hesitation. "You don't have to answer now. I understand this is unexpected. But think about it. Consider what it could mean for your future. Opportunities like this don't come often, Miss Lily. All I ask is you keep this offer to yourself for now and make a decision as soon as possible."

And with that, Isidora rose gracefully from her chair, adjusting her coat as she prepared to leave. "I'll expect your answer soon."

As Dora left, leaving Lily lost in thought, the poor girl failed to realize that a trap had been set for her. A trap that she might not be able to escape... Meanwhile, Dora had already left to handle her next 'prey'. Someone had been working too hard for the last few months and desperately needed a vacation. And of course, she had the most ideal location in mind...which could provide him with the best self care...

Dora sighed as she walked out of the cafe with a spring in her step. It was quite fun to play cupid. She just hoped that her arrows would be spot on...

#### Chapter 805: Shocked

Lily was in awe. Of her own decision and the speed with which Princess Dora worked.. Just two days ago, she had been approached by Her Highness to become a housekeeper at one of her royal residences, and now, she was almost already en route to the place. She glanced down at the itinerary and sighed. The rich really did live a different life. Even as a housekeeper, she was being flown out by a chartered airplane, with a helicopter ride waiting to take her to the estate. The butterflies in her stomach stirred at the thought of this new beginning.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Meredith's familiar voice, "I can't believe I'm losing my roommate and best friend just like that."

Lily turned and pulled her into a hug, squeezing her tightly. "Mer! You're definitely losing a roommate, but not your best friend! No way. We'll keep in touch—phone calls, video chats, everything. You're stuck with me. I am definitely not resigning from the best friend position."

Meredith let out a small laugh, but there was an edge to it. "Yes, yes, I know. But I still wish you hadn't met that man."

Lily froze, pulling back slightly to look at her friend with a frown. "Where did that come from?"

Meredith crossed her arms, her expression a mixture of exasperation and worry. "Oh, please. As if I haven't noticed. You're leaving Petrovia, but don't pretend it's just for the job. You've been running from him ever since... and don't even get me started on the way you've been glued to every news report about him. Do you think I haven't noticed how the TV remote mysteriously stops working every time his face shows up? Also, if you hadn't met him, you would not have been introduced to Princess Dora, right?"

Lily's cheeks flushed, her stomach knotting at the mention of him. She quickly looked away, feigning indifference. "It's not like that, Mer."

"Really?" Meredith raised an eyebrow, not buying it. "Then what is it like? Because from where I'm standing, it looks an awful lot like you're trying to get as far away from him as possible. And if I had known this would be the consequence of advising you to not date him, I would have definitely been the first person to push you into his arms."

Lily laughed at this and shook her head at Meredith, "I'm just... ready for a change. This job, it's an amazing opportunity. How could I say no? Even if you had pushed me into his arms, as you so nicely put it, I would run at this chance, okay?"

Meredith nodded and sighed, "Uh huh! I'll give you the benefit of doubt. But, here is the thing... I want you to actively start dating, okay? Once you are there, just go out with a few people, that way he won't be stuck in your head."

"Okay okay! Once I get there, I will turn into a party girl! Alright? Anyway, I won't have any company to watch all those boring documentaries..."

Meredith giggled and quickly hugged Lily back, "Okay okay! Don't turn into a hardcore party girl. I'll miss you, Lily!"

"I'll miss you too!"

Once inside the luxurious aircraft, Lily could not help but sigh. She leaned back into her plush seat, staring out of the airplane window as clouds drifted by. Her mind wandered back to the meeting yesterday, when everything had suddenly become real.

"Lily! I take it you've come to a decision? So, what is it to be?"

"I think I am going to take up this opportunity. Thank you, Your Highness."

"Excellent decision. Just call me Dora, okay? This 'Your highness' thing kinda gets to me! Especially now that we are going to have such a close relationship." Dora grinned and quickly rummaged through the papers on her desk, before pulling out a folder and handing it to her.

"When is the earliest you can leave? Do you need to give a notice period to your current place of work? Also, have a look at these contract papers and the non disclosure agreement."

"I can leave immediately. I've already spoken to my current boss and they were very understanding... I think they were more shocked than I was when I got the offer."

Dora smiled brightly. "Great! Then you get your bags packed and I'll let you know as soon as the airplanes are ready... give me enough time to prepare everything for your arrival. You'll love the estate. It's a little... well, let's just say, remote. But I'm sure you'll appreciate the quiet once you're settled in."

"Now, a bit of a heads-up. The estate is up in the mountains, and it gets pretty isolated in the winter. You'll be snowed in for a while once you arrive. We've stocked the guest house with all the supplies

you'll need—food, fuel, books, you name it. But human company might be scarce for the first couple of months. And so will your work load, so you can acquaint yourself. Once the roads start clearing out, you will need to start getting the estate ready. That means hiring the local staff etc to do the work so that once the roads are fully functional, the place is ready. Now, take a look at the papers and see if you are agreeable."

Lily quickly skimmed through the terms. Standard stuff—keep the estate's details and the royal family's personal matters private. No leaking of photos or stories to the press. And there was a hefty fine for the breach of contract. Well, she was not going to do that so she shrugged and signed her name.

Dora slid the papers back into the folder, looking pleased. "Welcome aboard the family, Lily." Dora extended her hand to shake and Lily paused, looking at her in confusion. Family?

Dora smiled and caught her hand, "Yep. We are all a big family..."

Lily sighed and then closed her eyes. Time to sleep and wake up to a new beginning.

Chapter 806: Oh...

Lily looked out of the helicopter window and felt her breath catch in her throat... The view was stunning, both overwhelmingly beautiful and dangerously intimidating at the same time. She gulped, her fingers gripping the armrests tightly as the helicopter jerked suddenly, more violently than before. The captain's calm voice crackled in her ear through the headset, "Don't worry, Miss Lily. We'll be dropping you off shortly. This is our last trip to and from here for the season. The wind's pretty fierce up here, that's why this little beast is shaking so much..."

Even though Lily knew that the captain was trying to reassure her, it didn't help. Not one bit. Why? Because the helicopter was shaking far too violently for her liking. It felt like the wind itself was trying to tear the machine apart mid-air. She squeezed her eyes shut, unwilling to keep looking at the breathtaking landscape below, in case something literally ended up taking her breath away for good! Gosh! All that snow below, although it looked soft and powdery from up here, wasn't fooling her. She knew that if they fell from this height, they wouldn't land gently. No, they'd hit that snowy ground and end up as pale and lifeless as a ghost...

After what felt like an eternity of violent jerking and stomach-lurching drops, the turbulence finally seemed to settle, becoming less chaotic. The captain's voice broke through her thoughts again, echoing clearly in her ear, "We're about to touch down, Miss Lily. Almost there."

Lily exhaled a long, shaky breath, her heart still racing as the helicopter finally made contact with the ground. That sense of overwhelming relief washed over her, like a wave that had been held back for far too long. But with that relief came a creeping sense of nervousness. The real challenge was just beginning. As the rotors started to slow and the world outside stilled, she couldn't help but wonder if she would truly be able to survive alone in this vast, untamed wilderness.

But she shook her head and reminded herself that she would be inside the house and on land at that. And for now, she had no responsibilities so she could simply treat this as a fully sponsored staycation.

Lily stepped out of the helicopter, feeling the cold air bite at her cheeks the moment her feet touched the snow-covered ground. The deafening whirl of the rotors was a sharp contrast to the stillness that had been visible from above. As she looked around, the blanket of snow that stretched out as far as her eyes could see, her heart still hammered in her chest. Where was this guest house exactly?

Before she could fully gather her thoughts, an older woman appeared from what she assumed was the path leading toward the guest house. The moment she saw Lily, she pushed ahead, walking with a purpose that left no room for pleasantries.

"Miss Lily, right?" the woman said, her voice raised slightly to be heard over the slowing helicopter blades. Without waiting for a response, she continued, "Everything's been prepared for you. The cabin's fully stocked with food and supplies, enough to last two people comfortably through the winter. If you need anything at all, or if you have any questions, there's a satellite signal phone inside. Use that to call us if something comes up. The wind's unpredictable out here, but it's mostly quiet now."

She barely had time to react as the woman pressed a set of keys into her hand and continued talking as if reading from a checklist.

"You'll find firewood inside, chopped and ready. The fireplace is already set up, so all you have to do is light it. There is also the heater that you can use if you don't want to use fire but I think that the fire is more romantic." The woman continued and Lily wondered what she would do with romance in this place, all alone. But, the woman was not going to give her a chance to speak at all as she continued, "There's a backup generator in the shed if the power cuts out, but you shouldn't have to worry about that for now. The pantry is stocked with non-perishables, and we've left fresh produce that should last you a good while. And if you're worried about the cold, don't be—those walls are thick. You'll stay warm."

"Thank you," Lily finally managed to say, clutching the keys tightly in her hand. "I'll be fine. Really."

The woman nodded, "Good. I'll leave you to it, then." She hesitated for a moment, her gaze lingering on Lily's face before she added, "The weather can turn quickly, so make sure you stay inside if a storm rolls in. It's safe, but you don't want to get caught out there when the winds pick up."

"Thanks again," she called as the woman turned to head back toward the waiting helicopter. The woman waved a hand in acknowledgment without looking back, moving quickly as the helicopter revved back to life, ready to take off.

As the helicopter lifted off the ground, leaving her in the silence of the wilderness, Lily took a deep breath. The sound of the blades grew distant, until finally, it disappeared altogether, and she was left standing alone in the quiet, snow-covered landscape.

For a long moment, she simply stood there, letting the quiet wash over her, the only sound the crunch of snow beneath her boots as she shifted her weight and started to take the path that the woman had come down from. It was time to live up her dream. Maybe, if she had a lot of fun here, she could buy some place in the wilderness like this, make her BnB and let guests experience the fun of being snowed in. Well, though she would have to have fun herself.

Carefully, she dragged the big suitcase behind her and finally, as she reached the guest house, felt her breath catch. Hidden behind the guest house and a cover of trees was the probably the largest mansion she had seen... This is the place she would be required to manage?

#### Chapter 807: Scare A Bear

Lily huffed and puffed as she dragged her suitcase behind her and wondered why she thought the distance from where she had been dropped off to this house was less. Dragging a bag in the snow was no mean feat! And the wind howling past your ears made it somehow even more eery.

However, as she saw the large mansion that she needed to manage, she forgot all about her struggle... It was beautiful! With a hand on her hip, she stood for a moment and admired it. The guest house, with its old-fashioned red brick and charming chimney, looked like something out of an English fairy tale. Its warmth practically radiated through the windows. Lily grinned to herself, shuffling through the set of keys she had been given, searching for the smaller one that would unlock the front door.

Just as her fingers brushed the key she needed, she caught sight of something from the corner of her eye. Her heart skipped a beat. Was someone—or something—moving toward her? The figure was far off but was definitely getting closer. Slowly. Cautiously. As if sneaking up on her.



Her pulse quickened. Was this her imagination running wild, or had she been spotted by a bear of all things? Weren't they supposed to be hibernating by now? And were they supposed to be hovering so close to where she was supposed to live? Even though she might not have to move about, she could not stay locked inside the house, could she? Panic set in as she fumbled with the keys, her fingers trembling uncontrollably. Her breath hitched as the figure moved faster, its form looming larger with each passing second.

With wide, frightened eyes, she tried to focus on getting the key into the lock, but her hands shook so violently she could barely control them. "Come on, come on," she muttered under her breath, willing her hands to cooperate. The wind howled louder, drowning out all other sound. She could feel the figure getting closer—too close. Her panic surged.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the key slid into the lock with a satisfying click. But before she could turn it, she felt a heavy paw land on her shoulder. Her heart leapt into her throat.

She froze. No, no, no! This was it! She squeezed her eyes shut, covering her ears with her hands as she let out a scream of terror.

Lily's breath came in short gasps, her body frozen in terror. But through the pounding in her ears, she became aware of a voice—soft but insistent. "Lily... Lily, it's me. Open your eyes."

For a moment, she stayed in her shell of fear, gripping her ears and squeezing her eyes shut tighter. But then she realized that the paw gripping her shoulder wasn't rough or clawed; it was warm and human. Slowly, her heart still racing, she let her hands drop from her ears and hesitantly cracked her eyes open.

There, standing in front of her, was no bear. It was him. The last person she expected—or wanted—to see. Her heart lurched, not from fear this time, but from pure shock.

Her voice came out in a breathless, confused whisper. "You're... not a bear?"

For a split second, the man looked just as stunned as she felt. Then his lips curved into an amused smile, his eyes crinkling with laughter. "A bear? Really, Lily?" His eyebrows lifted as if he couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Is that what you thought?"

She blinked at him, still reeling. The cold air seemed to vanish as the warmth of recognition and disbelief flooded her. Of all the people she thought she'd run into out here in the middle of nowhere—him. She couldn't seem to form a coherent thought.

His smile widened, lifting his whole face. "And what was your plan exactly? To scream the bear to death? Make it go deaf?" He chuckled, his grip on her shoulders gentle but firm. She became aware of how his thumbs seemed to be massaging her shoulders to calm her down... and she gulped.

Lily's cheeks burned with embarrassment, but she couldn't tear her eyes away from his. "I..." She swallowed, the reality of the moment hitting her all at once. "What are you doing here?"

Cai raised an eyebrow, taking in her shocked expression. In fact, he should have been the one asking her that. When he'd seen her standing there, for a wild moment, he'd wondered if he'd gone crazy or something. And then, his second thought had been that she had probably come here looking for him. But now, it seemed there was another possibility.

"I think I should be asking you that. What are you doing here?"

"I came here to work." she answered slowly and tried to step away from him. Of course it was impossible because his hands were still on her shoulders and the door was right behind her.

She looked into his eyes then, and tried to guess as he smiled down at her, "I came here for a vacation."

For a moment, neither of them spoke. The weight of their unexpected reunion hung in the air, thick and silent. Her heart thudded against her ribs as she tried to make sense of what was happening. Or at least guessed.

She had been hired as the housekeeper and he was here on a vacation. Could it be a coincidence. It might have been, if she had not known the connection between Princess Dora and Cai.

Suddenly, the shrill ring of a phone pierced the quiet, breaking the moment.

Cai blinked and his hands slowly dropped from her shoulders as he fished his phone out of his pocket, his brow furrowing as he glanced at the screen. Lily seized the opportunity, her heart still racing, she turned around, her back now facing him, and pushed the door open with more force than necessary and entered the house.

However, all her curiosity was not on the house now. It was focused on the man who followed her into the house as he answered the call.

"Hello?"

Chapter 808: Gift

Did you receive my gift?" Dora's voice chirped through the phone, pulling Cai's attention from his 'gift' — who had darted inside as if she still thought he was a bear ready to pounce.

He stifled a laugh, glancing at Lily's retreating form. "Oh, it's... interesting. Is this why you had me shipped out here?"

"Uh huh! You've been sulking for weeks now. I thought you'd snap out of it, but after you tried to name the baby 'Lily', I knew it was serious. So, I figured you'd need something bigger—like this gift. You're welcome!"

"I don't think she is quite happy with the stunt you've pulled."

He snorted. "I don't think she's too thrilled with your little stunt, by the way."

Dora laughed, the kind of laugh that said she wasn't remotely sorry. "Of course she isn't. I'll have a word with her in a minute. But let me make one thing crystal clear—if you mess this up and hurt her, I swear, you'll be stuck in the wilderness with no Wi-Fi forever. And you know what that means."

"Okay, okay, no need to threaten my very soul! And, uh... thanks, I guess."

Lily didn't have to strain her ears to catch every word. Cai wasn't exactly being subtle as he chatted away, his eyes locked on her like a cat watching a mouse. The second he mentioned her not being happy

about "the stunt," her suspicions were confirmed. She had been tricked into coming here! She glared at him, then at her poor, abandoned suitcase still outside the door.

There was no way she was staying. Not after this. Not under any circumstances. She was about to make a break for it when he casually passed her the phone, a teasing grin tugging at his lips.

"You might want to take this. It's the only way to talk around here. No signal in these parts for regular phones." He looked way too pleased with himself with that little piece of information.

She swallowed hard. How did he know she'd been planning to call Princess Dora and demand answers? Was he reading her mind now too?

With no other choice, she snatched the phone from his hand, glaring at it as if it personally offended her, then brought it to her ear. "Hello?"

"Miss Lily!" came Dora's far too cheerful voice. "I trust your journey was... good?"

Lily clenched her jaw. "Oh, it was unforgettable. The end destination however is like a bad dream, really."

Lily clenched her jaw, her frustration barely contained. "Actually, I wanted to talk to you about that," she said through gritted teeth. "I'd like to resign from this... situation. Effective immediately. If you could arrange for my return, I'd be incredibly grateful."

There was silence on the other end of the line. Dora, usually quick to respond, was uncharacteristically quiet for a few long seconds. When she finally spoke, her voice was softer, almost concerned. "Do you feel... threatened? By Cai? Is he making you uncomfortable in any way?"

Lily blinked in surprise, momentarily thrown off by the unexpected question. She glanced over at Cai, who was now leaning casually against the doorframe, watching her with an amused expression. Did he make her scared? Yes. But was he threatening? Not exactly.

"No," she replied slowly. "He's not a problem. At least, not in that way."

Dora's tone shifted back to its usual breezy demeanor, though a touch of seriousness remained. "Good. I didn't think so. But in that case, I'm afraid there's another issue. You see, the weather isn't cooperating right now. There's no way we can arrange for your return until things clear up which should be a couple of months, like I told you."

Lily's grip tightened on the phone. "Of course," she muttered. "Convenient."

"Oh, and one more tiny little detail," Dora added, her tone turning far too chipper for Lily's liking. "You might want to take a look at your contract. The one you signed so enthusiastically before taking this job. You'll notice there's a clause about early resignation. Something about a hefty penalty..."

Lily's heart sank. "What penalty?" But even as she asked, she could remember Dora warning her about the breaking of the contract.

Dora's laughter tinkled through the line, and Lily could practically hear her shrug. "Let's just say it would be a very expensive trip back if you break the contract now. It might even be correct to say that if you come back now, you might as well end up buried under a mountain of debt. But don't worry, I'm sure you'll adjust to the wilderness life soon enough and not feel like resigning. Cai's not so bad, once you get used to him. Good luck, Miss Lily!"

Before Lily could get another word in, the line went dead. She stared at the phone, dumbfounded, then slowly lowered it, her mind spinning. Trapped. She was trapped here, and Dora had just hung up on her.

What a fool she had been to think that this was an opportunity! She'd even thought this could be a 'free' staycation. She should have known that there were no freebies in the world! Now, she had fooled into coming here and staying here...

"You look angry! Let me remind you that...I was not involved in this charade... Why then are you staring at me?"

"I am thinking that it would have been better if you had been a bear..." Lily bit out before turning around and looking at the place... She glanced at the two closed doors on each side of the house, she quickly turned left and said, "Since we are locked in here, it would be better if we stay out of each other's way and away from each other."

As she reached the door and was about to go inside, Cai's voice stopped her, "I don't think that would be quite possible."

Lily paused and turned around to glare at him, "Why? Why is that not possible! Are you saying that you cannot stay out of my way...."

"I think it won't be possible if you are going to stay in my bedroom... That is where you are going after all..."

Chapter 809: Stew

Her eyes narrowed in frustration as she spun on her heel and marched toward the other closed door. She didn't care what he said. This had to be another bedroom—anything else would be better than staying near him. Once inside, she slammed the door shut, leaning back against it with a sigh of relief.

That relief was short-lived as she groaned, realizing her mistake. In her hasty retreat, she'd left her bag outside. Brilliant. Now it was stuck out there with him. There was absolutely no way she was going to open that door and retrieve it, not after storming off like she had. She cursed herself for not trusting her instincts earlier.

At the time, she'd hesitated for a moment, bothered by the hefty penalty if she breached the contract. But she'd brushed it aside, telling herself she was being silly for questioning it. She had no intention of breaking any clauses. Now, only a few hours in, all she wanted was to tear up the contract and walk out—before things got even worse.

Just then, a knock at the door made her jump. She glared at it, as if the door itself was to blame for her predicament. Then, Cai's voice drifted through. "There's some chicken stew on the stove. And I've left your bag by the door. Come out whenever you're done hiding."

Her frown deepened. Hiding? She wasn't hiding. But her conscience immediately argued back. Yes, yes, she was hiding. She bristled at the thought, refusing to admit it to herself, let alone to him.

Her stomach, however, had other plans. It grumbled loudly in response to the mere mention of food. After hours of traveling and the exhausting task of hauling her oversized suitcase around, she was ravenous. The faint aroma of the stew now crept under the door, teasing her senses. She could

practically taste it. And he had definitely left it on the stove on purpose, knowing full well its delicious scent would eventually draw her out.

Still, she shook her head, trying to resist. No. She couldn't just waltz out there. She needed a moment to gather her thoughts, organize her next move, and—most importantly—set some boundaries. She had to maintain her distance from him if she had any hope of getting through this.

But her stomach growled again, louder this time and more insistent.

She clutched her stomach and looked down at it before shaking her head. This was not going to happen. Nope. In an effort to stop herself, she took off her shoes and threw them aside. Ha! Not going out! Her bare feet sank into the soft carpet as she tried to ignore the gnawing hunger in her belly and purposefully walked towards the bed.

"You're not going out there. He'll think he's won.", she reminded herself.

But deep down, she knew that wasn't it. It wasn't about Cai thinking he'd won—it was about her. Being around him made her feel unsettled and she did not like the flustered feeling, one bit.

She sighed and walked over to the small window, pulling the curtain aside. Outside, it was already turning dark, even though it was barely evening. She couldn't hide in here forever. Eventually, she'd have to face him. Besides, she was starving. As all these thoughts ran through her mind, she decided that she would go outside.

"Okay, Lily," she whispered to herself. "Just get the bag, at least you have some snacks there that might last you through tonight. So get the bag and race back to this room. Simple."

With one last determined breath, she opened the door a crack, peeking out to make sure the coast was clear. There was no sign of Cai, and her bag sat neatly by the door, just as he said. Her stomach growled in approval as she crept out and snatched it up.

But the moment she straightened up, the scent of the stew hit her full force. Her mouth watered, and her willpower wavered. She could feel her resolve slipping as her gaze darted toward the kitchen. She

just needed a quick warm bite, something to tide her over until she could think straight again. The cold snacks might not cut it.

Her feet moved before her mind could catch up, carrying her toward the kitchen. The stew simmered on the stove, steam rising from the pot like a warm invitation. She grabbed a spoon and dipped it in, taking a small taste.

Oh, God. It was even better than it smelled.

"Good, huh?"

Lily froze, the spoon halfway to her mouth again. Cai leaned casually against the doorframe, arms crossed, watching her with that infuriatingly calm expression. She quickly lowered the spoon, feeling caught in the act like a red handed thief...

"I wasn't—" she started, but he cut her off.

"Relax, I heated it up for you. Figured you'd be hungry after the long trip."

"I am not..." She tried to refute again but before she could, Cai straightened up and cut her off, "Enjoy your dinner, Lily. I have no intention of forcing my company on someone who doesn't want it. And you have made the quite clear. So, there is no need to starve yourself just to avoid me. We'll talk tomorrow. Good night."

Lily stared at the empty doorway where Cai had just been, a pang of guilt tightening in her chest. His words were calm, but they carried the weight of unspoken accusation. She hadn't expected this from him, to leave her standing there with a spoon in her hand and a stew on the stove, like she was some sort of ungrateful child. And yet, here she was—guilty, frustrated, and completely conflicted over her own behaviour.

After all, he had done nothing. Every 'problem' had been in her own head. Whether her fear of being shadowed by Jasmine or now, feeling her own unstable emotions, he had not been responsible. And yet, he'd been caught in the crossfire. It was no wonder he chose to escape to his room than sit there and see her make a fool of herself.



## Chapter 810: Truce

The next morning, Lily hurriedly freshened up, eager to start her day. After a long night of reflection, she had finally come to a clear decision. First and foremost, Cai Frost was a guest of her boss, Princess Isidora, which meant she needed to fulfill her duties as the housekeeper, as underlined by her contract.. Establishing clear boundaries was important, and keeping things professional would be perfectly manageable in this scenario. She did not have to see him as someone she had went out with, even for a short time.

Secondly, she owed him an apology for her behavior the previous night. He had come here for a vacation, likely expecting solitude just as much as she had. After all, she knew how the last month had been one of the most exhausting time for him with his project having succeeded. Her unexpected presence might not have been the most convenient for him. And yet, he had accepted it gracefully, even going so far as to make sure she was comfortable.

Her first task of the day was to check the pantry, as she'd been instructed. If they were going to be stuck here for an extended period due to the weather, she needed to know what they had to work with. As she opened the pantry door, her eyes widened in relief. It was well-stocked, even better than she'd expected—shelves lined with canned goods, dried pasta, grains, fresh vegetables, meats, and jars of spices. They wouldn't go hungry, that was for sure. Even if they ended up snowed in for weeks, there would be more than enough to get by.

"Thank goodness for small miracles," she muttered to herself, running her fingers over the jars thoughtfully. "Now... what on earth should I make for breakfast?"

She stood there, hands on her hips, staring at the ingredients in front of her as if they would somehow decide for her. Cai hadn't mentioned what he liked to eat when they'd been out on the date, and she had no idea what time he might wake up. Would he want something light after sleeping in? Or maybe a hearty breakfast, especially in this freezing weather?

At the all-night diner, he had been eating pancakes and those baos...

Her eyes drifted to the window and the snow piled up outside. Somehow, it seemed that the snow from last evening had doubled by this morning. So whatever she made needed to be something that would keep well, just in case he didn't wake up for hours. The cabin was heated but even so, the last thing she wanted was for the food to go cold and unappetizing before he even made it to the table.

"Okay, Lily, think," she mumbled under her breath. "Eggs? They're fast, but they won't hold up in this cold. Pancakes? No, they'd turn into rubber if they sit too long..."

She tapped her chin, pacing a little as she mentally sifted through her options.

Before she could react, the door swung open and someone stepped into the pantry. Startled, Lily jumped, whirling around, her eyes wide in surprise.

Her gaze landed on the figure before her, and her eyes widened even more, if that were possible. Cai stood there, looking... different. Very different. Not at all like the polished and collected man she'd been mentally preparing to face. He barely seemed to register her presence at first, his expression dazed, his eyes bleary with the remnants of sleep.

"Morning," he muttered in a deep, raspy voice as he passed her, heading toward the shelves without sparing her more than a glance.

Lily blinked, momentarily at a loss for words. That voice—why did his voice sound so much... sexier in the morning? Rough, with a deep timbre that sent an unexpected flutter through her stomach. It was like a whole different person stood in front of her.

And it wasn't just his voice.

Her eyes trailed over him as he moved past her, taking in the sight of his rumpled appearance. His hair stuck out at odd angles, tousled from sleep, giving him a disheveled, boyish look that only made him appear more appealing. The usually neat and buttoned-up Cai Frost now stood before her in a simple t-shirt that clung to him in all the right places, showing off broad shoulders and a lean, toned torso. A pair of athletic shorts hung low on his hips, revealing muscular legs that she hadn't quite expected to see in the middle of winter.

He looked completely... messed up. And not in a bad way.

Lily's breath caught, her mind scrambling as her previous thoughts of professionalism crumbled before her. How was she supposed to keep things professional when he looked like this?

"Uh... good morning," she managed to mutter, her voice coming out a little more strangled than she intended. "What would you like to eat."

For a moment, his hand froze, half raised and he turned around to look at her as if she had asked him to reveal some unimaginable secret.

"You are going to cook?" He asked slowly and she nodded her head, "Yes. I was thinking pancakes. Since you are up, you can have them hot..."

He seemed to ponder for a moment before he shrugged and walked straight out back... I'll be in the living area. Just call me when you are done."

With that, she watched him as he turned around and left, leaving her standing there still.

As soon as he was out of sight, she let out a breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. She set the flour down on the counter with a soft thud, glancing toward the door as if to confirm he had really left.

A faint thud echoed from the other room, followed by the unmistakable sound of leather creaking under a weight.

Lily winced. Did he just throw himself onto the couch face-first?

She tiptoed over to the doorway and peeked out, curious. Sure enough, there he was, sprawled out across the couch in a way that could only be described as... dramatic. His arms dangled over the sides, his face buried in a pillow, and his legs stretched awkwardly behind him, one foot still hanging off the couch.

For a moment, she wasn't sure whether he was still awake or had already fallen back asleep.

Then, as if the scene couldn't get any more absurd, Cai let out a low, barely audible groan, shifting slightly before settling into an even more awkward position. His left arm twitched, the movement causing the leather beneath him to squeak again.

Lily clamped a hand over her mouth, stifling the giggle that threatened to escape. This—this whole thing—was too much. Here she was, trying to keep things professional, and Cai was out there looking like a sleep-deprived mess, completely oblivious to the chaos he was causing in her brain.