

Benefits 841

Chapter 841: Heartbreak

Lily knew something was wrong. The feeling gnawed at her, a deep, persistent tension in her stomach making her feel queasy. The doctor had said her father would be okay, so why did she feel like everything was about to fall apart? She couldn't explain it, but she couldn't ignore it anymore either. A short nap had offered some rest and with that a clarity that something was definitely up and so the unease had returned as soon as she woke up.

Needing answers, Lily walked quickly to her mother's hospital room. Her mother lay motionless, her face pale and tired, as if the past few days had aged her years. Lily's eyes went to the small purse on the chair. She reached for it and rummaged through it, finding her phone. A quick press of the power button confirmed it was dead.

"Figures," she muttered. Glancing at her mother, who remained still, Lily hurried out to the small store downstairs, bought a charger, and returned. She plugged in the phone and waited as the screen stayed black, each second dragging. Her eyes darted back to her mother, who shifted slightly, a frown creasing her forehead. The sight made Lily's heart ache.

If her father insisted on the divorce after he woke up, things would only get worse. Her mother had already suffered so much—losing Lily's older sister and then the distance that had grown between them. Their family was fragile, and Lily feared what the coming days would bring. Even though this woman had long stopped loving her, she could not help but feel for her.

She stepped closer to the bed and gently brushed her mother's hair back, wondering how she would face what was coming. Maybe she could try and convince her father again to give her a chance. With him sick for now, it would even give her mother something to focus on, someone to take care of. That would be good for her.

Her mother's hand twitched slightly in her sleep, and as Lily reached out to cradle it, rubbing warmth into the frail fingers, a sudden, jarring cacophony erupted from her phone. The continuous, sharp beeping of incoming notifications cut through the quiet room, making her jump. Heart pounding, she hurried to silence it, pressing down on the screen until the room fell silent once more.

But the brief calm was short-lived. A knot of unease twisted in her chest as she glanced at the screen. Dozens—no, hundreds—of missed calls stared back at her, the names blinking urgently. Cai. Meredith.

Even some of her former coworkers. Confusion clouded her expression. Why would any of them be calling her, and why so relentlessly?

Her frown deepened, eyes darting over the barrage of notifications. The missed calls were overwhelming, but it was the messages that sent a chill skittering down her spine. She quickly tapped to open her texts, scanning through Cai's frantic attempts to reach her. The worry in his words was palpable, yet none of them explained what was going on.

"Lily. Are you okay? Call me?"

"Lily? I need you to call me. We need to talk. Is everything alright?"

"You are not in the villa or the guest house? Where are you? Why did you leave?"

"Lily. Please call me. Just let me know you are okay."

"I'm sending a search party for you, Lily."

Lily frowned. Well, she'd known he would be worried but all these text messages did not explain the urgency. And all those missed calls from strange numbers as well. Meredith. Meredith had sent her about two hundred messages. Hurriedly, she moved to open her chat but even before she could scroll up, her phone started to ring, with Meredith's name flashing on the screen.

With a look at her mother's still sleeping form, thankfully she'd slept through the entire noise, Lily hurriedly answered the call, "Mer? What's up?"

Before Lily could get another word out, Meredith's voice crackled through the phone, breathless and frantic. "Lily! What's going on? Is everything on the internet true? Where have you been all these days? Are you really dating Cai? Is he using you to forget about your sister? Did you—did you actually say you were okay with being a substitute? Is your dad still in the hospital? And you really don't know what was happening on the internet?"

The rapid-fire questions hit Lily like a series of darts, each one more confusing than the last. She stood frozen, her mouth open, unable to process the flood of words spilling from Meredith's side of the line. She blinked, her hand clutching the phone tighter, her heartbeat quickening. "Mer? What are you talking about?" she managed to ask, her voice barely a whisper, as she tried to make sense of what was going on. "What's going on? What internet storm? And what is this about substitute..."

Meredith's voice faltered, then there was a long pause before she came back, sounding completely stunned. "Wait... you really don't know?" she repeated slowly, disbelief dripping from her words. "You still haven't seen the news? The videos? The articles? The online chatter?"

Lily felt her stomach tighten, the unease she had been trying to push down now escalating into a full-on panic. So something had indeed happened. She shook her head, as if somehow doing so would help her understand the madness unfolding. "No," she replied, her voice shaky. "I haven't seen anything. What's happening, Mer? Tell me what is going on."

"I don't even know where to start..." Meredith spoke slowly. "This is really unexpected." Finally, she took a deep breath and started, "Lily, baby, just sit down, okay? You might need to sit for this and I'll explain everything to you. First tell me, how is your father doing?"

Lily sat down and nodded blankly, "He is okay now..."

"And Cai? Did he really visit you? Didn't he say anything?"

"Cai was here. He arranged a room for me and then said he would come back tomorrow because he had to be somewhere. Tell me what is going on Meredith. Not knowing is scaring me."

Chapter 842: Shocked

To say she was shocked would be an understatement. No, she was beyond shock. Words failed her.

Lily sat there, eyes moving between her mother, who lay sleeping peacefully, and the phone buried in her purse. The last five days had been nothing short of a nightmare for Cai. The accusations had come fast and relentless, each one more painful than the last. He had been blamed for 'using' her, labeled a playboy with no loyalty, branded unfaithful to her sister, and even accused of being callous and heartless. The barrage of online abuse was unyielding, and voices demanding that he step down had grown louder by the hour. The public had turned vicious, and the scrutiny had probably been suffocating for him!

And all this because of her statement, which she had thought that she'd made to her mother, but instead it had been used against him. But what shocked her was Cai's behaviour. She could just guess what it could have looked like. That she'd sold him out and disappeared for good. MAYbe even taken money to ruin him.

But through it all, Cai had never once lashed out at her, not even in the messages. They had only been full of worry for her. He could have blamed her—could have demanded that she speak up to clear his name and end the storm of condemnation. It would have been easy, even justified. Yet, instead of shifting the blame or questioning her silence, when he had found her he had only looked at her with those eyes full of quiet understanding. He hadn't even mentioned the entire fiasco, let alone pressed her for answers.. He hadn't demanded anything. He had simply offered his support, standing by her side when she needed him, disregarding everything else.

And later, when the tide had turned against her, and people had probably started pointing fingers at her, he'd left her side and issued a statement that threw him in the mid of the fray once again. "What I do in my personal life, does not affect my patients. So, I do not need to justify anything."

Her fingers trembled as she placed down her phone after having read all the links that Meredith shared.

She needed to call Cai. She had to tell him that she was ready to step forward and set the record straight, to take responsibility and explain everything. But a realization hit her like a punch to the gut as an icy thread of doubt wove its way into her thoughts, anchoring her in place, stopping her from making that call. Her mother. This whole ordeal—could she have been involved?

The suspicion gnawed at her, making her chest feel tight. It was possible. Her mother had been shocked to see him there and Cai had not been pleased either. In fact, she'd almost felt the waves of anger rolling off him.

But it was possible.

Her breath caught in her throat as she rose on unsteady legs. The room seemed to shrink around her, pressing in with the weight of a realization that threatened to crush her. She glanced at her mother's serene, sleeping form—the picture of innocence—and then back at the phone resting heavily in her hand. The urge to turn away, to abandon the gnawing doubt clawing at her chest, was fierce. But she couldn't. Not when Cai's reputation, his career, and perhaps even his future depended on her finding

the truth. She swiped through the lock screen and navigated to the messaging app. Her heart thumped erratically as she scrolled, searching for any hint, any clue. Then she found it—a thread with an unfamiliar number. The first few messages were formal.

"Mrs. Kingsley, thank you for taking the time to consider our proposal. We'd like to feature you in an exclusive interview about your experiences with Caius Frost and his involvement with your daughters. We promise to compensate you handsomely."

Lily frowned as she read the message. Her mother had actually refused the offer so could it be that her mother was not involved. "I appreciate the offer, but my family's affairs are not for public discussion."

Yet, the tone shifted in later exchanges. Her mother's reluctance began to wane. It was probably around the time when they had come to see her first. At the inn.

"This isn't about gossip. I've already explained everything on the phone," the sender pressed. "It's about truth. Please think of what it could mean."

The next message from her mother made Lily's pulse quicken as she felt her stomach sink. "I will consider it. But my involvement must be kept discreet."

A sick feeling twisted in Lily's stomach. She scrolled faster, her eyes darting over the messages, and then she reached the exchange from the day of her father's heart attack.

"It's done. I've managed to record your daughter's words. And will use them well. Just make sure that you do not let her come forward to explain anything." the sender wrote.

Lily's breath hitched. A cold shiver traced its way down her spine, and she nearly dropped the phone. It was true— her mother had been a part of this entire thing...The interview, the rumors, the whispers that had painted Cai as a villain had all been part of a calculated plan and her mother had been a key player.

All these days, the reason her mother had kept her phone with her, had made her sit in the chapel all the time, not letting her leave her for a moment, it had not been for the sake of her father or even

because she'd needed her. It had been all because she needed to stop her from seeing everything and coming forward to clarify everything.

Lily's knees threatened to buckle. She braced herself against the wall, her vision blurring with unshed tears. Every memory, every conversation with Cai, every look he'd given her filled with silent support despite what had been going on, now felt like shards of glass digging into her heart.

A sob escaped her, raw and unrestrained as she fell to her knees. How could her mother have done this? How could she have betrayed her like this?

Chapter 843: Cai's Call

"Dad. Are you quite disappointed in me?" Caius asked, his voice tight with uncertainty. He did not like disappointing his father.

Erasmi looked at his son, his expression steady and calm. "Did you kill someone without cause?" he replied, his tone almost casual. Rafe, standing nearby, blinked in surprise at the older man's response, while Caius shook his head, a flicker of confusion crossing his features.

"Then I am not disappointed," Erasmi continued. "You did what you had to do to protect your love. There's no shame in that."

Caius let out a breath he didn't know he was holding, relief washing over him. He glanced at Rafe, who shook his head slowly, a bemused smile playing on his lips.

Getting to know the Frost family had been an experience, one that challenged every expectation he had about nobility and power. It was like his childhood had all been a lie. The Frosts' were different, profoundly so. They valued loyalty, love, and family above all else. They cared little for the superficial concerns that dominated the lives of those in the circle of the powerful.

Caius carried the weight of expectations as the oldest of the Frost family, much like him, and yet, he did not feel tied and repressed by it. Their priorities, their unwavering loyalty to each other—it was something Rafe almost envied. Almost. He wasn't sure he agreed with what had just happened.

But it also inspired him, lit a fire within him that pushed him to confront his own choices and the path he wanted to carve out for his future.

"Uncle Eras," Rafe said, a hint of exasperation creeping into his voice. "Are you really saying that as long as Caius hasn't killed anyone, you're not disappointed? But think about it—he just sabotaged his own career and everything he worked for. He could have talked to Lily, explained what was happening instead of acting impulsively and adding to all this trouble."

Erasmi chuckled, a warm sound that belied the seriousness of the conversation. "Rafe, just because Caius is a bit senseless doesn't mean I can be disappointed in him. Right, Cai?" He turned to his son with a knowing grin.

Caius groaned, unable to suppress a smile despite himself. "Dad, you make it sound like being senseless is a virtue."

"It's not a virtue," Erasmi said, "But it's a sign that you have the courage to love with all your heart. Those things can't be taught—and they're worth more than perfection."

Rafe's expression softened as he listened, a flicker of understanding in his eyes. Maybe there was something to learn from the Frosts after all, something deeper than the polished image of duty that defined his own upbringing.

For the first time in a long while, he felt a pull toward something simpler, something real. And maybe, just maybe, that could change everything. But, for now, he was curious what the Frosts were going to do about the latest round of netizens abuse, calling Cai a user, player and someone not worthy of being a doctor.

"What I'm wondering," Erasmi said, "is why you're here when you should be with Lily. You told me to find her, and I did. I led you to her. You went, saw her family's situation firsthand, and now you're back here instead of being there for her. It makes no sense. You're only adding more problems for yourself."

"Dad," Cai responded, running a hand through his hair in frustration. "Being with her right now will just bring her more trouble. I can't believe her mother went that far just to force me out of her life. And her father's health—it's deteriorating. The doctor was clear: he can't be under any stress. If Lily and her parents are fighting because of me, it'll only make things worse. The last thing I want is to cause more pain for her, so I'm trying to keep my distance."

The room fell silent for a moment, heavy with unspoken thoughts. Cai's jaw tightened, torn between his desire to help Lily and the fear of making things worse for her. He glanced at Erasmi, hoping to find some inspiration from his dad but it was useless. Suddenly, Rafe's phone chimed, cutting through the tension like a knife. He turned away, muttering a quick, "Excuse me," as he checked the message. The brief silence that followed was deafening. When Rafe turned back around, his face was grim, shadows of worry etched into his features. Without saying a word, he placed his phone on the table in front of Cai and slid it over.

"Take a look," Rafe said, his tone low and serious. He then turned to Erasmi, eyes narrowing. "I don't think Cai needs to make any decisions right now. But he might need to step in and save Lily after all."

Cai's stomach dropped as he stared at the screen, taking in the post that Lily had written on her account, which was already going viral. Cai's eyes widened as he read the post on Lily's social media account. She had written: "I have always liked and admired Cai, and if life had given us the chance, I would have jumped at the chance to be with him. Any girl would and I consider myself lucky to have been close to him for a little while. What you heard in those words that were shared was an echo of those feelings. That I am happy with him, regardless if he sees me as myself or as Jasmine. "But he has always treated me with respect, as Lily, not as Jasmine. We may look alike, but our personalities are worlds apart, and Cai recognized that. He should not be 'prosecuted' for my feelings of liking for him." Cai groaned. Why did this sound like a goodbye. Here he was trying to keep the storm away from her and instead she jumped into the eye of the storm brandishing an umbrella for 'protection'. "Dad. I'm going now." Cai said as he hurriedly stood up to leave. Since she'd already invited trouble, he could do nothing but stand next to her of course.

Chapter 844: Why

Lily's eyes never wavered from her father as he slowly returned to consciousness. The lines on his face seemed deeper now, etched by the days he had spent fighting to stay alive. As his eyes fluttered open, she leaned forward and clasped his hand gently. "How are you feeling now?" she asked, her voice steady but soft.

He didn't answer right away, but the way he squeezed her hand told her enough. Despite being the one who had hovered on the brink of death, the worry in his eyes was unmistakable. He opened his mouth to speak, but Lily was quick to shake her head, a small, knowing smile playing on her lips.

"No," she said firmly. "You're not allowed to talk for the next few days. It'll put too much pressure on your lungs. Just rest, okay? Everything is alright."

Her father nodded slowly, his eyes darting around the sterile hospital room. Lily saw the shift in his expression and knew exactly who he was searching for. The thought made her chest tighten, but she forced herself to not show any expression.

"She's in the next room," Lily said quietly. "Resting. She exhausted herself worrying about you." She paused for a brief moment, hesitating before continuing. "I'll send her in if you want to see her."

His eyes met hers, filled with conflict. The worry about his wife was clear as well, but so was the shadow of events that had led to this. Lily's chest tightened at the sight of his turmoil, and she squeezed his hand reassuringly. "Don't think about the past right now, Dad," she whispered. "Let her come in. This can be a new beginning, for both of you."

She saw the way her father looked at her and knew he had probably misunderstood. He must think that she and her mother had probably come to an understanding. She didn't correct him. They had come to an agreement, but one he would not like.

Before he could react or ask anything, Lily gave him a soft smile, one meant to comfort, and rose to her feet. "I'll send her in." The smile, however, fell away the moment she stepped into the hallway. Her steps carried her to the adjacent room, where her mother sat exactly where Lily had left her—head bowed, hands clasped tightly together in silent prayer.

"Mrs. Kingston," Lily said, her voice was low but loud enough to make the older woman's head snap up. "My father is awake. You can go see him now."

The woman's eyes were red-rimmed, tired, yet filled with a flicker of hope. She stood shakily, her gaze searching Lily's face. "Lily," she began, voice trembling.

But Lily's expression hardened, cutting her off. "Don't," she said coldly. "Don't say my name." The silence between them was thick, almost suffocating. "The only reason I'm even talking to you is because I don't want to stress my father out. But make no mistake," Lily's eyes narrowed, her words pointed, "if you try to pull anything like before, I will walk away. And then you can explain yourself to him about everything that happened and your part in it."

Mrs. Kingston's lips parted as if to speak, but she seemed to think better of it and nodded instead, eyes dropping to the floor. Lily took a step back, allowing her mother to pass, and watched as the older woman made her way to the door, shoulders stooped slightly.

"I hope I've made myself clear," Lily added, one last time before turning away.

Mrs. Kingston paused in the doorway, a fleeting moment of hesitation, before she disappeared outside. Only when her mother was outside, did Lily breathe a sigh of relief as she sat down on 'her' side of the room and leaned her head against the wall.

Now, she was showing remorse. Now, she was accepting her mistake. But what was done could not be undone. She would have done anything to have her mother try and talk to her in the past, even until yesterday, but now, it was too late for remorse, for apology.

Lily's fingers trembled as she clutched her phone. She had updated the post a few hours ago, and by now, it was probably everywhere. The comments were already flooding in, some supportive, others viciously dissecting her every word. She knew the truth of it: there was no taking it back. Meredith had already called, her voice sharp with frustration as she scolded Lily for shouldering the blame alone when Cai had already managed to redirect the public's attention to himself.

Yet the one person she needed to hear from remained silent. Cai. He hadn't called or messaged again. It was impossible that he hadn't seen it—the way news traveled, he would have known almost instantly. The silence stretched out between them, an invisible wall that seemed to grow thicker with each passing minute. Was he angry? Disappointed? She wouldn't have blamed him if he was. He had every right to be upset, to question why she would make such a move, such a declaration.

Lily's mind swirled with questions that gnawed at her resolve. Part of her ached to hear her mother's explanation as well, to know what had driven her to such a betrayal. Did she really hate her that much? Why would her own mother, the woman who had raised her, do something so unthinkable? Yet, an equally fierce part of her resisted. What good would hearing those reasons do? Justifications would only deepen the hurt, peel back the thin scab over a wound that was still raw. No, she didn't want explanations that might twist the knife further and make her feel even more betrayed. This time, there were no second chances.

A part of her wanted to hear her mother's explanation. Wanted to know what it was she had done to deserve such a betrayal from her own mother. But another, more stubborn and hurt part of her didn't want to know. She didn't want her mother's justifications. For those would only make her feel worse.

Chapter 845: Professor

"Professor Ellis White," Cai said, his voice calm cutting through the silence of the room as he stood in the open doorway.

The old man looked up from the stack of papers scattered across the table and jerked as recognition dawned on him. His eyes widened, and his body went rigid when he saw Cai standing there. "What... what are you doing here?" he demanded, his voice cracking with unease. His hand fumbled for the desk phone. "Who let you in? Security!"

Cai's lips curled into a slow, unbothered smile, the kind that hinted he had all the time in the world for the man to call for security.. Without waiting for an invitation, he strolled over and settled himself in the chair opposite the professor. His posture was casual, almost leisurely, as though they were old friends meeting for coffee. "How are you doing, Professor? Its' been too long since we've seen each other." he asked in a tone dripping with mock cordiality.

The professor didn't answer. His trembling fingers mashed the buttons on the phone repeatedly, his panic rising with every failed attempt to summon help. "Security! Security, get in here immediately!" he barked;

Cai leaned back in his chair, a faint chuckle escaping him as he watched the older man's frantic efforts. Finally, he sighed, spreading his hands in a gesture of mock surrender. "No point in shouting, Professor," he said with a shrug. "You're not the only one who knows how to grease the right palms. And you seem to be screaming as if you think I am going to murder you. Relax, Professor."

The professor froze mid-motion, his hand hovering over the phone as his gaze snapped back to Cai. His face was ashen now, his lips pressed into a thin line. He cleared his throat, but the sound came out weak and strained. "You— You need to leave. Right now," he stammered, "I don't care why you are here, but I have no wish to see you. So, if you don't leave, I'll have no choice but to call the police."

Cai's smile widened, but his eyes remained cold and calculating. "What's the rush, Professor?" he asked, his voice deceptively soft, like a predator toying with its prey. "What kind of teacher sends his old student away so rudely? Surely, we can spare a few minutes to catch up, hmm?"

The professor's hand fell to the desk, shaking uncontrollably as beads of sweat glistened on his forehead, betraying the calm façade he was desperately trying to maintain. Cai tilted his head slightly, as though studying the man's every reaction, his every twitch.

"You're sweating, Professor," Cai observed. His words were slow and deliberate, "Why are you so nervous? I'm just here for a little chat. No need to get worked up... unless, of course, you've done something that would make you uneasy."

The professor recoiled as though struck, his chair scraping noisily against the floor. His lips parted, but no words came out, as he closed his mouth.

"Did you do something, Professor?" Cai repeated, his tone deceptively light. "Because from where I'm sitting, it certainly looks like you've got something to hide."

Ellis White clenched his hands tightly under the desk, his nails digging into his palms as he fought to steady himself. He'd been careful, he reminded himself. No one could possibly trace everything back to him. No one. He inhaled a shaky breath, willing his racing heart to slow. Caius's sudden arrival had shaken him is all. Slowly, he composed himself, lifted his chin as he met Cai's piercing gaze with a disdainful one of his own.

"Done something?" Ellis scoffed, his voice growing louder with each word, "You ruined my career, Cai. You are the reason my medical license was revoked. Do you really think I should be happy to see you waltz in here like this?"

Cai leaned forward slightly, resting his elbows on the edge of the desk, his expression one of mild amusement. "Your license wasn't revoked because of me, Professor," he replied, his voice silky but laced with venom. "It was revoked because you couldn't keep your hands to yourself. Abusing your power over underage girls? Not exactly behavior worthy of a teaching accolade."

The professor stiffened as though Cai had struck him across the face. His lips curled back in a snarl, and his trembling hand shot out to point an accusatory finger at the younger man. "I was doing no such thing!" he spat, his voice cracking with the force of his denial. "There was no proof. None! Just one student lying through her teeth, and the university—those cowards—too afraid of you to investigate the truth. So, they pinned everything on me!" His finger jabbed the air between them. "Do you really think I should be welcoming you here? Do you think I'd want to see your face ever again?"

Cai leaned back in his chair, unperturbed by the outburst. He tilted his head, his sharp gaze never leaving the professor's face. "So," Cai began, his tone calm, "you expect me to believe that it was all a misunderstanding? That you were the victim in this whole mess?" He chuckled darkly. "Tell me,

Professor, does a victim bribe officials to bury complaints? Does a victim pay off witnesses to keep their mouths shut? Or threaten them to fail the subject if they didn't comply."

"But I can see how this would bother you, if you were innocent. I understand now. That is why I am here. At that time, the public opinion was not in your favour and you had to lose a lot. And now, unexpectedly, I am in a similar position. The public opinion is against me. Much like you, I am being accused of abusing and misusing my power. It is why I am here, you know. To tell you, how I understand what you went through. How difficult and humiliating it must have been to let go everything you built, only for it to come crashing down because of someone else."

Chapter 846: Pain

"Much like you, I am being accused of abusing and misusing my power. It is why I am here, you know. To tell you, how I understand what you went through. How difficult and humiliating it must have been to let go everything you built, only for it to come crashing down because of someone else, me specifically." Cai said softly.

Professor Ellis White's sneer deepened, his lips curling with disdain. "You realize what humiliation is? You?" he echoed mockingly. "I doubt that. You speak as if you've been stripped of something meaningful. But from where I stand, all you've endured is a little mudslinging online. Me? I lost everything—my career, my reputation, my life's work. And here you are, still standing, still smug, untouched by real ruin. I don't see you being forced out of your job. I don't see your personal life crumbling." His voice dripped with bitter sarcasm. "It's almost... tragic that you've suffered so little."

Cai smiled faintly, his expression calm and almost amused at the bitterness in his tone. He tilted his head, his eyes locked on the professor. Then, with a casual shrug, he said, "You're right, Professor. It is sad, isn't it? Sad for you, I mean. All that scheming, all that planning, all that effort to bring me down—and yet here I am. Still standing. Still me, unshaken. And you?" He let the words hang in the air, his smile sharp. "Well, you're just a man sitting in the ruins of his own plans and mistakes..."

Professor Ellis's sneer faltered for a fraction of a second before he regained his composure. "Scheming? Don't flatter yourself," he said coldly, leaning back in his chair. "You overestimate your importance. Whatever happened to you was the result of your own arrogance, nothing more. I've done nothing but watch as the inevitable catch up with you. And it has been amusing to say the least."

Cai's smile widened, his eyes gleaming with something that made Ellis shift slightly in his seat in worry. "No scheming, huh? That's interesting," Cai mused, his tone light, almost playful. He leaned forward slightly, resting his elbows on the desk between them. "So, you're telling me it's just a coincidence that Feliz Merton suddenly took such an interest in me right before all the mud slinging started? "

"Feliz," Cai continued, savoring the professor's reaction. "He's quite talented, isn't he? Sharp, resourceful... loyal to a fault. Especially to people who've helped him. But you know what they say about loyalty—it's a two-way street. And it didn't take much to figure out whose road he was walking on. See, he was so interested in me that he went to the place where I was on a vacation, recorded my girlfriend's words and used them to attack me. That really is too much of a coincidence, isn't it? And coincidences are something I absolutely don't believe in. "

Ellis White stilled.

Professor Ellis's hands tightened imperceptibly on the arms of his chair, his expression remaining carefully neutral. Yet there was a flicker—barely noticeable—in his eyes, a hint of worry that Cai caught instantly, giving him even more confidence. The older man leaned back, forcing his features into a mask of indifference, though his mind was already racing. How had Cai discovered Feliz's connection to him? And, more importantly, how much did he know? Was he playing in the blind. It was a possibility. It was something that Cai had done in the past as well.

"I don't know who you're talking about," Ellis said evenly in a measured tone. "Feliz Merton, you said? Doesn't ring a bell. And even if it did, I can't imagine why you'd come to me with such a name. Sounds like you're grasping at straws, Cai. And who cares about the recording of your girlfriend? The truth is that she did say something damaging."

Cai chuckled softly,. He leaned back in his chair, crossing his arms, his gaze never leaving Ellis's face. "Really, Professor? That's the story you're going with? You don't know Feliz Merton? That's funny, because he certainly seems to know you. In fact, if I didn't know better, I'd say he looks up to you. Talks about you like you're some kind of a saviour.."

Ellis felt a cold sweat start at the back of his neck, but he forced a scoff. "You've got quite the imagination. I have no idea who this person is or why you're so fixated on dragging their name into this. Honestly, you should be asking yourself why you're here, spouting baseless accusations."

Cai's smile never wavered. He tilted his head, studying Ellis like a predator sizing up its prey. "Oh, I know why I'm here," he said smoothly. "But I was curious if you'd at least have the decency to admit the truth. Guess not. But that's alright, denial's the first step, isn't it? Then let me tell you about Feliz's story. It is quite interesting."

"You see, Feliz wasn't always the rising star in gossip journalism that he is now. In fact, about three years ago, he was just another struggling writer trying to make a name for himself in a cutthroat industry. Back then, life was tough for him, both professionally and personally. One night, he found himself facing a dire situation, one that changed everything. His wife went into labor in the middle of the worst snowstorm the country had seen in years. The roads were completely blocked, every doctor's clinic in the area was closed, and there was no way to get to the hospital in time. It must have been terrifying, watching the clock tick by, knowing there was nothing he could do to help her and his child on his own.

But then, fate intervened. His neighbor— a doctor stripped of his medical license—stepped in. This neighbor not only helped Feliz's wife safely deliver their baby but also saved her life when complications arose. This of course left Feliz deep indebted to the neighbour. In fact he was so full of gratitude, that when the time came to name his daughter, Feliz chose to honor the person who had saved his family. Would you like to guess the name of the baby, professor?

Chapter 847: Lost

Lily gently patted her father's pillow, fluffing it with care, before helping him sit up. As she did, she struggled to keep the smile on her face, even as her father's soft voice broke through the silence.

"Have you spoken to Cai today?" he asked, his tone tinged with a wistfulness that tugged at her heart.

It was clear he had accepted the idea that she had spoken up out of love for Cai that day about being a willing replacement for him, and he didn't blame her for doing what she believed was right. He seemed content with the notion, almost relieved, as though it gave him a measure of peace.

But the truth was much more complicated. She hadn't spoken to Cai. Not since he had left a week ago, after painstakingly arranging everything here. And certainly not after she posted that clarification—the one that had almost crucified her online. He'd gone radio silent and she didn't know what to do.

For days, the storm that followed had been relentless, consuming her with regret. Every word she had typed, every choice she had made, was dissected and twisted until it felt like her very soul had been laid bare for strangers to judge. Mercifully, someone had come forward, revealing the entire scandal to be the work of someone seeking revenge from Cai. The furor had died down, dissipating as quickly as it had erupted. But she remained unsure. If she had stayed quiet, unaware of everything, would Cai have returned then? Would he have come to see her?

But now, along with the fading storm, her relationship also seemed to have faded into darkness. People had stopped whispering about them, stopped questioning her or his every move. Even the nurse, the one who had so earnestly warned her about the fallout, now seemed to look at her with pity. Perhaps,

she thought grimly, even the nurse believed that Cai and she were never as close as everyone had once assumed.

Her father's voice broke through her thoughts again, gentle but probing. "Are you still worried about me? Is that why you don't tell me about him?"

Lily sighed, her shoulders sinking under the weight of his words. "I am worried about you, Papa," she admitted. "But what do you want me to tell you?"

Her heart ached as she looked at him, his frailty so evident it made her chest tighten. She wanted to shield him from the truth, from the mess her life had become, but at the same time, she didn't know how to keep hiding it all without him getting suspicious.

He'd already asked her why he was not here and she'd told him about the scandal though not in detail. Just that someone from the past had tried to harm him and that he was busy handling it.

"Fine," her father said after a moment, his voice softer but no less probing. "If you don't want to talk about Cai, then tell me what's going on between your mother and you."

Lily froze, her hands stilling in her lap. The question was one she had dreaded even more so than his regular of if she had seen Cai, but she had known it was coming. She shook her head slowly, offering a faint, tired smile that didn't quite reach her eyes.

"Papa, there's even less to say about that," she replied quietly. "I mean, you already know how things stand between us."

Her father frowned, the creases in his forehead deepening with concern. "But you told me that you and your mother were going to work on things. That's what you promised me. And that is what she promised me."

"Yes, Papa," Lily said, "I did say that. And we will. But these things take time. It's not something we can fix overnight."

He sighed heavily, the sound filling the room as he stared at her. He'd never realized just how strong and stubborn his daughter had become.

Meanwhile, Lily was worried about her father. She could see the worry etched in his face, the lines that seemed to have deepened with every passing day. "I understand that," he said, his tone gentler now. "But the two of you aren't even in the same room most of the time. Every time your mother comes, you leave. And when you're here, she's nowhere to be seen."

"Papa..." Lily trailed off, searching for the right words to reassure him. "Please, don't try to rush this. I know how it looks, but sometimes space is what's needed. We'll handle it. Everything will be taken care of soon. Okay?"

Her father's gaze lingered on her for a long moment, searching her face for something she wasn't sure she could give him. Finally, he nodded, though the worry in his eyes didn't fade.

"Alright," he said, his voice quieter now. "I'll trust you on this. But, Lily..." He hesitated, as though unsure whether to say more, before continuing. "Don't wait too long. Time doesn't always wait for us."

The words settled heavily between them, a reminder of all the things left unsaid, of the fragile threads still binding their family together. Lily forced another smile, but her chest ached.

"I know, Papa," she whispered. "I won't." But she didn't know how to tell him that. How could she forgive the betrayal her mother had dealt her. But even so, maybe it was okay to let her father believe that. And later, she would find excuses to not go back home. He would slowly come to accept it that this was a truce.

Before she could say anything more or even think of what to say, a knock on the door startled her and her father. And when she looked up, she could only stare.

She heard her father say something though she had no idea what it was he said. Because her mind had gone all blank as her eyes drank in the sight before her. Caius Frost was back.

Chapter 848: Unbothered

Caius Frost was back. The words echoed in Lily's mind, relentless and insistent, as he strolled into the room with a large fruit basket in hand. His confident gait made it seem as though he hadn't disappeared from her life for days on end but only been away for a couple of hours.

Without a word, he set the basket aside, closed the distance between them, tilted her chin with a familiar ease, and leaned down to press a kiss to her lips. The gesture was casual, yet it left her breathless, her thoughts spinning. Before she could fully process his return, he turned to her father, his tone light and conversational.

"Caius! I was just asking Lily about you. It had been so many days, I was..."

"You were worried, Mr. Kingston?" Cai interrupted smoothly, a teasing smile playing at his lips. "The one thing Lily and I don't want you to do is worry. So, what's the verdict? Still managing to out-stubborn that heart of yours, or should I start prepping for a dramatic reading of your will?"

Lily's head snapped toward him at the audacity of his words, her jaw dropping slightly, but her father merely chuckled, the sound warm despite its frailty.

"Out-stubborn the heart? Please," her father replied, waving a hand as if brushing off the very notion. "Death doesn't stand a chance against me. I've already sent it packing twice this week. It'll have to get in line behind my aching bones and failing liver."

"Ahh, the unbeatable team." Cai quipped as he sat on the stool next to her before continuing, "I'm just glad to see you alright. This really gave everyone a scare. Now, you had better buckle up and start staying in shape. We need you to be hail and hearty for the wedding."

Lily's head snapped around so quickly this time that it was a miracle she didn't give herself whiplash. The wedding? What wedding?

Her father's reaction wasn't far behind, his eyes widening as he glanced between Cai and his daughter. Before either of them could voice the obvious questions, Caius pressed on, his grin widening mischievously.

"Of course," he added, leaning back with an air of complete confidence, "I haven't yet officially asked for her hand, so you've got plenty of time to recover. No pressure, Mr. Kingston."

While Cai kept talking, Lily was a swirl of emotions, but anger stood out the most—sharp and unrelenting. While her heart was almost jumping in excitement at the sight of him, her brain was not really happy with him. Ask for her hand? From her father? He hadn't even asked her! And now he waltzed back in like nothing had happened, leaving her to stew in worry for days.

She huffed quietly, masking her frustration while watching him charm her father with that easy smile and smooth words. He was good at this—too good. Her father was eating it up, laughing at every joke as if Cai hadn't just turned her world upside down with his return and his announcement.

Her patience snapped. She stood abruptly, ready to leave the room and escape his infuriating presence. But before she could take a step, Cai's hand caught hers, pulling her gently but firmly back onto the stool.

Then, he turned his full attention to her. Blocking her father's view, he smiled at her, calm and collected, as though he hadn't just thrown her life into chaos. She glared at him, her anger finally slipping past her carefully held composure.

He raised an eyebrow at her, clearly amused by her reaction.

"Wait," he said lightly, his tone infuriatingly casual. "I brought some apples from Petrovia." With that, he walked to the basket, took out two apples and a knife and plate... what the? and walked back to sit next to them, "I plucked them from the royal orchard just before flying out here so they're especially good. And they are good for your health as well, so you're going to be eating them."

Cai took his time slicing the apples with precision and Lily found herself momentarily distracted by the sight. His movements were deliberate, almost annoyingly so, as if he knew the tension he was causing and was in no hurry to address it. And as expected, he was quite experienced with the knife.

He carefully arranged the apple slices on a plate, "Here you go, Mr. Kingston. Fresh from Petrovia's royal orchard, specially plucked for you. Good for the heart, good for the soul."

When the man took it without much complaint, Lily almost rolled her eyes. Was this really her father? Hadn't he just been whining about how he was not hungry when she'd asked him to sit up to eat something?

Cai returned to his seat, picking up another apple. This time, his knife moved with a purpose, and Lily noticed him glancing her way as he worked. Her curiosity sparked, but she refused to give him the satisfaction of asking.

Moments later, he slid a plate in front of her. She blinked, her eyes widening slightly as she took in the neat arrangement of apple slices—shaped into a heart. When she continued to stare at him, he stood up, pushed the plate into her hand and whispered, "Come on baby. I am handing my heart to you on a platter. You can't refuse this."

Without a word, she picked up a slice and took a bite, her expression carefully neutral. The crisp sweetness of the apple filled her mouth, but she refused to let it distract her from her irritation. Cai's smirk widened as if he could sense her internal battle.

"Good, isn't it?" he asked, his voice low and smooth.

Lily chewed slowly, making him wait for her response. Finally, she swallowed and nodded, her tone clipped. "It's fine."

"Just fine?" he teased, leaning closer. "You're trying to break my heart?"

She gave a pointed glance at the plate where a part of the heart was already missing and said, "It's already broken."

Cai followed her gaze and shook his head, "Nope. You have a piece of it. And you're going to take the rest of it as well."

Chapter 849: Worried

Lily tucked her father in, brushed a strand of hair from his forehead, and stepped back. She gave him one last look before leaving the room. Cai had already gone, and with his absence, her anger deflated like a popped balloon.

Then the thought struck her—he was avoiding her. Why else would he show up and leave without speaking to her alone? He'd simply visited her father and then gone.

But if he was avoiding her, why did he come in the first place? And what was all that talk about the wedding and her having a piece of his heart? She shook her head, trying to make sense of it, when suddenly, a hand grabbed her wrist and yanked her into the next room.

She gasped, her heart jumping to her throat, and was about to scream when the door shut behind her, and she was pressed against it. A hand covered her mouth, muffling her shout

Her wide eyes landed on Cai, standing far too close, his lips quirking into a smirk. She blinked, confusion swirling in her mind. He was still here? Hadn't he left almost thirty minutes ago? Why was he lurking around? Her gaze must have given away her questions because he chuckled softly.

"Well," he said with a teasing shrug, "you were angry and ready to tear into me, so I figured I'd make a quick exit. Thought I'd give you time to cool off and maybe confuse you a little in the process."

Her eyes narrowed at his smug tone. He left just to mess with her? So that she would not be prepared for him. Before she could think it through, she acted. She bit his hand.

He winced, the sound low and sharp, but to her frustration, he didn't pull away. His grip tightened slightly, holding steady despite the clear pain.

"Babe," he muttered through clenched teeth, "if you keep this up, you're going to tear off my flesh." She froze, realizing what she was doing, and let go immediately. As he pulled his hand away, she saw the deep red marks her teeth had left. He rubbed his palm, examining the imprint, and she felt her stomach drop with guilt.

Shock rooted her in place. She couldn't believe she'd done that. What was wrong with her?

"I..." she began, her voice trailing off. Her back pressed harder against the door, as though she could somehow disappear into it. "Why didn't you move your hand?"

Cai didn't answer her question. Instead, he cupped her face with his unmarked hand, the warmth of his palm making her breath hitch. Her heart raced as he leaned in, and before she could process what was happening, his lips brushed hers in a soft, deliberate kiss.

The gentle pressure fried her brain, erasing all thoughts and protests. Instinct took over, and she kissed him back just as softly. Her hands found their way to his arms, clutching them for balance as if they were the only thing keeping her grounded. He deepened the kiss and she surrendered herself within a moment. All the rage, the confusion that she had been harboring seemed to disappear from her as his lips moved over hers.

When he finally pulled back, her lips tingled, and her chest felt too tight. His eyes searched hers, a flicker of something deep and unreadable in them.

"I missed you."

The vulnerability in his voice made her throat tighten. She swallowed hard, her mind reeling. He missed her? Then why hadn't he reached out? Why show up now with cryptic words and confusing actions?

Her guard went back up, and she stepped back, though his hands didn't let her go far. "If you missed me so much, why didn't you contact me all these days?" Her voice wavered between hurt and anger.

His gaze softened, but he didn't respond immediately. Instead, he leaned in again and captured her lips in another of his maddening kisses. This one was firmer, less restrained, and when he groaned against her mouth, a shiver ran through her. He pulled back abruptly, his forehead resting against hers as he exhaled heavily.

"I'm starved for you," he admitted, his voice low and rough.

Her cheeks burned at his words, the raw honesty of them leaving her speechless. Before she could collect her thoughts, he tugged her gently toward the bed. She stumbled slightly, but he steadied her with ease, sitting down on the edge of the mattress.

Still holding her hand, he pulled her down to sit beside him, his touch lingering on her wrist. "Lily," he began, his tone quiet but serious, "there's a lot I need to explain. But for now, I just need you to listen to me, okay?"

Lily nodded slowly, searching his face for any answers. But he only looked back at her, waiting for her. So she sighed and prepared herself for whatever curveball he planned to throw at her.

Cai sighed and then explained, "Okay. Its like this. When the news broke out, you'd disappeared for days on end. At first I thought nothing of it, assuming that you were busy and unaware. And then later I was worried about you, which proved to be right because Uncle Kingston was in the hospital."

Initially, Dad, my dad was supposed to come and bring you but when he realized that your father was here, he sent me over. But my being here would have brought more of a shi* storm for you, so I left hurriedly later."

"But I knew that things would get to you soon, so the moment I left, my priority was to resolve the matters before the storm hit you.

"However, as you know I failed," he admitted, "I thought I had time, but I didn't. You found out, and you took the hit head-on while I was off trying to fix things. I hated that by the way. Please don't do that in the future."

He shifted closer, his hand brushing against hers. "Then I discovered who was behind everything," he said, his tone hardening. "I swear, Lily, the moment I figured it out, I planned to come back to you after handling things. I wanted to tell you everything, to make it right."

Chapter 850: Interruption

"I swear, Lily, the moment I figured it out, I planned to come back to you after handling things. I wanted to tell you everything, to make it right."

Before Cai could explain everything, however, they were interrupted by someone as the door opened. Both of them turned toward the interruption, and Lily's mother, Mrs. Kingston, stepped hesitantly into the room. Her eyes flickered between them, and anyone could see that she was surprised.. For a moment, no one spoke. Then, with a nervous clearing of her throat, she said, "I'm sorry for the interruption. I'll..." Her voice faltered as her gaze lingered on Lily, then shifted to Cai, softening with an

expression that was equal parts guilt and hesitation. She swallowed hard, as though weighing her next words, and finally finished, "I'll wait in the other room."

However, before she could close the door, Cai stopped her, "Mrs Kingston, please wait a minute."

"What is it?" Mrs. Kingston asked cautiously, staring at the two of them even as her hand tightened on the knob. All these days, Lily had been ignoring any talks between them but she knew it would only be a matter of time when she would have to talk. It seemed like now was that moment.

"I'd like to talk about the recent incident." Cai began...

Her eyes darted toward Lily, then back to Cai, as though searching for an escape route. But after a moment's hesitation, she drew in a sharp breath and said quickly, "I... I owe you an apology, Cai. For everything that happened."

Her words fell like a stone in the room, heavy and unexpected. Cai blinked, caught off guard by her sudden apology, and tried to respond, but Lily cut him off before he could say a word.

"Wait—what?" Lily's voice rang out, sharp and incredulous at her mother's apology. How could she? It took her a moment but it seemed that she was extremely angry at everyone. Cai had barely escaped her wrath and now it was her mother's turn.

.She pushed herself off the bed, her arms dropping to her sides as all the repressed emotions burst forward. "You're apologizing to him? Him?" Her voice rose with each word, crackling with the anger she had clearly been holding back all this time.

"Lily, please," Mrs. Kingston began, but her daughter was already surging forward, her expression a mix of outrage and hurt.

"No!" Lily snapped, glaring at her mother. "He doesn't deserve your apology—" She threw a glance in his direction before continuing, "not before I do!" She pointed to herself, her voice trembling with the intensity of her emotions. "You used me to create that mess. You cooptated in an entire conspiracy to hurt me and then to hurt him! And now, you're here, apologizing to him? What am I? Air?"

Mrs. Kingston looked stricken, her mouth opening and closing as though searching for the right words.

"You don't think I deserve an apology?" Lily continued, her voice cracking as tears welled in her eyes. "After everything you put me through, everything I suffered because of you—" She broke off, shaking her head bitterly. "Of course. Of course, it's easier to apologize to someone who's not your daughter, isn't it?"

Cai stepped forward, his hands raised in a placating gesture as he tried to hold her. "Lily, please. Let's talk about this—"

But Lily shook his off and marched to the other side of the room, not wanting to hear any more explanations! She didn't want to understand anything anymore!

Mrs. Kingston, clearly shaken, finally broke the silence that permeated the air. And her words, ended up shocking Lily. "You're right, Lily," she said softly, her voice trembling. "You're absolutely right. I owe you an apology—a thousand apologies. I just... I don't know how to make things right, where to begin with you."

With that, the older woman closed the door and went away, leaving only Cai and Lily.

Cai stood still for a moment, before approaching her cautiously, as if afraid she might push him away. Her shoulders were shaking with silent sobs, her arms wrapped around herself like a fragile shield. He hesitated for a moment, then gently placed his hands on her shoulders.

"Lily," he murmured softly, his voice carrying a mix of concern and tenderness.

To his surprise, she turned suddenly and threw her arms around him, burying her face in his chest. The dam had broken, and she cried freely now, her tears soaking into his shirt. Cai instinctively wrapped his arms around her, his hand coming up to pat her back in soothing circles.

"It's okay," he whispered, his voice steady even as his heart ached for her. "It's okay. Let it out."

They stood there for a long moment, her quiet sobs the only sound in the room. When her breathing began to steady, Cai pulled back slightly, enough to look down at her tear-streaked face.

"I think she's truly sorry, Lily," he said gently, his tone careful but firm.

Lily's head snapped up, her eyes narrowing as if his words were a betrayal. "You're defending her now?" she asked, her voice sharp despite the tears. "After everything she's done, you're on her side?"

"No," Cai said firmly, cupping her face with both hands. His thumbs brushed away her tears as he held her gaze. "The only person whose side I am on is you."

She blinked at him, her anger momentarily replaced by confusion. "What are you talking about?"

Cai sighed, his expression softening. "Your mother helped expose Professor Ellis White, the person behind everything."

"What? That doesn't make any sense." She looked at him and shook her head, the disbelief in her voice evident, "Are you mistaken? She is the one who made me say those words and gave them the ammunition for everything. She is responsible for keeping me away from coming forward to clarify things. How can she have helped with that?"

Cai sighed and nodded, "Yes, she did all that. But, she also helped when she realized what she'd done. I had my suspicions about Professor White, "but I didn't have any concrete evidence to tie him to what he did to us. Your mother... she questioned the man who recorded you and contacted her, the one who set everything up. She trapped him into a confession, Lily. That led me to White and gave me the evidence I needed to bring him down."

Lily stared at him, her mouth opening and closing as she tried to process his words. "She... she did that?"

"She did," Cai confirmed, his voice calm but insistent. "And if you really want the whole story, Lily, you might want to talk to her. I think she's been waiting for the chance to tell you everything."

"I don't know if I can," she admitted quietly, her voice barely above a whisper.

"You can," Cai said, his tone filled with quiet certainty. "And when you're ready, I'll be here."