

Benefits 901

Chapter 901: Scolding

Before Dave could say anything, Grant was already out the door. He couldn't sit still any longer. This was the limit. Her behavior was completely unprofessional, and he was done letting it slide. A manager from Frost Industries might have handled things better, and so Grant wasn't going to let this go.

He stopped at her cubicle, scanning the space quickly. It was empty. She was already gone. Typical. She didn't even bother to stick around. It was as if all their hard work meant nothing to her. Did she think this was a joke? No, she must think they were a joke. There were already rumors in the market that the Frosts had sent their person to keep an eye on them as they did not fully trust the company. And now, if this Frost's person, Miss Innocensa Frost, was not in on the meeting with the distributors, what kind of an impression would that leave on them?

The thought only made him angrier. It wasn't just this project. It was probably the same with every other one she had been involved in. She let others do the grunt work while she sat back and took the credit. The more he thought about it, the clearer it became. She wasn't a team player—just a figurehead pretending to care.

He found her about to sit in the car, her back to him. He called out, "Miss Frost." At least she stopped when she heard him.

"Miss Frost," he called out sharply.

She froze at the sound of his voice. Her hand lingered on the car door as she seemed to hesitate. At least she had the sense to stop when called.

Grant didn't waste time. As soon as she slightly turned in acknowledgment of his voice, he was already closing the distance between them.

"What do you think you're doing?" he demanded, his voice sharp and cutting. "Do you have any idea how unprofessional this is? The distributors are going to be here at any minute, and you're out here—what? Avoiding responsibility? Acting like this project doesn't matter? Today's meeting almost decides the future of the entire company! It is not going to matter to you, is it? Because you will have another project thrown into your lap if this does not work out? But what about the others who have put their everything in it?"

She didn't respond, and her silence only fueled his anger. He gestured back toward the building. "If you can't even bother to make yourself available for a critical meeting like this, then I'll have no choice but to escalate this. I'll formally request Mr. Seb Frost to assign someone who actually understands the importance of professionalism and teamwork. Someone who takes this seriously and not like some vacation."

He paused, his chest heaving from the effort of keeping his temper in check when what he wanted to do was grab her by the shoulders, turn her to face him and shake her.. The threat hung in the air, and for a moment, he thought he'd gotten through to her. He watched as her hand loosened from the door's handle.

But, then she spoke, her voice low and almost trembling. "You should do that."

Grant stilled, the anger in his chest replaced by confusion. "What?" he asked, his tone sharp but quieter now. "What do you mean by that?"

Slowly, she turned to face him and the sight stopped him cold. Her eyes were swollen and red, with tear tracks staining her cheeks. She looked exhausted, as if the weight of the world was pressing down on her shoulders.

She met his gaze directly, her expression calm but broken in a way that struck him deeper than he cared to admit. "Do as you wish," she said simply, her voice steady despite the rawness in her eyes.

Without another word, she opened the car door, slid into the driver's seat, and started the engine. Grant was too stunned to say anything else as she backed out of the parking space and drove away, leaving him standing there, replaying the image of her tear-streaked face over and over in his mind.

Just as her car disappeared around the corner, Dave came rushing up, panting and slightly out of breath. "She's gone already?" he asked, his tone laced with disbelief and frustration. "The distributors have started to arrive! Dammit, Grant! You were right to think she might do more harm than good. Those people are expecting a Frost to be present for the meeting, and now she's just... left. What are we supposed to tell them?"

Grant shook his head, forcing himself to take a steady breath. The image of her tear-streaked face lingered in his mind, but he pushed it aside for now. "Let it go, Dave. Whatever it is, it must've been something serious. We'll manage this, just like we've managed everything else in the past. We don't need someone sitting in on the presentation just to flash the Frost name around. Our product is good enough to speak for itself."

Dave sighed and nodded slowly, his shoulders relaxing just a little. "You're right. The product really is the best. That's why we've gotten this far, even without any help. I just hate feeling like we're being set up to fail when we've worked so hard." But then, the ever optimistic, Dave shook his head and smiled with confidence, "We've been through worse, haven't we? Stick with me, and we'll get this done. Let's show them why they came here in the first place."

Grant grinned. This was one thing about Dave that he found himself unable to understand. The guy was always optimistic. Irritatingly so. Just now he'd been worried. A few words from him and there he was again. All well and good, rearing to go.

However, despite the meeting looming ahead of them and throughout the presentation, Geant could only think of one thing and that was her tear streaked and listless face.

Chapter 902: Worried

"What is up with you? You've been out of it since this morning. Even during the celebrations, you kept such a long face that anyone watching would've thought we lost the deal. What's on your mind?"

Dave's voice pulled Grant from his thoughts, though the latter barely looked up from the papers scattered across his desk. He shook his head, dismissing the concern with a tight, controlled smile.

"I'm fine," Grant muttered, but he knew he was lying—to Dave and to himself. He couldn't admit what was really bothering him. He couldn't tell Dave that Innocensa Frost had been occupying his mind all day, her tear-streaked face flashing through his thoughts like an unsolved puzzle. Why had she been crying? What could have driven someone so composed and professional to break like that? What was she doing now? Had she stopped crying? What had made her cry like that? Or rather who?

He'd scolded her earlier, chiding her about professionalism when she showed up in such a state. But now, in the quiet of his office, the memory unsettled him. She had still shown up, tears and all. She had not only brought the model but also taken the time to set it up meticulously, ensuring every detail was perfect. Wasn't that professionalism at its finest? If anything, it was more than he could have expected from anyone else under such circumstances.

Grant sighed and ran a hand through his hair, frustrated with himself. "I'm just in a mood, okay? Nothing major." He stood abruptly, herding Dave toward the door in a not-so-subtle gesture. "I've still got work to finish, so just go."

Dave raised an eyebrow, his expression a mix of amusement and concern, but he didn't argue. "Alright, alright. I'm going. But seriously, don't forget to eat something, okay? You barely had anything all night, and instead of food, you just kept drinking. That's not exactly the best diet, bro. Put some real food in your stomach before it starts burning a hole in you."

Grant rolled his eyes, though the corner of his mouth twitched upward in reluctant acknowledgment. "Alright, Mom. Don't be a nag."

Alone again, Grant leaned back in his chair. His fingers tapped rhythmically against the desk as his thoughts drifted back to Innocensa. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't shake the image of her tear-filled eyes or the nagging worry they stirred within him. He should have saved her phone number when she asked him to. Now, he could not even ask her if she was alright. Should he ask Seb Frost?

But then he immediately shook his head. Her father would not appreciate him trying to poke his nose in her business. With a determined look, he turned to his work. It was better to finish the work and go and rest.

Suddenly, his brows furrowed. The office was supposed to be empty by now and the staff had gone home long ago. But he was sure he heard a faint sound.

Soundlessly, he stood up. If it was some thief, trying to get lucky, then they would regret it.

He followed the noise, his ears attuned to the subtle whimpering that seemed to grow louder the closer he got. His steps brought him to the far corner of the office floor, where the staff cubicles were arranged in neat rows.

And that's when he saw her.

Innocensa Frost.

She was sitting in her small cubicle, her head buried in her arms atop the desk. Her shoulders shook as soft sobs escaped her. The glow of a desk lamp cast a pale light over her figure, highlighting her disheveled hair and trembling hands.

Grant froze. All the irritation he'd felt earlier—at her unexpected tears, at the way she'd been haunting his thoughts—vanished in an instant. All he could feel now was a pang of guilt and concern.

"Innocensa?" he said softly, his voice cutting through the quiet.

She flinched at the sound of his voice, her head snapping up. Her wide, tear-filled eyes met his, and for a moment, she looked as though she might bolt.

"Are you okay?", he asked slowly.

She stood up and shook her head quickly, "I am sorry. I didn't realise you were still working. I am sorry to disturb you. I'll leave now."

Hurriedly, she started to move away but he caught her wrist. "Is everything okay?"

Innocensa nodded her head quickly, but almost immediately, she shook it, her lip trembling as she avoided his gaze. "I'm fine," she whispered, though her voice cracked on the words, betraying the lie.

Before Grant could respond, she tried to pull away again, twisting her wrist in an attempt to free herself. But his grip was unyielding, as if letting her go wasn't an option.

"Innocensa," he said in a low murmur, "Talk to me."

"I—I can't," she stammered, "I shouldn't have come here. I'll go."

She tugged harder, but Grant didn't let go. Instead, with one smooth motion, he pulled her toward him. The momentum sent her off balance, and before she could process what was happening, she found

herself colliding with his chest. His arms wrapped around her instinctively, steadying her as she froze in his hold.

The world seemed to still for a moment. Her cheek was pressed against the soft fabric of his shirt, and she could hear the steady, grounding rhythm of his heartbeat and the smell of alcohol and some soap that was probably lemon. She made a small noise of protest and her hands pushed weakly against him, but he didn't let go.

"Innocensa," he murmured again, softer this time. "Breathe."

That single word seemed to break her. The resistance melted out of her as she let out a shaky exhale, her body sagging against his. And then the tears came. Quiet at first, just a few muffled sobs, but soon they poured out of her, unrestrained and raw.

Grant simply held her tighter, letting her cry until she was able to calm down.

Chapter 903: Love of My Life

Grant's shirt was nearly soaked through with her tears by the time Innocensa finally regained her composure and stepped back, her breathing uneven but steadier. Her hands, however, remained firmly planted on his shoulders, her nails digging into his skin as if anchoring herself in the moment. The faint sting barely registered in his mind, a trivial discomfort overshadowed by the way she looked up at him with a trembling, hesitant smile.

He couldn't help but marvel. How could someone be so heartbreakingly beautiful, even like this? Her swollen eyes glistened with remnants of tears, her nose reddened from crying, and yet, in her vulnerability, she radiated a kind of fragile grace that took his breath away. She was, without question, the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

"Sorry for the waterworks," she said shakily though her voice was tinged with a hint of humor. A faint blush crept up her cheeks, making her even more prettier, "And thank you for lending me your shoulder. I didn't mean to... do this. I... I thought this office would be empty and I'd have a chance to be alone...I just... Thank you again for letting me cry it all out and not trying to pacify me."

Grant shrugged. He would have had no idea how to pacify anyone. And what was he even supposed to say when he did not even know the reason for crying.

Innocensa looked up into the man's hazel eyes and felt her heart beat faster. Grant was a jerk. She'd come to know that much in the last week while working with him. Either that or he didn't like her. But now, this jerk was the one who had consoled her.

As her gaze met his, something else seemed to light up between them. She, who had never taken the initiative, leaned up on her tiptoes and pressed a kiss to his thin lips.

She felt him stiffen in shock or surprise and it was then that she realized what she had done. Did she just kiss someone... just like that?

As the realization of what she'd just done crashed over her, Innocensa's eyes widened in panic. She began to step back, her hands dropping away from his shoulders, but before she could retreat, Grant's hands moved swiftly, pulling her body closer to him as his hands settled over her hips, holding her in place and then pulling her closer.

She could feel the warmth of his palms through the fabric of her dress, sending shivers of need down her spine.

Then, before she could process what was happening, he tilted his head, broke the kiss and then leaned in to capture her lips once more. This time, the kiss was deliberate, unrestrained, and undeniably hotter.

His tongue licked her lips before invading her mouth and she could only suck on it, wanting and needing more. His lips moved against hers alternatively tender and then aggressive, as though he was discovering something he hadn't expected to find. Innocensa's breath hitched, her hands instinctively found their way back to his chest, clutching his shirt as she leaned even closer to him.

The world around them faded—no office, no lingering traces of her tears, no tension from moments before. It was just the two of them, caught in a moment that neither had anticipated but neither could deny. All she could remember was this man who was kissing her.

A sudden ringing in her ears caused Innocensa to return to the world of the 'living' and she broke the kiss, even as she continued to stare at Grant who stared back at her with a heat that made her want to ignore the ringing.

Blindly, her hand fumbled over the desk behind her, searching for her phone as her eyes darted down to the screen. The name flashing there made her chest tighten all over again: Dad.

Her breath was still uneven, her voice tinged with raw emotion as she hurriedly answered, muttering a quick, "Excuse me," and turning her back to Grant. She didn't need him to overhear this. Thankfully, her father seemed to attribute the breathlessness to the crying and not the way she and Grant had almost 'ate' each other.

The moment his familiar voice filtered through the line, her tears almost started all over again. Though, Grant had really purged most of them.

"Yes, Daddy," she whispered, her tone trembling. "I... I gave him a proper send-off. Just like we talked about."

She sniffled, nodding absently as if he could see her through the phone as he talked. "No, no," she added quickly, her voice soft, "Vinny was there with me. I didn't go through it alone."

"I know you couldn't come," she murmured understandingly.

And then, as if her father's next words had struck a nerve, her breath hitched audibly. She closed her eyes tightly, gripping the edge of the desk for support as she took a deep, shuddering breath.

"I know, Daddy," she said in an almost broken voice, "But he was the love of my life." Her lips trembled, and her tears fell faster now, unchecked. "Even if... even if he was sick for so long. Even if we knew this was coming... even if I was there to send him off, it doesn't make it hurt any less."

"But, I've said my goodbye, I'll be back to myself in a little while. Hmm. Bye. Love you too."

After disconnecting the call, Innocensa took a moment to turn around. She would have to talk to Grant about what she had done just now. She couldn't let him think that she had used him to forget her pain or something. He was a smart man whom she wanted to know more about.

But as she turned around, Grant was already gone. Confused, she turned her eyes towards his office and frowned. Well. That was odd. Was he shy or something? She raised her hands to her lips. If they had not still been tingling, she would have thought that she had probably imagined him being here.

Chapter 904: Another Man

She'd spent the entire day crying her heart out for another man—the love of her life, no less. And what had he done? Grant clenched his fists, his jaw tight with frustration as he stomped towards his car. He should have walked away, should have left her to grieve in peace. But no. He'd gone and tried to console her. As if he knew how. And then, he'd pulled her into his arms. Okay, so she had been comforted, but like a jerk, when she thanked him, what did he do? He kissed her! Calling himself a fool hundred times would not be enough.

He nearly kicked the car out of sheer frustration but thought better of it and leaned against the door instead.

He was furious—furious with himself for losing control, for stepping over a line he had assured himself he would not cross. But he was equally angry at her, though he knew he had no right to be. What kind of person kisses someone just after they've spent hours weeping for someone else? He knew she wasn't thinking straight that she was drowning in grief, and yet the memory of her lips on his was branded into his mind, refusing to let him forget how wrong it all felt.

And adding to all this was the irrational jealousy clawing at his insides.

The man she had been mourning wasn't just any man— it had been the love of her life. Someone who had been sick for a long time. The one she had probably dreamt of growing old with.

He ran a hand through his hair, tugging at the strands. What had he been thinking? The truth was, he hadn't been thinking. Not clearly, at least. He'd acted on impulse, on the ache he had been feeling after seeing her like that. And now? Now he was left with a tangle of guilt, anger, and something he wasn't quite ready to name.

With a frustrated growl, he yanked open the car door and was about to sit inside when he heard her call out to him! Dam* it! He'd planned to run.. ugh, leave here before she realized that he was gone.

He inhaled slowly and then turned around, pushing at the door to close it back. Nope as he looked at her again, she was just as breathtaking while smiling as she was crying. It was official. He had lost his intelligence. Why else would he be so lost just by looking at her.

And then she smiled tremulously, his heart stuttered again. Maybe he had contracted a heart disease. Dave did nag him a lot to take care of his heart.

But that was beside the point because she was now saying something, "Hey, I just... I wanted to thank you. For earlier." Her gaze flicked to his shirt, and she winced. "And I'm sorry about, you know, the soggy mess I left on your shirt. I didn't realize how much I—" She cut herself off, laughing weakly. "I'm sorry."

Grant waved it off, forcing a casualness he didn't feel. "Don't worry about it. I've survived worse things than a wet shirt." He tried to match her weak smile but faltered. Nope, he could not do all this fake thing. Clearing his throat, he looked down for a moment before meeting her eyes again. "Actually, I should be the one apologizing. For this morning. I didn't realise you were in... so much pain.

"It's okay. I know you were worried. And... maybe I needed that. Someone to pull me out of my head for a moment and not worry about my fragility. It was a good thing, actually."

Grant nodded and stepped back, or tried to because his own car was obstructing his way. As Innocensa stepped back, ready to leave, Grant couldn't help but ask, "Is that why you've been late all week?"

Innocensa stilled at the question and nodded, "Todd was... he was on heavy pain medication most of the time which made him foggy. And he wouldn't eat anything. He'd only really be lucid for a few hours in the mornings and that was the only time I could convince him to eat something. So, I made it a point to be there for his last days. I thought I'd prepared myself for his death. But even so, I was just...unprepared I guess."

"I'm really sorry for your loss, Innocensa. I can't imagine how hard that must have been for you."

She gave him a small, grateful smile, though her eyes shimmered, "Thank you."

Grant hesitated for a moment, unsure if he should press further. "Are you... are you okay now? I mean, did you at least eat something today?"

Before she could answer, her stomach growled audibly, and almost immediately, his own followed suit, echoing hers. They both froze for a beat before bursting into laughter, the sound cutting through the heaviness of the moment.

"Well," she said, covering her mouth as she tried to stifle her laughter, "I guess that answers your question."

Grant chuckled, shaking his head. "Seems like we both skipped a meal or two." He tilted his head toward the main road. "There's this little diner a few blocks down. Not fancy, but the food's good. Want to join me?"

Grant cursed his own mouth. What was wrong with him? Why was his mouth yapping off its own accord and asking her out for dinner?

Innocensa hesitated. "I don't know. I should probably—"

"Take care of yourself?" he interrupted gently. "It's been a long day, and I think you could use a decent meal."

She gave him a look, half amused and half uncertain. But then, she sighed and nodded. "Okay. Dinner sounds good. But only if you let me pay."

Grant grinned. "As a gentleman I should argue but I doubt that would go well over with you. Next time, I'll pay. Deal. Now let's go before our stomachs start arguing louder than we do."

He walked around the car and opened the passenger door for her, and as she slid into the car, he caught a faint smile on her face. For the first time that day, it felt like maybe—just maybe—he'd done something right.

Chapter 905: Dinner

"Did you ever have dinner with my daddy?" Innocensa asked slowly, as she stared at Grant and the plate before him.

Grant looked up, startled by the sudden and seemingly random question. His brow furrowed as he set his fork down, taking a moment to process her words. They'd been eating in silence, when she decided to speak up. And it was such an odd question to ask out of the blue.

"Yes," Grant answered cautiously, nodding slowly. "When Mr. Frost was considering our project for investment, he invited me and Dave to dinner. Why do you ask?"

Innocensa smiled, a playful glint in her eyes, and shook her head lightly. "No wonder he likes you so much."

Grant's frown deepened. He leaned forward slightly, curious now. "What do you mean by that?"

Placing her fork down on the table with deliberate care, Innocensa leaned back in her chair, her expression shifting to something conspiratorial as she grinned. "Okay, promise me you won't take offence, all right? This is just a family joke."

Grant raised an eyebrow but nodded, gesturing for her to continue. As for whether he would be offended or now... would depend on the things she did say.

"Among the family," she said, her voice lowering as if she were about to share some big secret, "there's this running joke that Daddy could eat a horse and still be hungry. He has the biggest appetite you've ever seen. And..." She paused, her gaze sliding toward his plate, as a teasing smile spread across her face. "From the looks of it... you do too. And he likes people who are not pretentious and eat well."

Grant blinked, momentarily stunned, and then followed her gaze to his plate. It was still almost full, but she wasn't wrong—he wasn't a big eater most of the time, but when he did eat, he tended to eat well. A small smile tugged at the corners of his mouth as he wondered whether to feel flattered or mildly offended.

Before Grant could respond, Innocensa's smile softened, taking on an almost nostalgic quality as she sighed, her eyes drifting toward the table. "You know," she began, her voice quieter now, "when I first heard that phrase as a child, I was terrified. I didn't talk to Daddy for weeks after that."

Grant blinked, caught off guard by the confession. "Really? Why?" he asked, his curiosity piqued. It was hard to imagine someone like her being so shaken by a simple family joke. From everything he'd heard, Sebastian Frost was not just a brilliant businessman but an amazing father. It didn't make sense.

Innocensa glanced up at him, a sheepish smile tugging at the corners of her lips. "Because," she said, drawing out the word, "I thought Daddy was going to eat my horse."

Grant froze mid-motion, his fork hovering over his plate. He stared at her. "Eat your horse?" he repeated, his voice disbelieving.

She nodded solemnly, though her cheeks flushed with the slightest hint of embarrassment. "Yes. I was seven, and Daddy had just given me a horse for my birthday. I loved that horse more than anything. He was my pride and joy. He was a foal actually and Daddy told me that I should feed it well and make it big soon. I thought he planned to eat it when it was older."

Grant couldn't hold it in any longer. He laughed. Or rather guffawed. He had not been expecting that. He tried to stifle it by covering his mouth with his hand, but the image of a young Innocensa maybe holding onto her horse in terror was too much. "Oh, no," he managed between laughs, "you didn't really think that, did you?"

"I did!" Innocensa exclaimed, throwing her hands up in mock indignation. "I refused to go near him for weeks. Every time he tried to talk to me, I'd run away. He was at a total loss about what he had done."

Grant leaned back in his chair, wiping at his eyes as his laughter finally began to subside. "Did you ever tell him why?" he asked, still grinning.

Innocensa made a face, rolling her eyes playfully. "Of course I did. And his reaction was exactly like yours—he laughed and laughed. I thought he'd never stop." She paused, shaking her head with a small smile. "But after he got over the hilarity of it all, he promised me something. He said Todd would stay with me for as long as Todd lived. And since horses live a long time, he assured me that meant Todd would be with me well into my twenties."

Her smile turned wistful, her gaze dropping to the table. "At the time, that felt like an eternity. I was so satisfied, so sure that we'd have all the time in the world together. But now..." Her voice softened, and her expression grew somber. "Now that Todd is gone, all those years we had feel so short. Time moves so differently when you're looking back."

With a shake of his head, he returned to eating his food when she continued, "Todd was the best partner ever. Do you know we won so many championships together. And we even qualified for Olympics when I was only sixteen. He was eighteen then and almost past his prime but still we won. It was the best time..." As Innocensa's eyes turned misty again, Grant stilled.

Slowly, he set his fork down, and leaned back in his chair as her words replayed in his head. Todd... Wasn't that the name of the man who was the love of her life. The one who had recently passed away? The one she'd spoken of with such emotion... "Wait a minute," he said slowly, piecing it all together. "Todd. The love of your life—the one you said you just lost—is... your horse?"

Innocensa nodded, "Hmm. He fell sick a couple of years ago. And his health had been downgrading despite us doing everything to save him. He loved to eat sugar cubes and apples you know. Whenever I neared him, he would start sniffing my pockets for his treats."

Chapter 906: Laughter

Grant started laughing—a deep, uncontrollable laugh that shook his shoulders and echoed around the room, almost turning other people's heads. He couldn't help it. The love of her life was a horse. All the tears she'd shed, the way her voice had cracked when she'd been sobbing in his arms...no, in the office—it had all been for Todd. And the ironical part, an insidious voice whispered in the back of his mind, was that he'd been jealous. Jealous of a horse. He shoved the thought aside, determined not to let it take root. No, this wasn't about that. It was just the sheer absurdity of the situation.

Innocensa tilted her head, her eyes narrowing as she stared up at him. "Why are you laughing? What's so funny?" Her tone wavered between confusion and irritation. "Try getting sniffed all over by something twice your size, and then tell me how funny it is! Let me remind you to even his last day, Todd was taller than me."

Her indignant comment only made him laugh harder, almost making him double over.

Finally, Grant managed to shake his head, though the grin plastered across his face refused to fade. He sucked in a deep breath, wiped his eyes, and attempted to compose himself. "When you came into the

office crying for him earlier," he began, his voice still unsteady from suppressed laughter, "I thought Todd was the name of your childhood sweetheart or something. I figured you'd lost the guy you intended to marry..." He paused, his grin widening. "But Todd is a horse!"

Innocensa gasped, her jaw dropping as she processed his words. "Wait. You thought...?"

Grant nodded, his shoulders shaking with laughter again. "Yeah. I thought Todd was some the love of your life, and I felt genuinely sorry for you. Turns out, he was just a four-legged, hay-eating beast."

She crossed her arms over her chest and sent a glare at him that could have melted ice.. "Todd is not just any horse. He's practically family. He's been with me since I was seven. Didn't you hear a word I said? And for your information, Todd was more loyal and understanding than most people I know."

"I'm sure he' was a great guy—err, horse. But you have to admit, from my perspective, this whole thing is just—" He broke off, shaking his head in disbelief. "It's a bit much."

Innocensa groaned, throwing her hands up in exasperation. "Unbelievable. Here I am, mourning Todd's absence, and you're turning it into some kind of comedy routine."

"I'm not laughing at you," Grant said, his tone softening as he tried to regain control of the situation. "Okay, maybe I am a little. But seriously, can you blame me? The way you were crying, anyone would've thought it was a person."

Innocensa shook his head but then could only smile. It was possible for anyone to be mistaken. After all, he could not have expected her to be like that because of an animal. No one would even know what it felt like. Also, at least now whenever she thought of Todd, she would remember this instance and maybe smile fondly about it, instead of simply missing him too much. Her horse was helping her keep focus even in death...

But then, another thought struck Innocensa like lightning. Her gaze sharpened, and she jabbed a finger in Grant's direction, her tone incredulous and her eyes narrowing suspiciously. "Wait just a minute," she demanded, her voice rising with a mixture of disbelief and accusation. "I kissed you in the office, and you—" She threw her hands up in exasperation for emphasis before pointing back at him, "—you devoured me right back, despite thinking I was crying over some lost love? What kind of person did you take me for?"

Grant winced...He should have kept his mouth shut and not confessed," I thought I was a despicable man to have kissed you when you were feeling vulnerable and thankful..."

Innocensa's jaw dropped, her mouth working soundlessly for a moment as she processed his words. Then, with a dramatic flourish, she knocked on the table in front of her and leaned forward, narrowing her eyes like a predator sizing up its prey. "You, mister," she began, her voice dripping with faux sweetness, "Ah! I don't even have the words for you right now. But, just for your future information, please make a note of this."

She paused for effect, her finger wagging in the air like a teacher scolding a wayward student. "When I kiss you, it will definitely be because I want to. No amount of gratitude or vulnerability or anything else will ever make me respond to you like that unless it's entirely because I want it. If I am feeling thankful, I will gift you a fruit basket. Got it?"

Grant blinked at her, his brain scrambling to catch up with her words. "You mean... if we kiss again in the future?" he asked cautiously, unsure if he was digging himself deeper into a hole or finding a way out of one.

Innocensa harrumphed, crossed her arms and lifted her chin in mock indignation. "Nope. When we kiss in the future," she corrected him. "Because we will. In fact, that kiss would have been a lot closer in your timeline if you hadn't just confessed to... all of that." She gestured vaguely at him. "So now? Congratulations. You've successfully postponed our next kiss to when we have an official date—whenever that might be."

Grant blinked again, his mouth opening and closing like a fish out of water. "You're... really confident about this, aren't you?" he finally managed to say.

Innocensa laughed then and stood up. "Of course, I'm confident," she declared, "You're always staring at me when you think I'm not looking, and, spoiler alert, I'm doing the same thing to you when I know you're not paying attention. You've probably undressed me in your mind more times than I care to count—don't even try to deny it—and, for the record, I've done the same with you."

"And now," she announced dramatically, "I'm going to walk away from here in a huff, because you, Grant, are a complete and utter dum-dum." She turned on her heel but paused to glance over her

shoulder, her grin now tinged with mischief. "Feel free to stew over all of this for a while. Then, when you're done fretting, go ahead and ask me out for that date."

Chapter 907: Introduction

Grant was stunned, caught completely off guard by the whirlwind that was Innocensa Frost. He had never imagined, not even in his wildest dreams, that someone would propose to him like this. Innocensa, with her captivating confidence, had effortlessly swept him off his feet—and not in the way most would expect. She didn't ask or suggest; she declared. She had laid it out plainly, leaving no room for misinterpretation. After their next date, they would kiss. That was non-negotiable. But then, as if that bold statement wasn't enough to leave him reeling, she went on to inform him that he would be the one asking her out for the date.

Talk about pressure.

It wasn't that he didn't want to. On the contrary, he wanted nothing more than to take her out. Her words had lingered in the air like a challenge, daring him to act, and if he hadn't been so utterly flabbergasted in the moment, he might have blurted out an invitation right then and there. But he couldn't. No matter how badly he wanted to, he couldn't bring himself to say the words.

There were rules—unwritten but deeply ingrained within him—rules that he couldn't just cast aside. Sebastian Frost, had done more for him than anyone else ever had. The man didn't know that, of course. To him, Grant was probably one of the thousands of orphan students that he sponsored.

The anonymous benefactor who had quietly supported the orphanage for so many years, ensuring that the children had food, clothing, and even a chance at an education, was none other than Sebastian Frost.

Talk about bad timing. And bad luck.

If only Father Peter hadn't called him to help with the accounts today. If only Grant hadn't decided to take a closer look, his curiosity piqued by the generosity of someone who had remained nameless for so long. But he had looked. And he had noticed. The account number of the mysterious benefactor matched perfectly with the one that Seb had used to give him the funding.

How could he repay that kind of selfless kindness by even thinking about starting something with Innocensa?

With a sigh, he sat back instead of leaving. It seemed today was meant for him to keep drinking. He had been drinking through the evening but even now, with all the things going on in his head, he only wanted to black out. So, he decided to wash down all his food with the drinks.

The warmth of the alcohol did little to dull the knot in his chest. Her voice, her words, played on an endless loop in his mind. Next time they would kiss. But he was making it so that there never would be a next time.

Grant let out a frustrated sigh and drunk now, made a decision. A dumb one. But a decision none the less.

Pulling his phone from his pocket, he decided to message her. Maybe if he just explained—laid it all out—she would understand. Maybe she'd even see it from his perspective. His thumbs hovered over the screen as he debated where to start. She would also know that he was not worthy of her, was nothing but a mongrel, unwanted even by his own parents.

Grant stared at his phone, his heart pounding as he began to type.

"I really, really like you."

He hit send, then paused, his fingers trembling slightly before he typed the next line.

"From the moment I saw you, I knew I wanted you to be mine. It was a shock actually, how much I desired you."

A deep breath. Another message.

"I know you think I'm going to ask you out on a date."

He hesitated, feeling the lump in his throat grow heavier.

"But I can't."

He swallowed hard and kept going.

"You're incredible. You have no idea how much I admire you."

"How much I've wanted to jump up and ask you out."

His thumb hovered over the screen before he typed the next line.

"Innocensa... even your name makes my heart race."

"You don't know this, but your father has done so much for me."

"Not just through this company. It goes beyond that."

"I'm just an orphan, Innocensa."

"Someone who lived on your father's charity."

"I'm not worthy of you."

With the last message sent, he gave a resigned sigh, and shoved the phone into his pocket, unable to bear looking at the screen any longer.

Grant stood, the sudden motion making his head spin slightly. The alcohol had taken too much effect. He knew better than to drive in this state. Pulling up an app on his phone, he booked a car to take him home. And once he had been dropped there, he checked the phone one last time to see if she had replied before quickly blocking her number and falling asleep.

He told himself he had done the right thing. It was better this way, cleaner, less complicated. If Innocensa understood, she would move on. If she didn't, at least she wouldn't waste her time waiting for someone like him. . What he couldn't bring himself to think about, though, was how he would handle things if she responded. What if she pitied him? What if she tried to comfort him or offered him support? That thought alone made his stomach churn more than the whiskey.

But there was a reason why everyone warned against sending messages while drunk.

If Grant, who was always so careful, had been in his right mind, he would have triple-checked before hitting send. He would have realized that the name he had chosen wasn't Ines Frost. It was Seb Frost. The last person that Grant would want to expose his feelings to.

Seb Frost looked down at the multiple messages that he had received from Grant. He smiled. Seemed like the usually reticent kid was feeling talkative today. However, as he opened the first message, he frowned. The second caused the frown to turn in a scowl. And by the time, he came to the end of the messages... he had already stood up and called an emergency meeting of his brothers, planning to return to the country.

Chapter 908: A Presentation

"I really, really like you."

Gabe read the words on the screen and raised an eyebrow at his brother. "Really, Seb? You organized an urgent meeting, sent out an SOS, just to show us that girls still confess to you?" His tone was a mix of disbelief and mockery as he leaned back on the couch, his arms crossed as he stared at his brother.

Sebastian didn't respond, his grim expression unchanging as he stared at the phone in his hand and scrolled to the next message, displaying it on the projector screen.

"From the moment I saw you, I knew I wanted you to be mine. It was a shock, actually, how much I desired you."

Gabe snorted, but before he could say more, Erasmi jumped in. "Woah. Are the person's eyes rotten or something?" He gestured toward Seb, shaking his head in exaggerated disbelief. "Look at this old man. Why would he be desirable?"

At the comment, the other all chuckled, not failing to put a jab there about how the oldest was talking about the others being old. But Seb wasn't laughing or even answering. Instead, he scrolled down to the next message.

"Is this some kind of stalker situation? Have you been receiving these kinds of messages regularly?" Erasmi added, his tone now more worried than mocking. Seb had stalkers in the past as well and this could be one of the similar situations..

Seb just shook his head and sighed, ignoring the questions and jabs and the concern. He remained silent, his grip tightening slightly on the phone as he scrolled further, letting the messages move on the screen.

"I know you think I'm going to ask you out on a date."

Lucien leaned forward, squinted at the screen and sighed. "You're waiting for someone to take you out on a date?" He raised an eyebrow in accusation. "Seb, are you seriously going to risk cheating on Olivia? Have you lost your mind?"

Seb felt his temper flare. "Will you guys please be quiet and just read through the entire thing? Keep your comments to yourselves for now!"

The room went quiet for a moment, but not without Gabe muttering under his breath, "Touchy, aren't we?"

Seb ignored him and scrolled to the next few messages.

"But I can't."

"You're incredible. You have no idea how much I admire you."

"How much I've wanted to jump up and ask you out."

As the brothers read the messages, the jokes started to die down. A heavy silence settled in the room. Okay. This was some serious love confession and not one which would have a good ending it seemed.

But it was the next message that caused all other six brothers to sit up straight, their casual demeanor vanishing instantly.

"Innocensa... even your name makes my heart race."

There was a stunned silence, followed by a collective burst of curses from the group.

Sebastian exhaled, feeling validated at last. See? This wasn't an overreaction on his part. His brothers were reacting exactly the same way he had when he first read the messages. What had started as a somewhat amusing confession, maybe sent to the wrong person had just turned into something far more worrisome.

Lucien was the first to break the silence. He stood abruptly, "This is just not done! Absolutely unacceptable! How could—"

"Exactly!" Sebastian cut in, "This is unacceptable, and that's exactly why I called this meeting!"

But then Lucien's sharp gaze turned on him, "Then why did you do something like this, Seb?"

Seb blinked, caught off guard. "What?" he said, his voice dropping in confusion. "What did I do?"

He looked around at the faces of his brothers, feeling their sudden shift in attention toward him. Did he hear correctly? What had he done?

Lucien sighed and pointed at his brother, his expression unimpressed. "Then why did you invade Innocensa's privacy, read these messages, and even share them with us? That's not exactly a great look, Seb."

Seb blinked, momentarily at a loss for words.

Frustration bubbled up inside him. They were focusing on the wrong problem entirely.

"Are you serious right now?" he said, exasperation creeping into his voice. "Of course I wouldn't do something like that! Why would I invade her privacy? I was the one who received these messages."

That got their attention. A collective frown spread across the room as the brothers stared at him, their curiosity piqued.

"What?" Lucien asked, clearly skeptical.

Seb sighed and gestured toward the phone in his hand. "I think Grant was drunk or something and sent the messages to me instead of Innocensa." He paused, giving them a pointed look. "Why would I go digging through her phone or messages? I am over protective but I am not crazy, okay? Innocensa would never talk to me if I did something like that. I cannot afford to anger my princess."

To drive his point home, Seb tapped a few times on his phone before projecting the next set of messages onto the screen. He didn't even bother holding the phone anymore, tossing it carelessly onto the table before closing his eyes and rubbing his temples.

For a moment, silence reigned in the room as the brothers read the messages. Then, like a dam breaking, everyone burst into laughter. The sound was loud and unrestrained, filling the room with an almost mischievous energy. Even Demon, who had remained stoically quiet until now, couldn't hold back his amusement.

Seb couldn't help it either. He chuckled despite himself, shaking his head at the absurdity of the situation. Receiving love-confession messages from a guy who was clearly interested in his daughter was infuriating enough, but knowing the sender had accidentally confessed his feelings to him instead of Innocensa? That was on another level of ridiculous.

"Does he even realize what he's done?" Demon asked, his grin wide and dangerous. The glint in his eyes made Seb immediately wary. Whatever Demon was plotting in his head, Seb was certain it wouldn't end well for the poor guy.

"I doubt it," Seb admitted, shrugging as he leaned back in his chair. "I haven't received any panicky calls from him yet, so he's either still oblivious or too mortified to say anything."

At that, the brothers exchanged glances, their expressions shifting from amused to downright devious. Slowly but surely, their laughter began to morph into something darker—evil, even. The kind of laughter that meant trouble.

"So," Gabe started, his grin matching Demon's now. "Grant's interested in Innocensa, huh? And he even thinks he is not worthy of her? Dam* right, he isn't!"

Lucien leaned forward, his elbows resting on the table as he smirked. "Does he really think it's going to be that easy for him? Poor guy doesn't know what he's gotten himself into."

Erasmi shook his head, chuckling softly. "I mean, sure, he technically refused her in those messages, but that doesn't change the fact that he's clearly interested. We can't just let him off the hook, can we?"

"Absolutely not," Gabe replied, his voice filled with mock outrage.

Ian was the only voice or reason who sighed, "You all do realize we're grown men, right? Maybe we shouldn't act like schoolyard bullies?"

Everyone turned to look at Ian who grinned and shrugged, "Hey! That comment was necessary.. In case someone asks, we can say we measured the pros and cons."

Chapter 909: Oops... Father of oops!!!

Grant couldn't help but frown, his thoughts drifting back to the messages he'd sent to Innocensa last night. He felt a pang of regret, but it didn't linger for long. By the time he was stirring together a hangover drink in the kitchen, the feeling had dulled, replaced by the quiet reassurance that it was for the best. He'd been too unsteady to handle her any other way.

Sober, he knew he wouldn't have had the strength to say no. Good thing he had done the thing he needed to do when intoxicated. He wasn't proud of that, but at least the decision was behind him now. What was done, was done. And that was a relief—or so he told himself.

Still, as he drove to the office, his mind couldn't help but wander. What would her reaction be? Would she remain as composed as always, unbothered by the boundaries he had tried to set? Would she be angry, or worse, hurt? It was hard to say, and the uncertainty gnawed at him, though he tried to push it aside. Whatever her response, he knew one thing for sure: it wouldn't be easy to face her.

What he hadn't expected—what he hadn't even considered for a moment—was for her to step into the office with an air of calm detachment, behaving as if his messages had never reached her. She was the very picture of professionalism, her demeanor poised, her tone businesslike, and her attention fully focused on her work.

Meanwhile, he proceeded to spend the entire day feeling on pins and needles, anxiously bracing himself for some sort of reaction, some acknowledgment of the situation between them. But she had shown no signs of being affected, no flicker of hurt or anger in her eyes, not even the faintest indication that she'd spared him a second thought. Was this her answer? To cut him off so completely and effortlessly, as though he hadn't mattered at all?

He told himself he should feel relieved. If she had been upset, if she had confronted him in any way, it would have made things messy, uncomfortable, and impossible to ignore. It was better this way, cleaner. At least this way, they could both move forward without the baggage of lingering emotions complicating things. But despite telling himself all of this, relief was the last thing he felt.

He was seething. She had moved on so easily? After promising him a kiss for the next date?

It wasn't until the end of the day, as he was gathering his things to leave, that she finally came into his office carrying a stack of documents in her hands, her expression as polite as ever, making him even more frustrated. Who told her to have such kissable lips?

But he did not say that. Instead, "You could have just emailed them," he said, his voice coming out sharper than he'd intended.

Instead of replying, she stepped closer, her heels clicking softly against the tiled floor. Grant stiffened in his chair, his hand frozen mid-motion as he watched her approach. She placed the file carefully on his desk, her movements deliberate, almost languid, before circling around it with a kind of predatory grace.

His pulse quickened as she stalked closer, the space between them shrinking with every step. He straightened in his chair instinctively, his body tense and braced for something he couldn't quite name. She didn't stop until she was standing directly in front of him, leaning back slightly against his desk as if she belonged there, as if she owned the room—and him along with it.

And then she leaned forward, and everything else disappeared.

Her gaze locked onto his, unwavering and deliberate, and his breath caught in his throat when her finger grazed his cheek. The light touch sent a jolt through him, and he blinked in stunned silence as she traced a slow, lazy line along the curve of his jaw.

"Of course, I could have emailed you," she murmured, her voice low and teasing, as if she found the very idea amusing. Her finger continued its path, a featherlight caress that left his skin burning in its wake. "But the workday is over now," she added, her lips curving into a small, knowing smile. "So I thought I'd give you a chance."

Grant's mind scrambled to make sense of her words, but it was a losing battle. Her touch, her proximity, the way her eyes seemed to hold him captive—it was all too much. His instincts screamed at him to lean into her hand, to press his lips against her palm, but he forced himself to remain still, his fists clenching tightly at his sides as if the tension might ground him.

It took every ounce of his focus to manage a response, his voice coming out rough and uneven. "A... chance?" he repeated, the words sounding foreign even to his own ears.

She tilted her head slightly, amusement flickering in her expression. "A chance," she confirmed, drawing the word out as if testing its weight. Then, as if she hadn't already shattered his composure, she leaned in even closer, her breath brushing against his cheek, her presence overwhelming.

And that was when he lost all coherent thought.

"So," she whispered, her voice like a challenge, her lips dangerously close to his ear. "Are you going to do it?"

"Do it?" he echoed though his brain willingly provided all the things he would like to do to her...

"If you're going to repeat everything I say," she teased, "then this conversation is going to take a lot longer. Are you going to ask me out on a date or not? I've been waiting all day."

Finally, Grant shook his head and tried to gather his senses. "Did you not see my messages?"

Innocensa straightened then and frowned, "Your message? Did you ask me out on a date via a message? Hmm. I might have missed it. Okay. Let me go check." With a wink at him, she quickly turned around and left.

But Grant frowned. She was not the type to miss out something like that. And then, suddenly, he felt a premonition...Hurriedly, he pulled out his phone and checked her number. It was not blocked and there were no messages he had sent in the chat box... He frowned. Could it be that he had dreamt about sending the messages? No. He was very sure he had...

And then, as he back tracked from her chat interface and scrolled... He paled. With trembling hands, he opened the messages that had been sent to Sebastian Frost...before throwing his head back and banging it against the chair...He needed to start making arrangements for his funeral....

Chapter 910: An Attack

"Are you seriously going to try and scare him off?" Demetri asked, watching as Seb made his so-called 'preparations' to handle Grant.

Nora shook her head, exasperated. "I don't even get the point of this. If you have a problem with the guy, then just call Innocensa off, give her some other project and tell her to keep her distance. They'll forget about the attraction eventually. I mean they have not even started dating. Besides, you said Grant is already trying to maintain his distance."

Seb let out a long sigh and dropped onto the floor, rubbing his temples. "The problem isn't that they're working closely together," he muttered. "The problem is you."

Nora frowned and pointed at herself with an expression that asked if Seb had lost his marbles. She was nowhere involved in this mess. She had met the man just once! "Me? How the hell am I the problem?"

Seb scowled and jabbed a finger in her direction. "You. Because you babysat Ines and Vinny too much when they were younger, those two take after you—especially my Ines. See, Olivia, this is why I should have stopped you from going into business with Nora." He then turned back to Nora and asked, "If I tell Ines to back off, what do you think she'll do?"

Nora's frown vanished, replaced by a wide, knowing grin as she leaned back and shrugged her shoulders as if it was the answer was obvious. "She'll go after him with all guns blazing. He won't stand a chance."

Seb let out another sigh, this one heavier than the last. "Exactly. She's already pursuing him. The guy knows she's waiting for him to ask her out, which means she's already made her move—and knowing her, it was probably in some outrageous way."

Nora's grin stretched even further. "That's my girl! And for the record, I am never outrageous. If anything, that trait comes from your bloodline, not my influence. You are the outrageous one, Sebastian Frost."

Seb scoffed, opened his mouth to argue, but before the bickering could truly begin, Demetri and Olivia exchanged a glance.

Then, Demetri interrupted calmly, "I don't think Innocensa and Grant's potential relationship is the real problem here."

Seb and Nora both turned to him, confused. "What do you mean?" Nora asked.

Demetri shrugged. "I think, Seb, that you are the problem."

Seb sat up straighter, looking thoroughly offended. "Hey! How am I the problem? Olivia, are you hearing this? He's blaming me!"

Olivia, who had been silent until now, merely shrugged. "I hate to say it, but I agree with Demon. You are the problem."

Seb looked between them, utterly betrayed. "Me? What did I do? Here I am, working hard to teach Grant a lesson, making sure he remembers to stay away from my daughter, and my own family is turning against me!"

Demetri sighed, shaking his head. "Seb, you're protesting too hard. The truth is, you actually like Grant Davis. The boy won you over long before he ever got involved with Innocensa. Deep down, you think he's a good choice. But you can't stand the idea of Innocensa dating anyone, so you're making a fuss.

"You asked all of us to help you teach Grant a lesson, but let's be real—if you truly hated the guy, he would have already disappeared from the face of the earth, let alone from Innocensa's life. What you were really hoping for was that one of us would stop you, talk some sense into you, and convince you to let things be."

Seb opened his mouth to argue—then snapped it shut.

Demetri smirked. "See? You know I'm right."

Seb rolled his eyes before finally letting out a reluctant sigh. "Okay, fine. I'll admit it—I do think he's a good kid. He's hardworking, responsible, and decent, and I trust his character."

He crossed his arms, his expression still stubborn despite the admission. "And the fact that he's been trying to step back from her, which I know is not going to be easy with her persistence, already proves that he's not the type to take advantage of the situation."

He exhaled, as if resigning himself to the truth, then straightened his shoulders. "But that doesn't mean I have to just sit back and give them my blessing, does it? No way. If anything, it means I have every right to make things very difficult for them. And trust me, I fully intend to do just that."

Olivia sighed and pointed at him, "You're starting to resemble Elijah Frost. You don't want to be like him, do you?"

Seb rolled his eyes, affronted, "Hya! Livi! Don't insult me by comparing me to that old coot, okay? I am not going to try and make Grant run off and then pretend that he took off with my money."

The others all laughed at that. They'd been watching the entire thing like a dam* show. Seb glared at each and every one of them (and even the readers who were probably grinning right now) before standing up, "Fine. None of you want to join me in this, I'll do it alone!"

As the others laughed and called out that they will definitely join him and enjoy the consequences, Ian received a call that shook him.

Looking up, he scanned the faces of his brothers, all gathered together, still caught up in their amusement. Dam* it! Couldn't they have a moment of peace? He exhaled slowly, shook his head and braced himself. Then, taking a deep breath, he finally spoke.

"People. I have some bad news."

The shift in the atmosphere was immediate. The laughter died, replaced by wary glances. "What is it?"

Ian hesitated for a fraction of a second, then ran a hand through his hair before delivering the news. "There was an attack," he said grimly. "Someone broke into the office—most likely trying to steal information. But they weren't expecting anyone to be there." He paused, his jaw tightening. "Some of the staff were still inside when it happened. The intruder panicked when they got caught... and opened fire."

"Where? Which location?", Erasmi asked but Seb had a feeling... "Who was hurt?"

Ian sighed, "It happened at Canary Tech. Grant Davis was shot and taken to the hospital. Innocensa was with him." Seeing Seb pale, Ian quickly added, "She is not hurt."

Without a word, everyone quickly filed out of the house, racing to the hospital where the two had been taken.

Innocensa hugged herself tightly, her arms wrapped around her body as if that alone could steady the trembling within her. She stood just outside the operating room, her heart pounding in her chest, still struggling to come to terms with everything that had happened.

She had come out of the office so happily, to check if Grant had asked her out. Only to come face to face with a masked man. And then, before either of them could have reacted, Grant had walked out of his office, making the man panic and try to take her hostage.

And that is when things had gone south, if only she had assessed the situation before reacting, maybe—just maybe—things would have turned out differently. Instead, her instinct and training to resist had taken over, and she had tried to handle the situation on her own.

But Grant could not have anticipated that she was trained in self-defense. He'd come rushing to her side, only for the thief to become even more panicked and take out his gun.

Innocensa shivered. Grant, that fool, had actually stepped in the way of the bullet that had been shot at her. As she tried to compose herself, she heard her father's voice, "Ines."

Her composure collapsed. With a choked sob, she threw herself into her father's arms, crying continuously, "Daddy! It is all my fault."

"Of course it is not." Seb said automatically as the others all surrounded Ines, forming a protective barrier around her.

Grant woke up slowly, a dull, throbbing pain radiating from his arm. Damn, that hurt like hell. Even with the lingering effects of anesthesia, the sharp sting made itself known, cutting through the haze. He let out a low breath, bracing himself against the discomfort.

Unlike most patients coming out of surgery, he wasn't disoriented or confused. He knew exactly what had happened. He had been shot. He could still hear Innocensa's furious voice echoing in his mind, cursing him for being a reckless idiot. Why would you step in front of a bullet, you fool? she had raged. But beneath the anger, he had heard something else—something that made his chest tighten. Her sobs.

He opened his eyes slowly, expecting to find himself alone in the sterile quiet of a hospital room. Instead, he nearly jolted upright, only to wince as pain flared through his body.

What the hell?

The sight before him was enough to send a chill down his spine. The room was crowded. Not just with doctors or nurses—no, that would have been normal. Instead, a whole group of people were there in the large room- The Frosts.

Grant swallowed hard. Why were they here?

A cold realization gripped him. Had something happened to Innocensa? Was she hurt too? The thought sent a wave of panic through him. He must have made a sound because everyone in the room simultaneously turned to him. And then they communicated silently. This was a Frost trait that he had noticed. All the Frost men seemed to be mind readers. At least for each other. They'd just share a look with the other to communicate.

Even as he said this, Demon Frost came to him and patted him on the shoulder, "Welcome back, boy."

And then, sending him all sorts of looks, the entire family walked out. But he was no longer looking at the others. Where was Innocensa?

Soon, the only person left in the room was Sebastian Frost who came to sit by his bedside with a grim expression. He remembered then. The blunder he had done, before all this had happened. He knew he needed to apologize but first, "Where is Innocensa? Is she hurt?"

Sebastian Frost narrowed his eyes at him, "She is not hurt. She was in a bad state so her mother took her back for a little while. She will be here soon. And I think now would be as good a time as any to talk about some things."

Grant sighed in relief at first. Innocensa was alright. That was all that mattered. When he'd seen the gunman pointing his gun at her and pulling the trigger, he'd been terrified. Now that she was safe, it was time to apologize and make some corrections.

He looked at Sebastian Frost and started, "It is a good time. But before you say anything, Sir, I'd like to say something. You know by now those messages were not meant for you."

Seb snorted and interrupted sarcastically, "Yes. I am not waiting for you to ask me out on a date, Grant."

Grant blushed a little at that and pressed on, "Everything I said in those messages was true. I truly like and admire your daughter. And I am indeed an orphan with no family and raised only on charity. Mostly yours. So, I never would have dreamt of pursuing her, no matter how much I want to."

He paused and looked at the older man, his idol, and then closed his eyes and continued, "But...I want to apologize to you that I won't be able to do that. I think I am going to pursue your daughter."

Seb raised his eyebrows at that and asked stoically, "What do you mean? Do you suddenly think you are suitable for my daughter? That you are worthy of her? My Innocensa?" Even though Seb said it with a perfectly straight and threatening expression, on the inside, he winced. Dam*. He did sound like his old grandfather.

Grant stiffened at the words. "No. I am not worthy of her. I don't think I ever will be. But... I know that I want a chance to make her happy. When I was being brought here and thought I might die. I could see only one regret in my life. Not getting to know her better. I think she is an amazing woman- smart, kind and even innocent like her name though she doesn't think so. And if, she will have me, I would like a chance to know and cherish her."

Sebastian felt bittersweet for a moment then. This boy was really smitten. How was he supposed to do anything in the face of this sincerity? He'd have to be heartless... Okay. He could be heartless. With his face set in a scowl, he asked, "And what if I refuse?"