

Chapter 100 Anything for You

"Are you serious? What'd you do?!"

Upon hearing her, Xander followed her line of sight to the nearby cruise ship, now a whirlwind of activity. Passengers poured onto the lifeboats in a chaotic scramble, panic evident on their faces.

"Hey, Boss! What do you think? Quite the spectacle, right?" Beowulf exclaimed, clearly enjoying the unfolding scene.

"What happened? Did you create smash a hole through the ship's hull?" Isabel frowned, torn between amusement at Kaleb and Eva's misfortune and concern for the innocent bystanders caught in the turmoil.

"Not at all! I would never stoop to something illegal or cruel. I merely had a chat with the crew. They were told to yell that the ship was sinking when Kaleb and Eva exchanged their vows!"

"So, the ship is actually safe?"

"Of course!"

Isabel breathed a sigh of relief, her gaze drifting back to the cruise ship. A satisfied smile spread across her face.

She had always believed in retribution; when someone wronged her, she returned the favor.

Eva had shattered her wedding plans, damaged her reputation, and made her suffer. Disrupting Eva's wedding once felt too little.

As she absorbed the drama unfolding before her, Xander's deep voice interrupted her thoughts.

"Do you really not want to see them tie the knot?"

Without hesitation, Isabel replied, "I don't forget easily. Kaleb spilled coffee all over you that day at the café. How could I let them off the hook?"

At her words, a light shone in Xander's eyes. He took her shoulders, his gaze fierce and filled with joy. "So, you're defending me? You actually care?"

Caught in his intense stare, Isabel felt an unexpected warmth bloom within her.

"Um, I just look out for the people I care about. I can't watch someone close to me be mistreated."

Is that really all there is to it?

Xander's expression softened, and he let out a sigh. He chose to savor the moment, allowing the air to thicken with unspoken words.

An uncomfortable silence enveloped them, prompting Isabel to redirect the conversation.

"I'm so hungry! Didn't you mention dinner? Where is it? In the restaurant?" She stepped away from Xander's grasp and moved toward the dining area, eager to escape the tension.

Xander quickened his pace to catch up, a look of confusion etched on his face. "How do you know the restaurant is that way?"

The Princess Charm was a vast vessel, unlike any other cruise ship.

Newcomers often wandered aimlessly, struggling to find their way. Even seasoned visitors sometimes lost their bearings.

Yet here was Isabel, moving with an uncanny confidence toward their destination.

She paused, a shy smile gracing her lips. "It's just a feeling. I thought it would be over there."

Xander squinted slightly, masking his doubts. "Hmm."

Grateful that he chose not to pry, Isabel walked alongside him into the dining area.

The moment she stepped inside, the aroma of delicious dishes made her stomach growl audibly.

A bit embarrassed, she rubbed her midsection and promptly settled into a chair.

"These shrimp look incredible. They must have just come in today," she exclaimed, her appetite taking over.

"Care for some red wine?"

"Yes, that would be lovely!"

Xander uncorked the bottle, pouring a generous amount for both.

"Just remember not to drink too much. You always strip when you get drunk," he warned.

Isabel nearly sputtered at his remark, her eyes widening as memories of their last encounter flooded back.

Regrettable moments.

As her mind wandered, her gaze drifted to Xander's backside.

The weight of her stare nearly caused him to choke.

Though days had passed since their last mishap, and any visible marks had faded, the heat of her look ignited something within him.

"What's with that gaze? Planning to get rough again?" he joked.

Isabel blinked, tearing her focus from him and clearing her throat.

"I'm not the type to resort to violence. That's simply shameful! I would never stoop to that level."

A playful smirk appeared on Xander's lips, not merely because of her words but because her reference to violence suggested she regarded him with a sense of intimacy, as if he were family.

"If that's what you want, I wouldn't object," Xander said with an air of indifference.

"Wait, what?" Isabel's jaw dropped.

Had she misheard him? Had the wine finally clouded his judgment, or did he genuinely have a penchant for pain?

While she scrutinized him in disbelief, Xander stood up and added a piece of braised abalone to her bowl. "You should taste this. It's a specialty of the chef aboard the Princess Charm. It's quite delightful."

Isabel stared at the glistening abalone before her. She almost laughed, knowing precisely how it tasted. During her week-long rental of the Princess Charm, she had insisted the chef prepare this dish every single day.

She adored it, and Beowulf and the others shared her enthusiasm. It quickly became a staple at every meal until they were all utterly tired of it.

She began to eat, her gaze drifting out to the bay, where lights danced like stars on the water's surface. Though she savored the moment, a sense of discomfort lingered beneath the surface.

After a moment, Isabel turned her attention back to Xander, her tone more serious. "I'm not the person you think I am."

Xander paused, setting his utensils aside to focus on her. "You're not me, so how could you possibly know what I think of you?"

"What if I'm not a good person?" Isabel asked, her voice steady. She had never viewed herself as virtuous—only someone who refrained from causing harm.

His dark eyes pierced hers, a small smile forming on his lips. "And do you consider me a good person?"

The question threw her off balance.

Was Xander truly a good person?

Years prior, after the untimely death of his father, Xander had faced three uncles who were eager to seize control of the Bennett Group. He had been fresh out of college, battling these cunning men for the family legacy.

He had carried the burden alone, emerging from the fray, but the violent struggles and betrayals remained his secret.

Had he shown any sign of weakness or innocence, both he and his mother would have faced exile from the Bennetts, left with nothing.

He had fought because he had no other choice.

Isabel pressed her lips together, her gaze unwavering. "Perhaps your brother is correct. Maybe I entered your life, signed that marriage license, with my own intentions ... "

For a fleeting moment, a shadow passed through Xander's eyes before it vanished.

For a fleeting moment, their gazes held steady, and the air between them thickened with an almost palpable tension.

Xander squinted, his fingers laced together on the table. He leaned closer, his tone hushed. "What do you desire?"

"I—" Isabel began, her mouth forming the words, but her thoughts tangled in uncertainty.

Before she could continue, Xander shifted back in his chair, loosening his tie and unbuttoning the collar of his shirt with deliberate ease.

"I'll give you whatever you seek."