

## Chapter 7: Grandpa's Advise

A few weeks ago, William Doughby's office:

"Antonio is in love with Sara?" As the older man repeated the words, his tone took on a sharpness while his eyes narrowed. He had experienced the world and knew very well that coincidences were rarely that. And this one just happened to be too convenient...

"Yes. Sara. Mom's favourite daughter. I had hoped that I would be able to escape... I mean marry and have a happy family..."

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William Doughby sighed as he ignored the slip that she had made. He had an idea of how bad things were in that house but had been forced to keep quiet due to the circumstances... However, he could now see a way to help her out... Before he could say anything, Nora wiped her tears and straightened her back, "There is no need for Antonio to make a choice. I will break off the engagement."

"Nora." William stopped the girl with a stern voice. When she looked up at him, perplexed William sighed and spoke, "Child. I understand your feelings. But before you make any hasty decisions, I want you to consider this carefully. Rushing into something or breaking off an engagement can have long-lasting consequences."

Nora's eyes filled with tears as she said, "But Grandpa, I won't be able to bear marrying him knowing he had once betrayed me with her..."

William gently reached out and took her hand in his, giving it a reassuring squeeze. "I know it's hard, my dear, but there are things you are unaware of. Things that you will need to know. Listen to me. Tonight, you come and stay with me and your grandma. Take yourself away from the chaos in your heart and give yourself time to think clearly. I'll be there for you, and we can discuss this further."

"Grandpa, I am fine. I mean I will be fine. But I do not want to stretch this matter... if I break up with him at least I can come out of the relationship with my dignity intact." Nora spoke in a small voice.

William Doughby sighed before speaking, "Nora, it is time you start using your head instead of your heart."

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Nora looked up shocked at Grandpa's words and tone. He had always been kind to her and never spoken so harshly. As she stared in confusion, he began, "You must think we are all blind kid! The world might be but I am not. I have had to keep my eyes closed to the truth because I did not wish to make things difficult for you. But now! Do you think I do not know what your mother has been doing to you all these years?"

William stared at the straight dark line on Nora's hand and questioned, "Tell me, child, how did you get this mark?"

Nora looked down at the old scar on her hand and gulped saying nothing, "It's so old, I don't even remember grandpa."

"You don't remember? Well, let me remind you, you burnt your hand because your mother ordered you to make pancakes for Sara who wanted to eat them. And before you open your mouth and try to defend her actions about how it is alright for an older sibling to take care of the younger one, it is not okay when the older one is only 6 years old! Would you like to talk about the scar on your forehead just under the hairline? Four hours! She took you to the hospital for a head wound four hours after you had just your head. She wanted you to bleed out!"

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Nora winced as the last words were almost roared out by her grandfather and felt her heart break all over. Yes, her mother had indeed mistreated her all her life. As a young child, she had assumed that all mothers were like that to their older kids. But slowly she had come to realise that only she was the one who got such treatment from her mother.

To win her mother's love, she had done everything, from learning to do household chores to not studying and doing well in exams so that Sara could shine. By ten she had been adept at managing the household and her mother

had been able to get rid of the help staff. By fourteen, Nora had been struggling to keep up in class with the other kids and studying only so that she would be sent to the next grade.

At sixteen, she had finally learnt to accept whatever crumbs of affection her mother threw her way and live with that. But the most healing part had been when Antonio had come into her life.

He'd taken her under his wing. He'd showered her with kindness, pushing her to study well and even helping her with concepts she had no grasp of. And finally, when he had confessed his love for her she had been over the moon...

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Nora hugged herself as she tried to get rid of those memories as well. She had worked so hard to forget all that. Antonio's love had been like a blanket on all those memories. There were times when she too had wondered if her mother had really wanted her to bleed out or die. But hearing it confirmed from Grandpa William's mouth was even more heart-wrenching.

"Grandpa, I'll leave now. You are right, we must talk tomorrow. There is no need to... no need to go to your home, I'll just go home..."

Before she could say another word, Nora had already lost conscience and fallen onto the carpeted floor.

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