

## Chapter 9: A Lover

Present Day

As the car drove away from the hotel, Nora reminded herself not to cry. How could she have been so blind to Antonio's shamelessness? He'd betrayed her so badly and other than a little pang of guilt, he had felt absolutely nothing. Did he really believe that after all that happened, she would still be grateful for the crumbs of his friendship?

However, she reminded herself that she too had been at fault here. After all, she had always bowed her head and acceded to his wishes. Could she entirely lay the blame on Antonio?

She felt a blast of cold air from the air conditioner and hugged herself. In the next moment, the heat was turned up, and she could feel herself warming up. She turned to look at the man who was driving and finally broke the silence, "Thank you for... this."

With his eyes still focused on the road ahead, Demetri simply nodded, saying nothing. However, Nora did not mind. In the last two weeks, she had come to realize that Demetri Frost was a man of few words. He treated words as if they cost a fortune, as if he was running a word-saving business and trying to maximize his profits.

"How did you know I was coming out?" she asked hesitantly.

The silence continued, and she wondered if he would ever answer her when he finally did, "Attorney Doughby called me."

"I see. Thank you once again."

Silence reigned again in the small car, and Nora could not help but wonder how to break this. She did not like this tension and awkwardness. "Where are we going?"

Demetri glanced at her briefly before turning his eyes back to the road, "My house. As per our contract, you will live there from today onwards."

Nora gulped. She had tried not to think of this day in the last two weeks, but the day was finally here. Was she ready to move into his house? Not really. Sighing, she wondered what was wrong with her when she had agreed to his conditions. Ah yes, she had been partially insane due to the heartbreak. Closing her eyes, she thought back to their first meeting...

"Do you think you can handle pretending to be my lover? And be in love with me?"

The way he had looked down on her, his gaze challenging and smug as if he had already won, had made her go crazy. All the anger that she had felt towards Antonio, towards her sister and her mother and the world had come to her at that moment, and she had looked at him and given the best acting performance of her life.

Instead of cowering away, she rubbed her cheek against his fingers and smiled up at him, "Pretend to love you? Of course? Don't you see the love in my eyes?"

He'd stepped away from her as if she had sprouted horns. The slight distance between them and the incredulity in his eyes had given her the courage to speak, "I am a good actor, mister. You don't have to worry about that."

Just then, William Doughby entered and introduced, "Nora, this is Demetri Frost. He would be your perfect husband. And Demetri, this is Nora. Your perfect wife."

"Let's finalize the details of the contract. Doughby, you are biased. You will not sit for the negotiations. Send in someone else."

William Doughby opened his mouth but refrained from saying anything and with a reassuring nod to Nora, he walked out of the room. As soon as the two were seated, Demetri started to lay down the conditions.

"Contract will be for 5 years."

"3 years. And standard Prenuptial agreement. We exit the marriage without claim to anything that belongs to the other party," she'd parried.

"Non-disclosure Agreement." He bit out.

"Agreed." She accepted easily.

"No Physical contact." She'd added.

"Impossible. Physical contact with consent." He countered. "And early termination only after prior notice and mutual consent."

"No cheating." She'd added.

This time, there was a pause, and Demetri looked at her intently, "Miss William, are you proposing to offer yourself to meet my needs?"

"No. I meant... I meant..." She'd had no idea what she had meant herself. Just that she did not want to be cheated on again...

But the man had taken pity on her and added, "I can be discreet. And you will be informed of any lover so that you are not blindsided. And the same applies to you."

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"Thank you," she answered a bit unsurely.

"That is the only concession you will get from me, Miss Williams. All expenses during the term of the marriage will be mine. We will get married tomorrow so you can pack your bags and move in."

However, she had spoken again, "I, uh...I cannot move in with you."

"Miss Williams, we are going to be husband and wife. A couple lives together."

"I don't mean that I won't move in with you. Just that, I cannot move in right away. I need to settle some things. My wedding ceremony is in a couple of weeks..."

"A wedding ceremony?" A small amused smile played at his lips, and she wondered if he had been apprised by Grandpa William of her situation...

"Very good. Then we will get married tomorrow, and you can move in with me after the wedding ceremony...if you do not get wedded, that is..."

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Within an hour, the contract had been drafted, signed, and sealed...

"One last thing, Miss Williams, you absolutely cannot fall in love with me at the end of the contract."

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"We are in agreement on that, Mr. Frost. You should also remember that you cannot fall for me."

Nora opened her eyes as she remembered the last thing they had said to each other that day. And could barely believe herself. She was hardly lovable. Her own parent and sibling had no love for her. The boy who had promised to cherish her and love her had let go of her hand without much thought or care.

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She'd done all she could to win the love of these people and still failed miserably, so what hope could she have that a stranger would fall for her? Rolling her eyes, internally at her own audacity, she finally remembered something and spoke up hastily.

"Mr Frost, I cannot move in with you tonight."