

## Chapter 14: Best Friends

After dropping that bombshell on the three people inside, Nora quickly made her way to her next appointment: a meeting with Isabella Ruffalo, her best friend and soon-to-be inquisitor.

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Ever since she had discovered the truth about Antonio and Sara, and signed the marriage contract, she had been pondering a way to reveal everything to Isabella. However, she knew that while she could confide in Belle about the will and Antonio's betrayal, she couldn't disclose the information about the marriage. Belle wouldn't be able to keep such a secret, even if her life depended on it.

Fortunately, Belle was leaving the country tonight for her higher studies. In fact, she was supposed to have left last week, but Belle had postponed her departure just to be there for Nora on her wedding day. Nora felt fortunate to have her friend by her side, the one person she could always rely on. As she walked towards the restaurant, she couldn't help but wonder if it was because she had always sensed Antonio's impending betrayal and had therefore never fully opened up to him.

However, as the question arose in her mind, she pushed it aside. Now was not the time to dwell on these thoughts. Her immediate focus was on seeing Belle off while revealing as few details as possible of her own marriage.

As expected, Isabella was waiting for her at the restaurant. A sizable order of chips (A/N: also known as French fries, I think) sat in front of her, accompanied by a glass of iced coffee for herself and iced tea for her. Another thing for which Nora felt grateful. Typically, when Isabella and Nora met, Nora would be in a rush to return home for chores or to meet Antonio for study. Therefore, Isabella had developed the habit of preordering food for both of them, arriving early at their meetings. This allowed them to enjoy a meal and a few extra minutes of conversation.

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As Isabella looked up and greeted her with a grin, Nora felt a pang in her heart. Isabella was leaving tonight, and Nora was going to be left alone once again. Nora had known about Isabella's departure, yet she had found solace in Antonio's presence. But now she was going to be left alone... again

Sighing, Nora reminded herself to remain strong and swiftly moved in to hug her best friend.

To say that Isabella was surprised would be an understatement. Nora had rarely initiated such gestures. Her shyness of potential rejection prevented her from even initiating a simple handshake. Isabella quickly reciprocated the hug and asked with concern, "See, I knew you weren't okay. You should've come to me yesterday, babe."

Nora stepped back just as quickly and smiled at Isabella. "I'm fine, Belle! Even if that 'fine' is as delicate as an eggshell. I hugged you because I realized I'm going to miss you."

Isabella gazed intently at her before sighing. "Of course, you're going to miss me, babe. I mean, look at me, how could someone not miss me..."

Nora laughed and promptly nibbled on a chip. This contrasted their personalities. While Nora was reserved around people, Isabella took for granted that she was loved and cared for, thanks to her doting family.

"Now, spill it, girl. Are you going to share or do I need to extract the details from you?" Isabella asked playfully.

Nora didn't need further prompting, immediately launching into the tale of her discovery of Antonio's deceit, Grandpa William's revelation, and her subsequent plan. Isabella listened with occasional exclamations of shock or colorful language.

After recounting everything, Nora concluded, "So, Grandpa William suspected that this was a scheme to snatch my inheritance? Both Mom and Sara were involved? And I orchestrated the entire fake wedding?"

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"Grandpa William wasn't certain, but he had his suspicions. That's why he stopped me from confronting them. He suggested allowing the wedding to

proceed, avoiding a confrontation. However, I swapped the priest at the last minute."

"What do you mean?"

"Grandpa William suspected my mother's involvement, but he lacked evidence. They had planned all along for Antonio to abandon me at the altar. This way, I'd be left with no potential spouse, and Sara would secure her marriage. It was a two-birds-one-stone scenario. Mother knew that if Grandpa William discovered Sara and Antonio's affair, he'd grow suspicious and reveal everything to me."

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"But if the affair was exposed at the last moment, even if I knew about the will, I wouldn't have time to act, putting everything in Sara's favor."

"Ha! Fate favored you, and you unearthed the truth, as did Grandpa William! Brilliant turn of events. Changing the priest to an actor, ensuring only a counterfeit marriage license, was a stroke of genius! I wish I'd been there at the meeting this morning. I would've captured a few snapshots of your mother and Sara's expressions to relish later."

Nora chuckled at her friend's disappointed expression and shook her head. "Let's move on from this topic."

Isabella, however, persisted, giving a concerned look. "Nora, remember, this is temporary. Antonio is still on their side. They could easily register their marriage..."

Nora responded with an enigmatic smile. "Do you think I haven't prepared for that? Taken steps to prevent it?"

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Isabella raised an intrigued eyebrow, eagerly awaiting the revelation.