

Mr. Edwards' Unraveled Life chapter 161

Chapter 161

When Jamie turned her back on Norah after making that demand, Norah knew she had to be straightforward with Kevin.

She reported, "Jenkins wants you to come in person, Mr. Edwards. They aren't pleased with our team's turnover."

Norah kept it simple. If Kevin valued this partnership, he'd need to meet them himself. Otherwise, she could pretend she never heard their demands—and maybe slip away to see a lawyer.

To her surprise, Kevin instructed, "Come back here." His tone was firm, making it clear he wasn't joking.

"Yes, sir," Norah replied, keeping it professional.

Back at the office, she found him standing by the floor-to-ceiling window, cigarette in hand. She kept her tone businesslike. "Is there anything else you need from me, Mr. Edwards?"

He exhaled a cloud of smoke, his expression unreadable. "What did you say to make them request that?"

His words were full of suspicion, barely veiled.

Norah felt a chill. "If you think I'm causing trouble, why don't you ask them yourself?"

She'd been at his side for years, and he couldn't find even a shred of trust in their shared history?

Kevin didn't respond, letting more smoke swirl around him. Norah didn't want to linger in the haze—it wasn't good for her, especially now.

"Mr. Edwards, if that's all, I'll be on my way." She turned to leave, her intentions obvious.

But Kevin stopped her. "You'll bring on any hires you choose only after I approve them."

“Understood.” Norah had no objections but reminded him, “I’ve shown you many résumés, and none were to your satisfaction.”

She continued, “If you think I’m sabotaging this partnership, what are you doing?”

Kevin had once told her she couldn’t leave until she found a suitable replacement. She’d hired Scarlet, who he promptly dismissed. Now none of the new applicants were good enough—he was just making it impossible for her to leave.

Kevin’s tone was icy. “The ones you brought me were either questionable or too flashy. This is a company, not a pageant.”

Norah held her tongue, frustrated. These were top-tier candidates, yet he called them “crooked melons and cracked dates.”

She suggested, “You’ve had Kian by your side longer than me; perhaps he should handle the hiring.”

Kevin glared. “So you can dump your work on him while you disappear?”

Norah swallowed her response. “Fine. I’ll keep looking. I’ll check the talent market.”

Kevin’s silence signaled approval, though she had other plans.

Instead of the talent market, she headed straight to a law firm. Meeting with a top lawyer, she laid it out. “My husband and I have a contract marriage. We’ve made an appointment at the Civil Affairs Bureau, but I don’t want to wait two months. I want to sue for divorce.”

The lawyer, an impeccably dressed professional, raised an eyebrow. “Two months isn’t long. If he’s unwilling, we can pursue legal action.”

She was resolute. “I need it done as soon as possible. How much will it cost to secure my freedom?”

The lawyer observed her closely. “Why the rush? Is he resisting the divorce, or is there another relationship involved?”

“I didn’t cheat,” she clarified. “This is a contract marriage. We keep it secret, and he has feelings for someone else. I need a fresh start. We don’t share assets, no kids—just a clean break.”

The lawyer, Lepage, intrigued, recognized an opportunity. This kind of client typically came from wealth.

“Go with my assistant to prepare a draft,” he instructed.

Minutes later, she returned with a draft. “Lawyer Lepage,” she said politely.

When he glanced at the document, he froze. The defendant was Kevin.

Double-checking, he realized this was the very contract he’d drafted for Kevin! He couldn’t believe it.

Norah noticed his hesitation and frowned. “Is something wrong with my case?”

“No, not at all. Go home for now. I’ll contact you once it’s scheduled.”

Norah nodded gratefully. “Thank you, Lawyer Lepage.”

As soon as she left, Lepage called Kevin.

Kevin answered curtly, his voice indifferent. “What is it?”

Lepage didn’t hold back. “Guess who came to see me?”

Kevin’s tone turned wary. “Norah was there, wasn’t she?”

“Not only that,” Lepage replied, “she’s filing for divorce. I can’t believe three years of marriage didn’t make a dent. This isn’t like the stories where the couple grows closer over time!”

Kevin’s face darkened. “Warn your colleagues. No one should take her case.”

Lepage chuckled. “Sure, I can pull some strings, but remember, other regions might take it. You really don’t want her to go, huh?”

Kevin’s response was a simple, seething, “Buzz off.”

As he ended the call, Kevin ordered Kian to track Norah’s location. Within minutes, he was on his way to confront her.

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At the talent market, Norah felt the impact of the “Edwards” label—plenty of applicants showed up to submit their resumes. She sorted through them meticulously and sent the selections to Kevin. But his silence said it all: he didn’t like any of them.

Norah realized it—Kevin wasn’t planning to let her leave, and he was making it difficult on purpose. She felt the fatigue seep in, not just from the heat but from the endless hurdles. Deciding to push through, she committed to staying another hour to gather more applications. But if Kevin still wasn’t satisfied, she resolved to wash her hands of it.

Under the blazing sun, she stepped out to buy a bottle of water. The heat made her dizzy, so she sat down on a roadside planter to catch her breath.

“Norah,” a hesitant male voice called out.

She looked up to see Steven, dapper in a sharp silver-gray suit, standing beside her. Surprised, she took in his familiar face, which broke into a gentle smile.

“Steven,” she said, managing a small smile of her own.

“Small world,” he replied, slipping a hand into his pocket as he sat down nearby. He nodded towards a black Bentley parked down the street. “I was here for some business and saw you as my assistant stepped out to grab something. What brings you here by yourself?”

“Recruiting,” she replied simply.

“Recruiting? And they had you come out personally?” Steven’s brows knit in surprise.

Norah hesitated before admitting, “Yeah, it’s for my own replacement.”

A silence fell between them, thick with unspoken words. Steven finally ventured, “You look worn out. Is there...trouble between you and Kevin?”

His question caught her off guard. Few people knew she and Kevin were in a hidden, contract marriage. But here was Steven, gently probing as though he understood. She looked at him, stunned.

“You knew?” she asked quietly.

He nodded, smiling faintly. “I figured it out when I saw him with you last time. And then there was all that online buzz—confirmed it for me. I always thought... well, I just hoped he’d make you happy.”

She nodded, lowering her gaze. “Honestly, Steven, he’s not a bad person. If we weren’t tied by this marriage, I’m sure we’d get along just fine. But the time has come, and I’m ready for a divorce.”

The word “divorce” brought a mix of relief and sorrow to Steven’s face. “Why? Did he hurt you in some way?” he asked, voice thick with concern.

Norah chuckled faintly. “No, he didn’t hurt me. But this whole arrangement—it’s just time for it to end.”

Steven looked at her thoughtfully, his voice soft but steady. “If it’s making you unhappy, it’s okay to let go. But if there’s still something unresolved, maybe give it a bit more time. Sometimes, feelings work themselves out.”

Norah nodded, resonating with his words. “You’re right. Sometimes, time lets things just... fade away. That’s exactly how I feel now.”

Wanting to lighten the moment, Steven pulled a silly face, hoping to cheer her up. She blinked in surprise, then laughed, touched by his unexpected gesture.

“Where did that come from?” she asked, still smiling.

“I just thought you needed a reason to laugh,” he replied, grinning.

Unknown to them, Kevin was watching from a distance. The sight of them together, laughing and sharing an easy rapport, made his face darken with a sudden intensity. He muttered Steven’s name under his breath. He’d been hearing about this “Anthony” Norah once mentioned, and though he couldn’t track that person down, Steven was her only long-term male friend. The thought gnawed at him.

When Norah finally returned to the office, it was nearly 4 p.m. She had managed to collect more than 30 resumes, all from top graduates. She barely noticed Kian’s sidelong glance as he commented, “Secretary White, is it necessary to rush so much?”

Ignoring him, Norah marched into Kevin’s office, presenting the stack of resumes. “Mr. Edwards, here are all the candidates I’ve found—graduates from top universities. Please take a look and let me know if anyone meets your standards.”

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Kevin glanced up from his work, giving Norah a cold, measured look as she held the document. Surprisingly, he picked it up and flipped through the pages, causing Norah's heart to race.

"These candidates are suitable. Let them stay," he said, setting the approved resumes aside. "They can come in for interviews tomorrow."

His decisiveness caught Norah off guard, but she quickly responded, "Understood, I'll reach out to them."

"If that's all, you can go," he added, his tone detached.

Norah, taken aback by Kevin's distant demeanor, hesitated before heading out. Just then, Kian burst in.

"Mr. Edwards, there's been an accident at the construction site on the east side of the city!"

Hearing this, Kevin's expression tightened. He stood and walked out with Kian, the urgency of the situation clear. Norah instinctively followed, but Kevin stopped, glanced back at her, and looked toward Paulina.

"You follow," he said calmly.

Norah paused, momentarily stunned, as Paulina perked up, sensing an opportunity.

"Of course, Mr. Edwards!" she replied, hurrying after him as the group waited for the elevator.

Norah returned to her desk, unsettled. Not long after, she overheard a murmur outside, "Three people died at that project site. If Mr. Edwards is responsible, he could be facing prison."

Her heart clenched. Checking recent news reports, she saw that all signs pointed toward Kevin.

The situation at the east city construction site was dire—a building collapse had led to three fatalities, drawing intense media and police attention.

As soon as Kevin arrived at the scene, reporters surrounded him, their microphones thrust forward.

“Mr. Edwards, how will you handle this accident?”

“Three people dead from shoddy construction—what do you have to say for yourself?”

Questions from the press mixed with the cries of workers and the grief of families, creating a chaotic scene. Kian and Paulina attempted to calm the crowd but struggled against the surge of emotions.

Finally, Kevin stepped forward, his voice strong and resolute. “The Edwards family will thoroughly investigate this incident. We won’t leave any stone unturned, and compensation will be promptly sent to the victims’ families.”

Just then, a group of police officers pushed through the crowd. One approached Kevin.

“We’ve received reports implicating your company in tax evasion, contract fraud, and drug trafficking. We’re placing you under detention for investigation.”

Gasps rippled through the crowd, and some families cried out, “He must have known about the shortcuts in this project—this is murder!”

Norah arrived on the scene, hearing the angry accusations. Keeping her composure, she defended him. “This is a setup! I’ve worked with Mr. Edwards for years. If he were guilty of these crimes, it would’ve come out long before now.”

But her defense only provoked the crowd further. “She’s just his mistress, of course, she’d defend him!” someone sneered.

“You’re only speaking up because you’re afraid of losing your benefits if he goes down!”

The crowd turned on Norah, their anger directed at her. Observing from a distance, Paulina smirked, pleased at Norah’s misfortune.

Despite Kevin’s attempts to break free, he was led away by the police. Kian moved to protect Norah from the crowd.

Once Kevin was detained, Norah turned to Kian, “Focus on investigating Luis and Scarlet.”

Luis had recently faced criticism from Kevin at a shareholders’ meeting, and Scarlet had been a frequent presence around him—both were highly suspicious.

With the investigation underway, Norah was assigned to stay at the Edwards family headquarters. Meanwhile, Kian arranged for their lawyer, Bonian, to meet Kevin. When Bonian arrived, Kevin’s focus wasn’t on his legal troubles but on his divorce from Norah.

“Make sure she doesn’t detect any unusual moves in the divorce proceedings,” Kevin instructed.

Bonian was taken aback. “Mr. Edwards, you’re facing serious charges here. If we can’t find evidence to clear your name, you could be looking at a lengthy sentence. And yet, you’re still focused on the divorce?”

Kevin’s voice was steely. “I’m not guilty of any of this. And as for the real culprit, I have a plan.”

Bonian sighed but refocused on his client’s needs.

Back at the office, Luis seized the opportunity to call for Kevin’s removal as chairman.

“The country can’t be without a leader, and neither can this company,” he announced, implying the need for an immediate replacement.

Norah fixed him with a cold gaze. “Kevin may be in custody, but Kian and I are fully capable of managing the company, and we’ll convey Mr. Edwards’ directives in due course.”

Luis scoffed, trying to undermine her. “You’re just a secretary, Norah. Don’t overstep.”

With a faint smile, Norah retorted, “If you’re innocent, Mr. Cruz, there’s no reason to panic. Only the guilty worry about ghosts knocking in the night.”

Luis bristled with anger. “You and Kevin are in this together, aren’t you? Trying to drag me down with him?”

Paulina, pretending to mediate, interjected, “Let’s all calm down. Secretary White is just concerned for Mr. Edwards.”

Ignoring Paulina's feigned concern, Norah addressed the room. "There will be no interim chairman. Kian and I will continue managing the company's affairs."

With that, Norah took charge, her resolve unshaken as she prepared for the battles ahead.

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Luis had stirred up the other shareholders, but once Norah made her stance clear, the shareholders dared not say a word.

Paulina, hoping to keep tensions high between Norah and Luis, was frustrated as her plans faltered. However, with Kevin out of the picture for now, she saw this as her best opportunity to strike.

Norah stayed put, intent on drawing out those plotting against Kevin. She called Kian and said loudly, "I'm heading over to see Mr. Edwards. I need to hand over crucial evidence directly to him."

No sooner had she hung up than Paulina approached, trying to sound casual. "Norah, I heard you mention important evidence. Do you know who's behind all this?"

Norah nodded. "Yes. It's within the Edwards circle."

"Who do you suspect?" Paulina pressed further, her curiosity barely hidden.

Norah smiled. "It's not a suspicion—it's a fact. I'm going to deliver it to Mr. Edwards now."

She began tidying her desk, but she was already recording their exchange. Paulina's persistence gave her away.

"Norah, why don't I go with you?" she offered. "With Mr. Kian out, I could lend a hand with anything you need."

This was unusual behavior for Paulina, but Norah played along. She passed Paulina a file, saying, "Why don't you take it? I've been considering resigning anyway, especially after offending Mr. Edwards."

Paulina's face lit up with surprise, though her mind raced. It made sense why Norah had defended Kevin so vigorously at the site earlier.

Gladly accepting, Paulina said, "I'll deliver it. Don't worry."

As Paulina left, Norah forwarded the recorded exchange to Kian, who had just discovered Paulina and Luis were frequently in contact. Paulina wasted no time, calling Luis from a private number. "Luis, Norah found something serious on you. It's in my hands now."

She set up a meeting with him at a nearby café, scheming to frame Luis, prove her loyalty to Kevin, and rise to the top.

When Luis arrived, he was immediately suspicious. "How do you have critical evidence?" he demanded.

Paulina explained how Norah had handed it to her. Luis's expression darkened. "You've been tricked," he said, moving to leave.

But before he could, Kian and Norah entered with police officers and security. Paulina went pale. "Norah, did you set me up?"

Norah smirked. "You exposed yourself. I just followed your lead."

Knowing Paulina and Luis were involved, Kian had discreetly tracked their activities, gathering ample evidence. Now cornered, Paulina broke down under pressure. "Luis approached me," she confessed. "He promised I'd be the top secretary if I got rid of Norah. I only altered a few contracts—everything else was his doing!"

With nothing left to hide, she pointed the finger at Luis, claiming he orchestrated the entire operation.

Finally facing Kevin, Luis erupted in rage. "Don't gloat, Kevin. Without your loyal watchdog, you'd never have survived this!"

Kevin responded with an icy stare before kicking Luis to the ground. Looming over him, Kevin spoke slowly, "Luis, you know I repay loyalty—and treachery."

Luis could only gasp as he was subdued, his face bloodied. Kian finalized the investigation, and Luis was swiftly prosecuted. Kevin's name was cleared, and the Edwards family compensated the families of the workers who had died, bringing closure to the scandal.

Soon after, news outlets broadcast Luis's crimes. Watching the report, Norah finally exhaled, relieved.

Her colleagues buzzed with excitement. "Justice prevailed! I thought Mr. Edwards was finished, but he turned the tables!"

"Yes, and we owe a lot to Secretary White," someone added. "She pulled it off flawlessly."

Just then, footsteps approached, and everyone fell silent. Kevin walked in, his dark eyes intense, and locked eyes with Norah.

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"Mr. Edwards," Norah greeted quietly, her gaze dropping.

Kevin walked toward her with a firm stride, his presence imposing, his expression stern. The intensity in his eyes felt like a weight, and Norah wasn't sure what he meant to say—until he broke the silence.

"Norah, why did you help me?"

The question was blunt, but his voice betrayed a touch of bewilderment, and Norah quickly gathered her thoughts. "Mr. Edwards, I'm your secretary. As long as I work for the Edwards family, it's my duty to handle things for you."

Her words were steady, her gaze clear and detached. But Kevin let out a bitter laugh, a faint trace of sarcasm on his lips. "So, you're just that devoted an employee?"

Norah lowered her head. "I'm only doing my job."

The look on her face only fueled the irritation simmering in Kevin's chest. Why did she seem so calm, so unbothered, especially when he had caught her sharing quiet moments with Anthony? He had expected a little more warmth, even vulnerability. But to his dismay, Norah's expression remained unreadable.

Kevin's mouth tightened, his voice a touch colder. "Norah, as an employee, it's your responsibility. Don't read into this any further."

With that, he turned sharply and went into his office, leaving her standing alone, emotions clouded and unresolved.

Inside his office, Kevin lit a cigarette, the smoke curling up as he inhaled deeply. After a tense silence and three cigarettes, he called Kian.

“Do a full sweep of the Edwards family. I want every trace of these ‘opportunists’ out.”

“Yes, sir,” Kian responded briskly, aware that Kevin’s tolerance was running thin.

Kevin’s next destination was a bustling club in the city center. His close friends Cody, Esteban, and Bonian were already there, waiting for him with knowing grins.

“Where’s your better half tonight?” Bonian smirked.

Esteban raised an eyebrow, barely containing his amusement. “Looks like you’re into her, man. It’s written all over you.”

Cody chimed in, adding, “If you’re serious, why don’t you make it official? You’re already together, and if you’re both feeling it, get married, have a kid. Before you know it, the big wedding will be on.”

Kevin’s patience snapped. He grabbed a drink, tuning out their playful teasing. Norah was the only thought running through his mind, but not in the way his friends imagined. She’d risked so much for him, yet she seemed so emotionally distant. What was she trying to prove?

Cody exchanged a glance with Bonian, who nodded in agreement. Seeing Kevin down a few more drinks, Cody took the opportunity to fish his phone from Kevin’s pocket, quickly dialing Norah.

“Sister-in-law, Kevin’s had way too much tonight.”

There was a pause on the line, but then Norah’s voice came through, steady but hoarse. “Where is he?”

“Glow Lounge, Room 409. Can you come get him? I’ve got to run.”

“Alright.”

Cody hung up, pleased she hadn't brushed it off. After returning the phone to Kevin, he and the others discreetly left, leaving Kevin alone in the dim room. The moment the door clicked shut, Kevin opened his eyes. There was no hint of intoxication in his sharp gaze.

An hour later, Norah finally arrived at Glow Lounge, delayed by heavy traffic. She navigated the hallway's dim lighting with familiarity—she had often come here during business events with Kevin. Just as she neared Room 409, a figure stumbled in her direction.

The man was tall, broad, and clearly intoxicated. His gaze locked onto her, eyes narrowing. "Well, look what we have here," he slurred, a smile creeping over his face.

Alarmed, Norah tried to step aside, but he grabbed her wrist. "Excuse me, you must be mistaken—"

Ignoring her words, he pulled her close, intoxicated by the subtle scent of her perfume. "Tonight, you're mine. Let's go."

With that, he hoisted her onto his shoulder, his grip unyielding. Fear surged through Norah's chest as she struggled against him, her cries for help barely piercing the club's noisy hallway. "Help! Cody! Cody, help me!"

Her pleas only seemed to aggravate the man. He dropped her back to the floor but kept his hold tight. "Enough with the shouting," he growled, raising a hand to strike her.

A sharp crack echoed through the hall as his palm connected, and Norah felt a sting spread across her cheek. The man, smirking, loosened his belt, ready to lash out again. Desperate, Norah shielded her face, preparing for the worst.

But the next blow never came. Instead, there was a loud crash, and the man was flung backward, colliding with the wall. Standing in his place was Kevin, eyes blazing with fury, his presence fierce and unyielding.

Kevin's gaze locked onto hers, and without a word, he extended his hand. Norah hesitated only a second before taking it, his grip firm as he pulled her to her feet. She stumbled forward, instinctively clutching his chest, his heartbeat strong and steady against her ear.

For a brief moment, they stood close, her breath hitching as she felt his protective warmth surround her.

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The man's gruff voice rang out from across the room, snarling, "Who's this pretty boy, huh? Think you're some knight in shining armor? I'll crush you!"

He lunged forward, his movements aggressive and forceful.

But Kevin didn't flinch. With a quick, calculated kick, he sent the man sprawling.

Thud! The man hit the floor, groaning.

Still holding Norah close, Kevin made a call. "Esteban, get a few guys over here and handle the brute outside the private room. Tell Cody to bring a medical kit to me, pronto."

With that, Kevin ushered Norah into the private room.

The man, now wide-eyed, realized Kevin wasn't someone to mess with. Panicking, he tried to scramble to his feet and flee. But as Esteban, Cody, and Bonian arrived, there was no escape.

Meanwhile, Cody entered the private room carrying the medical kit.

"Check her injuries," Kevin commanded.

Cody glanced at Norah, noting the red mark on her cheek from the slap. "Where else are you hurt?" he asked.

Norah's voice was barely audible, "Just...just the slap."

She was shaken. Her luck had run out tonight, and if Kevin hadn't intervened, things would have taken a dangerous turn.

Cody said, "I'll grab some ice. You'll need it for the swelling." He placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "Don't worry about it—Kevin's got you covered." With a wink, he left, mumbling to himself about how overprotective Kevin was.

Once Cody left, the room fell silent, leaving just Norah and Kevin.

A few moments later, there was a knock. “Your ice pack,” a staff member announced.

Kevin gestured for him to enter, then wrapped the ice in a towel and pressed it gently to Norah’s cheek, his hand steady and focused.

Norah, feeling the cool relief on her stinging cheek, mumbled, “I wasn’t trying to get in trouble—I tried to avoid him...”

Kevin’s intense presence and slight smell of alcohol lingered as she thanked him softly. “Thank you.”

His expression grew colder. “There’s no need to thank me. Just remember, everything between us is an exchange.”

Norah swallowed hard, realizing that to Kevin, this was simply about repaying a debt. She nodded, “Got it. Are we leaving now?”

“Soon,” he replied, placing the ice pack in her hand. “You represent the Edwards family. Stay composed.”

The reality stung. He’d saved her because it was expected, not out of care.

Esteban had the drunken attacker bound in another private room, knowing Kevin would want to deal with him personally. The man thrashed against his bindings, his face twisted in anger.

Kevin entered the room and, without hesitation, grabbed a nearby bottle, smashing it over the man’s hand.

The man’s screams filled the room as Kevin coldly instructed his guards, “Make sure he leaves this city as a beggar.”

Esteban watched, uneasy yet impressed by Kevin’s ruthlessness.

When Kevin returned to Norah, she could smell a faint hint of blood, and the sight of him made her stomach churn. She turned away, feeling nauseous.

“Do I reek of blood?” he asked, noticing her reaction.

Norah nodded, trying to steady herself. “A bit, yes.”

“Bear with it. We’re heading home.” He led her to the car, his grip firm.

Back at the mansion, Kevin went straight upstairs, leaving Norah alone. She headed to the bathroom, trying to wash away the lingering scent that haunted her senses.

Later, Kevin appeared in the doorway, his face impassive as he remarked dryly, “So, Norah, should I add this incident to our growing list of reasons for divorce?”

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Norah stood at the sink, washing her face repeatedly, scrubbing with facial cleanser, hand soap, and even body wash. The faint scent of gardenia—her favorite fragrance—filled the air, mingling with the other scents.

She was doing everything to erase Kevin’s smell from her skin.

He had left a lingering odor—a mix of strong alcohol, heavy smoke, and, worst of all, a metallic hint of blood.

As she wiped her face, she forced herself to calm down, meeting Kevin’s gaze with a detached expression. “Don’t overthink it. You know why I wanted a divorce,” she said, her voice even.

The time had come for her to leave, and she had no intention of staying any longer. Watching him move on with Bianca was unbearable.

Kevin’s expression darkened, a glimmer of frustration breaking through his usual control.

She saw it—the jealousy, the possessiveness—when he thought of her returning to Anthony and Steven’s side. Her calm demeanor only seemed to fan the flames, especially when he remembered how he’d seen her laughing with Steven earlier that day.

With his emotions no longer restrained, he took a step forward and grabbed her by the neck, voice raw and threatening, “Norah, I’ve changed my mind. I’m not going to the Civil Affairs Bureau with you.”

“You!” Norah gasped, shocked. He had given his word, and now he was going back on it.

Now she understood why the Civil Affairs Bureau required a cooling-off period. She steadied her breath, forcing herself to stay calm. “It doesn’t matter if you won’t go through with the divorce right now. We’re even now. But tonight, I—”

Her words were cut off as Kevin pulled her into a fierce kiss. He held her firmly, guiding her backward until her legs hit the bed.

Pinned beneath him, Norah tried to push him away, but he grabbed her wrists, pressing them above her head, his gaze intense and unyielding.

“Kevin, please, calm down! I can’t... The doctor said I need to take care of myself right now—folic acid, calcium tablets...” Her voice trailed off, her worry mounting. She couldn’t risk hurting their child.

But Kevin didn’t stop, moving forward until he was deeply entwined with her, and Norah lay frozen, barely daring to breathe. She felt his anger, his possessiveness, and, strangely, a pang of sorrow.

Then, as if coming to his senses, Kevin pulled away, the taste of her tears lingering on his lips—a reminder of the bitterness in their lives. Suddenly, he felt a wave of regret.

He rolled off her, lying on his back, exhausted. Alcohol clouded his thoughts, making him feel weightless, as though he were floating on air.

In a daze, he murmured, “Bianca...”

The name stung Norah. Even now, Bianca occupied his thoughts, a reminder of why he had pushed her away.

The next morning, Norah made her way to a law office. Spotting Bonian, she approached him with determination. “Attorney Lepage, I need this divorce expedited.”

Bonian’s face remained calm as he explained, “Ms. White, few attorneys in this city will touch your case. But since I accepted it, I’ll see it through. I’m scheduled to handle some cases before leaving for the U.S., so your case may take two and a half months.”

Norah’s heart sank. By then, she would be four months pregnant. Kevin would never let her leave once he knew. She narrowed her eyes, a bitter smile playing on her lips. “So, you’re one of Kevin’s friends?”

Bonian’s eyes flickered. “Sharp as ever, Ms. White.”

Norah didn't miss a beat. "If you won't handle my case, leave," she replied coldly, turning on her heel to exit.

As she left, Bonian quickly dialed Kevin, who was still asleep. Bonian's sarcastic voice broke through the line, "Still in bed? Your wife was here first thing, and she figured out my connection to you. Better be careful."

Kevin's grogginess faded as he hung up, dialing Norah. She was out searching for another attorney, encountering rejection after rejection. Seeing Kevin's number, her stomach twisted, but she answered, her voice steady.

"Where are you?" Kevin's voice was cold.

"I'm out shopping, taking a personal day," she lied, trying to mask her anxiety.

"Have you finished what I asked of you yesterday?" His tone was unforgiving.

Norah hesitated, then replied, "I'll head to the office now."

"Good."

Hanging up, Kevin dressed and headed to the cloakroom. His phone rang again, and, assuming it was Norah, he answered coldly, "I don't want to repeat myself. Don't push me."

There was silence before a familiar voice stammered, "Kevin?"

Kevin's demeanor softened. "Bianca? Sorry. What's going on?"

She paused, then spoke with quiet resolve, "I need to see you. I have something to say in person."

"I'll come by this afternoon," he replied.

At the Edwards Group, Norah escorted a new recruit, Shelby Lyons, to Kevin's office. "Mr. Edwards, this is Shelby Lyons," she introduced.

Kevin's gaze landed on the slim, wavy-haired woman before he turned to Norah. "You'll oversee the arrangements with Jenkins," he instructed, signaling for Shelby to follow up on her task.

Norah dutifully took Shelby to the hotel where Jenkins was staying. As they arrived, Jamie, Jenkins' representative, looked at Norah, surprised. "Secretary White, I didn't recognize you last time. My apologies for the oversight."

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Jamie strode confidently toward Norah, a bright smile on her face. Today, her attitude seemed far warmer than it had been yesterday.

Norah matched Jamie's smile and gestured for Shelby to step forward. "Shelby, come meet our partner."

Though Jamie's demeanor had softened, she couldn't entirely hide her frustration. Norah was well aware of Kevin's intention to have Shelby manage the Jenkins account, so she took the opportunity to introduce them.

Despite her internal annoyance, Jamie kept her composure. "So, Secretary White, has your company been onboarding a lot of new hires recently?"

With Kevin out of sight, Jamie's irritation simmered beneath her polite surface. She subtly pressed Norah, aiming to steer the conversation toward the issue she truly cared about.

Norah replied diplomatically, "Miss Jenkins, if you're worried about project delays, rest assured that Mr. Edwards will personally oversee any agreements."

Jamie's mouth tightened. "Then why don't we discuss the plan back at Edwards Group? What are your thoughts on the proposal?"

After Norah had left the previous day, Jamie learned Norah had been Kevin's secretary for seven years—a fact that only fueled Jamie's desire to bypass her entirely.

With calm professionalism, Norah replied, "Miss Jenkins, your proposal doesn't align with standard practices. What is the reasoning behind a 15-day delay for a 20% payment after the contract is signed?"

Jamie's lips curved into a sly smile. "Given that this is our first partnership, that's just a safeguard. Didn't you read the fine print? Clause three specifically states full payment is due within one month of completion."

Norah maintained her polite tone. "Miss Jenkins, we're here to discuss serious business. This is not how partnerships are usually structured. It's common to set clear payment terms upfront to maintain trust."

Jamie's face flushed with frustration. "Enough," she snapped, "I'm done discussing this with a secretary. I'm going directly to Kevin!"

Norah wasted no time, calling Kevin as Jamie had ordered.

Kevin answered in an icy tone, "What's going on?"

"Miss Jenkins is on her way to Edwards Group to discuss the contract," Norah replied, summarizing the situation.

Kevin didn't reply, and Norah took that as acknowledgment. She hung up, took a shortcut to the office, and arrived before Jamie. She left Shelby at the front desk and went straight to the president's office, calmly setting out tea in preparation for Jamie's arrival.

When Jamie arrived, she looked distinctly displeased. As Norah handed her a cup of tea, it accidentally spilled, splashing hot liquid on Jamie's hand.

"Ow!" Jamie cried, glaring at Norah. "Did you do that on purpose?"

Norah remained composed. "Miss Jenkins, I assure you, it wasn't intentional. It just slipped."

Jamie's eyes narrowed, suspicion filling her voice. "Really? I bring up a concern, and suddenly I'm splashed with hot tea? Mr. Edwards, your secretary seems to have quite an attitude!"

Kevin, standing nearby, gave Jamie an unimpressed look. "Miss Jenkins, if you're concerned, we could review the surveillance footage."

Jamie froze, visibly thrown off balance by his suggestion. Her composure faltered. She had underestimated how much Kevin valued Norah's work ethic.

"Fine," Jamie conceded, struggling to maintain her dignity. "But the tea still burned my hand, and I'd expect a little consideration from your team."

Norah spoke up calmly, “Miss Jenkins, if I had spilled tea on myself, I’d handle it with a bit of embarrassment. However, since you’re concerned, I can arrange for an ice pack and make an appointment at the best dermatology clinic in town.”

Jamie waved her hand dismissively. “Ice will be fine.”

Kevin watched the exchange with a barely concealed smirk. When Norah left to get the ice, Jamie turned to him, sensing her chance to press the issue.

Kevin’s expression shifted to one of mild impatience. “Norah has worked with me for seven years. She has my trust and the authority to make decisions. If you wish to proceed with this partnership, it would be wise to ensure smooth communication with my team.” His words were slow and deliberate, the message unmistakable.

Jamie’s face betrayed her frustration. She realized that if she wanted this partnership, she’d need to make amends with Norah.

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Jamie’s face tightened. “Mr. Edwards, I’ve had some disagreements with Secretary White, and frankly, anyone would assume her actions were intentional. Also... do you really not recognize me?”

Kevin’s expression remained cool. “I know exactly who you are. That’s irrelevant here.”

His calm, dismissive response left Jamie stunned and fuming.

Just then, Norah returned with an ice pack. “Miss Jenkins, here’s the ice.”

Norah’s expression was unbothered, in sharp contrast to Jamie’s growing frustration. And from Kevin’s cold stare, it was clear that he expected an apology if the partnership was to move forward. This collaboration was something Jamie had fought hard to secure, convincing both her father and brother to entrust her with it.

Forced into a corner, Jamie took a breath and said reluctantly, “Secretary White, I apologize for earlier. I shouldn’t have blamed you for the tea incident. I hope you’ll forgive me.”

Norah, taken aback for a moment, noticed Kevin watching the exchange, his eyes fierce and unwavering. She managed a polite smile. “Miss Jenkins, we’ve discussed this already; no need to dwell on it.”

Not wanting to linger in the tension-filled room, Norah added, "I'll leave the ice pack here for you. I'll step out so you and Mr. Edwards can continue your discussion."

Once Norah left, Kevin's voice was low and firm. "Miss Jenkins, it might be best to avoid acting entitled."

Jamie's frustration surged, but she forced a calm tone. "Mr. Edwards, are we still moving forward with this partnership?"

Kevin turned to face her. "If you want to discuss business, I need to see real commitment from you."

Knowing she had no choice, Jamie tried to soften her approach. "I may have mishandled things, and my initial proposal wasn't perfect. How about I offer a two percent reduction on the KK project as a goodwill gesture?"

Kevin didn't respond, keeping his back to her, which only added to her humiliation.

At home, Jamie was revered as the eldest daughter of the Jenkins family. People treated her with deference, but here she was, humbled before a secretary and practically begging Kevin for business.

She fought to hold back her frustration as Kevin finally spoke, his tone mocking. "You traveled all this way to negotiate for just two percent? Doesn't that seem like a poor trade?"

Jamie felt her pride sting. This project was a major international venture, and she had crafted the proposal hoping to impress Kevin, not to have it scrutinized by his secretary. But now, with her back against the wall, she swallowed her pride. "Mr. Edwards, sometimes we have to look at the big picture. Sacrificing a small amount now secures a long-term partnership. My offer is twenty percent; I can't go any lower."

"Fine," Kevin agreed quickly, though his calm acceptance only deepened Jamie's resentment.

"Mr. Edwards, since we've reached an agreement, I'd like to invite you to a dinner I'm hosting at Red Leaf Villa tomorrow. I hope you'll attend."

He nodded, not bothering with further pleasantries. "Norah, show Miss Jenkins out."

Jamie held her tongue as Norah returned, though once Kevin was out of earshot, she said quietly to Norah, "That apology? It was only for Mr. Edwards' benefit."

Norah gave her a measured smile. “Miss Jenkins, I’d advise letting go of grudges. Holding onto them only creates unnecessary stress. I’ll be by Mr. Edwards’ side every day.”

Norah’s gaze held a hint of ice, making it clear she wouldn’t back down. Jamie’s face twisted with resentment as she muttered, “We’ll see how long that lasts.”

Without another word, she turned and strode off.

Norah, unfazed, returned to the office. As soon as she stepped off the elevator, she heard Kevin call from his office.

When she entered, Kevin was leaning back in his chair, a lit cigarette in his hand, eyeing her with an appreciative look. “Thanks to you, we got a twenty percent concession. Should I reward you?”

Norah remained steady. “If you’re serious, I’d prefer something more in line with my interests.”

Kevin raised an eyebrow, a faint smirk on his lips. “I should have known.”

He leaned forward, studying her. “You’re so calm about everything. Doesn’t anything faze you?”

Norah kept her tone light. “Only when people make moves behind my back. It’s hard to take things seriously if they’re not upfront.”

Her suspicion had been confirmed—Bonian, the lawyer she’d consulted about her case, was one of Kevin’s close friends. Her efforts had been quietly stymied before they even began.

Kevin’s expression grew colder. “I refuse to let you turn my life into a public spectacle.”

The room filled with smoke, obscuring his face. Norah realized she couldn’t rely on anyone else here.

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Norah asked Kevin, “Could we move up the trip to Foutumsally?”

Kevin's eyes darkened, a hint of coldness flickering as he regarded her in silence through the smoke curling up between them. He seemed puzzled; Norah and Steven appeared close, yet here she was, requesting to leave sooner.

"If you'd rather cancel, that's fine," she said, catching his hesitation. "Mr. Edwards, do you have anything else?"

Kevin's attention shifted as he replied coolly, "Make me a cup of tea."

"Yes, sir," she said, bringing him a fresh pot within minutes.

Then, he added, "Join me at Red Leaf Villa tomorrow night."

Norah simply nodded and left the room. But as she did, a group chat notification popped up from her classmates: **Class reunion rescheduled for tomorrow at 9 PM.**

She remembered Kevin's request to join him at Red Leaf Villa to meet with Jamie, so she quickly messaged her friend Micah: *"I won't make it tomorrow. Sending \$5,000 for you to transfer to the class president."*

Micah replied with a quick *"Got it"* and then added, *"Take care of yourself."*

To him, her absence made sense. Pregnant and avoiding evening events with alcohol would be understandable, even responsible.

An hour later, as Kevin passed her office on his way out, he didn't say a word, but his message buzzed in her phone: "Dinner's ready." She texted back a simple *"Got it."*

Leaving work on time, she headed to the grocery store, where she paused, surprised to see Kevin's image flashing across a display screen in the supermarket.

Dressed in a black designer suit, Kevin looked poised and authoritative beside Bianca, who wore a white dress and delicate makeup as she stood before a row of cameras. Bianca smiled slightly as she addressed the crowd: *"I wanted to clarify a few things. Secretary White gave me the tonic soup as instructed by Aunt Siena Edwards. There was no poisoning. I simply had a reaction to the ingredients. These are my medical reports. I apologize for any misunderstanding."*

As she bowed to the cameras, Norah shook her head. If Bianca was genuinely sorry, she could have apologized directly. This press conference was clearly for the public.

A reporter cut in, "Ms. Lynch, if this wasn't intentional, why did it take two days to clarify? And why isn't Secretary White present?"

Bianca swayed slightly before Kevin's hand found her waist, steadying her. Looking pale under the bright lights, she tried to sound remorseful, saying, *"I didn't mean for Secretary White to face harassment. I only just received my medical report."*

Kevin's eyes met the camera, his stare sharp and protective. "There's no poisoning or malice here," he said firmly, "and I'd appreciate it if we keep the reporting fair."

Norah watched as Kevin stood by Bianca's side, exuding calm strength, projecting a security she'd never experienced with him. The contrast stung. Only Bianca could draw out this side of him.

Just as she turned away from the screen, another question rang out: *"Mr. Edwards, are you here as a spokesperson or a friend of Ms. Lynch?"*

Kevin answered bluntly, *"Both."*

Norah felt a weight settle on her chest as she watched the screen, her pulse racing when a final reporter asked if wedding bells were in their future. Bianca, smiling demurely, held onto Kevin's arm. *"That's private. We'll share any news when the time is right."*

Unable to watch any longer, Norah turned her attention back to shopping.

The couple's black-and-white attire complemented their image perfectly—talented, sophisticated, and undoubtedly admired. When a woman behind her snapped, *"If you're not buying, please let others through,"* Norah quickly grabbed a shopping bag and left.

Later, on the drive back, Bianca turned to Kevin, her voice tentative. "Kevin, I'm sorry for answering on my own. I thought it'd help shift focus off Norah."

Kevin's response was barely audible. *"Hmm."*

Bianca saw the displeasure etched on his face and added, "Maybe I should apologize to Norah directly."

"She's been busy," Kevin replied curtly.

Accepting his disinterest, Bianca nodded quietly. After a moment's pause, she said, "Maybe I'll visit Aunt Siena instead."

Kevin's tone was icy. "No one's stopping you."

Bianca lowered her gaze, her voice subdued. "I thought maybe you'd prefer I take a taxi."

Kevin shrugged. "Suit yourself."

She sighed but gave in. "Then just drop me off at my apartment."

"Kian, to the apartment," Kevin ordered, his voice flat.

Half an hour later, the car pulled up to Bianca's building, her hand resting on the door handle as she took one last look at Kevin, his face a mask she couldn't read.