

Mr. Edwards' Unraveled Life

Chapter 591

A flicker of mocking amusement played across Kevin's lips. "So, let me guess—you're telling me that if I apologize and pay up, everything goes back to normal. But if I refuse, I'll be held responsible and deal with the fallout myself?"

Though Kevin smiled, it didn't reach his eyes.

These officials had been in the game long enough—they'd seen it all. They weren't easily shaken by Kevin's demeanor. Still, they expected him to pay for what he'd done.

"Glad you understand," one of them said coolly.

But Kevin wasn't the kind of man to bow to pressure—especially from people abusing their power.

If they came knocking on his door, then they had no one to blame but themselves.

Kevin made one phone call—and soon the Disciplinary Inspection Commission showed up. After a thorough investigation into their son and grandson, the truth came out.

Oaklyn was just using Cooper's popularity to chase fame and money in the entertainment industry.

And that money? Completely illegitimate.

Worse, the young man had used his family's political clout to commit all kinds of shady deeds.

Now that Kevin had acted, he planned to bring the whole operation down in one swoop.

That call also meant he'd have to visit Mr. Godin, leaving Norah behind—but thankfully, Jack and Gwen had arrived.

"Mom, Dad," Kevin said, "Can I trouble you to look after Norah for a few days? I have some things to take care of."

Jack and Gwen had witnessed all the chaos surrounding Kevin and Norah. There never seemed to be any peace.

Jack couldn't bear the idea of his daughter living a life constantly filled with turmoil. So he gently suggested, "Norah, why don't you and Kevin consider moving to the countryside? It's quiet out there. You won't be bothered by anyone."

Norah understood what her father meant. But Kevin had responsibilities with the Edwards family, and Cooper still needed to attend school in the city.

Sure, they could hire a private tutor—but part of growing up was experiencing school life.

"Dad, this is just temporary. We can handle it. Please don't worry about us," Norah said softly.

She still addressed them the same way and hadn't let marriage change their relationship.

Kevin had said the same thing earlier—and Norah was on the same page.

She held their hands gently. "Mom, Dad, can you stay a little longer this time? Every time you visit, it's always a rush. I've never even taken you shopping. Let's go out in Belourvinelle and see if there's anything you like. And I'd love for you to meet my father—he can check your health and maybe suggest some supplements."

At their age, early checkups could make a big difference.

Jack waved it off. "We're in good health. No need for all that. But you..." He looked at Norah, concern written across his face.

Holding her hand, he said, "You and Kevin have a high profile. Envy comes with the territory. You have to take care of yourself—and the kids."

"Cooper's health hasn't been great either. I worry about both of you."

"Why don't you come stay with us for a while?" Gwen offered warmly.

Jack shook his head. "Norah's married now. She's got her own family. If she stays with us, what about the child? Kevin would never agree to her going alone."

"There's nothing wrong with that," Gwen argued. "They can come with her."

Her heart was in the right place—but in reality, it wasn't that simple.

Jack nodded. "It all depends on Kevin, really."

"That may be true," Gwen said, "but just because Norah's married doesn't mean she's Kevin's property. She's still free to make her own choices."

Jack softened. "Right now isn't the time to debate this. It's really up to Norah."

Norah smiled gently. "If I went to stay with you now, I'd just cause trouble. I'm pregnant—my appetite's all over the place. Why don't you just stay with me for a few days? When it's time, I'll take you back myself."

"It's not about whether you can take us," Jack said. "It's not any trouble at all. It's just a short trip—we can head home anytime."

"How about this," Norah suggested, "stay a little longer. When Cooper has a school break, we'll all go together."

It was Tuesday. Cooper would be on break by Friday.

But Jack couldn't help but comment, "You say that, but you seem to have plenty of time to take Cooper to TV shows."

He wasn't upset—just concerned. He felt Cooper should be focusing more on education.

Cooper might still be in kindergarten, but this was the best time to build good learning habits.

Norah looked flustered. "Dad, it's not like that. I... I just want you to stay a few days. Let me get the kitchen started."

Even though Norah wasn't Jack's biological daughter, he'd treated her like his own for years. He knew exactly what she was trying to say.

"Alright," he said kindly. "We'll do it your way. No more arguments."

"Great."

Norah was genuinely happy they agreed to stay.

Later, Pharaoh examined Jack and Gwen, just as Norah had requested. “Nothing serious. Just make sure they get plenty of rest.”

Norah felt relieved.

Still, Jack and Gwen couldn’t help but comment on Cooper.

“He’s so thin,” Gwen said. “There are so many of you here—how is he still so skinny? Why not let us take him for a while? We’ll fatten him up.”

Norah had refused Pharaoh’s request to take Cooper to the Yi Tribe. There was no way she’d send Cooper away again.

“Mom, Dad, we’ve given him every supplement out there. If he’s still skinny, it’s not for lack of trying. But don’t worry—I’m determined to fatten him up this year.”

They believed her.

Gwen smiled warmly. “When you gave birth to Cooper, I didn’t get to help. But this time—I’m not missing it! If this one’s a girl, how perfect would that be? One son, one daughter.”

Norah gently rested her hand on her belly and smiled, “I hope it’s a girl too.”

Chapter 592

“I’m going to cook all your favorite dishes,” Gwen said, dragging Jack into the kitchen. “And remember—when my son-in-law gets home, back me up about Norah coming to live with us.”

Jack sighed. “You really...”

But one look from Gwen shut him up. He had no choice but to agree.

Soon, dinner was ready—everything Norah loved.

As they sat at the table, Gwen filled Norah’s plate. Seeing her frown, she gently encouraged, “Pregnancy is like this. You’ve got to eat something. Don’t avoid food just because you’re afraid you’ll throw up.”

“But I’ve been throwing up so badly...”

This wasn’t Norah’s first pregnancy, but this time it felt completely different. She was nauseous just looking at food.

Gwen handed her some pickled fish. "That's exactly why you need to eat. If there's something in your stomach, it won't feel as bad coming up."

Jack added his support too. Norah, not wanting to worry them, asked for some soup instead.

Gwen quickly served her a bowl. When she saw Norah drink it, she relaxed and smiled. "That's better. Let me know if you want anything else."

Maybe it was the comforting atmosphere, but after the soup, Norah actually started to feel hungry. She asked Gwen for some braised pork.

She ate until her stomach was stretched tight. If she hadn't been worried about overdoing it for the baby, she would've kept going.

That night, Kevin returned just as Norah was getting ready for bed.

She heard the car pull in, walked to the balcony, and saw him look up. She smiled down at him.

Kevin smiled back and held up a box of dessert.

"You bought that for me?" she called.

He nodded.

Norah chuckled. "You're too late. I'm stuffed."

Kevin rushed upstairs and pulled her into a kiss the moment he stepped inside, like he hadn't seen her in ages.

When he finally let go, he carried her to the sofa and tried feeding her the dessert.

Norah shook her head. "I ate way too much. Feel this." She grabbed his hand and placed it on her bloated belly.

Kevin chuckled. She hadn't had an appetite for days, and now suddenly she was back to eating like normal—clearly, Gwen's presence made a difference.

He teased, "So my cooking's no good, huh?"

Norah nestled into his arms and laughed. "Not at all. I think it's just the mood. I missed them."

Kevin smirked. "I think you're just making excuses. My heart is broken. You have to make it up to me."

Norah giggled and kissed his cheek. "That enough?"

“Nope,” he said, dramatically clutching his chest. “It still hurts. It wants more.”

She grinned. “Alright. Close your eyes.”

Kevin hesitated—was she mad? But seeing her serious expression, he relaxed and closed them.

Her lips brushed his. Soft and sweet.

Just when Kevin was about to ask for more, Norah climbed onto his lap, catching him off guard. His heart thumped wildly, but he didn’t move, letting her take the lead.

The kiss deepened, growing more passionate.

“How about now?” she asked, smiling at his dazed expression.

Kevin laughed, set her gently on the sofa, and nodded. “That was perfect. I look forward to your next move.”

Then, like a man fleeing temptation, he bolted into the bathroom. The sound of running water soon followed.

Norah smirked. She knew exactly what was going on.

The next morning, Gwen was waiting for Kevin.

As soon as he came downstairs, she called him over. “Kevin, I need to talk to you.”

He sat with her on the sofa. “Go ahead.”

“I want Norah to come home with us. I brought it up yesterday, but she has some concerns. If you say yes, I know she’ll go.”

Kevin hesitated. Work was demanding, and if Norah left, they’d be apart. He didn’t want that—not after all the time they’d lost.

Still, he saw the hope in Gwen’s eyes.

“Why don’t you stay here—” he began.

“You’re busy. You’re a man. You can’t take care of her the way I can,” Gwen interrupted. “I’ve got time. I’ll care for her 24/7.”

She stood, and Kevin quickly pulled her back down. “Wait, what are you doing?”

“Norah may not be my biological daughter, but she’s my child. If you don’t agree, I’ll kneel right here.”

Kevin panicked. “No, no—don’t! I agree! I agree. But it’s going to be a lot of work for you...”

“Don’t worry about that. Just prepare what she needs,” Gwen said, already smiling.

Kevin nodded. As he started making arrangements, Norah came downstairs. He rushed over to help her to the dining room.

When Gwen mentioned returning home, Norah looked surprised, but Kevin gave her a reassuring nod.

Later, while Gwen was in the kitchen, Kevin kissed Norah secretly. “It’s good to have a change of environment. I’ll visit on weekends and bring Cooper.”

“You said it—don’t back out! I’ll call you nonstop if you don’t come.”

Kevin reassured her and didn’t leave until she finished breakfast.

After packing, they said goodbye to Pharaoh and set off. Gwen was careful the whole way, making sure Norah and the baby were okay.

As soon as they arrived in the countryside, Norah could feel the fresh air. She eagerly asked Gwen to go walking with her.

Returning to her childhood home stirred emotions she hadn’t felt in years.

After a nap, she woke up to another delicious dinner, completely different from the night before.

She hugged Gwen and said softly, “Thank you, Mom.”

“Silly girl,” Gwen said, holding her back. “I’m here to take care of you and the baby. No thanks needed.”

Norah believed her. She’d been unsure about coming back—but now she knew it had been the right decision.

No parent ever stops missing their child. And no parent stops wanting to do everything they can for them.

Chapter 593

After dinner, the three of them sat around the tea table reminiscing. The warm atmosphere brought back sweet memories.

Norah lingered for a long time before going to bed. It wasn’t until Gwen playfully pretended to be upset that she finally returned to her room, reluctantly.

She went into the bathroom—and suddenly, something felt off. Looking down, she saw blood.

“Mom! Mom, come quick!”

Panic surged through Norah. Frozen with fear, she instinctively called for Gwen.

Gwen rushed in at the sound of Norah’s voice and immediately spotted two drops of blood on the floor. Her face turned pale.

She helped Norah dress, laid her down carefully on the bed, then darted out to call Jack.

Spotting could mean something minor or something serious. They didn’t dare take chances. Jack and Gwen immediately took Norah to the hospital.

After examination, the diagnosis was a threatened miscarriage. She needed to be hospitalized for observation and to protect the pregnancy.

Gwen was devastated with guilt and kept apologizing to Kevin.

But it wasn’t her fault. Norah was already older, and many factors could lead to complications. Returning to the countryside wasn’t necessarily the cause.

Kevin understood and gently reassured her, telling her not to blame herself.

Gwen looked like she wanted to say more, but Jack reminded her that Norah needed rest. She finally left after saying goodnight, worry still etched across her face.

Norah stared at the wall, fear creeping in.

What if... She didn’t even want to finish the thought.

Kevin held her hand and comforted her softly, “It’s okay. The doctor said it’s not serious. You just need rest. Everything will be fine.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t protect our baby,” Norah whispered, tears brimming in her eyes.

Kevin pulled her into his arms and kissed her forehead. “Don’t blame yourself. No one saw this coming. Don’t blame anyone. Just rest, okay? Our baby’s strong—it’ll be just fine.”

Norah nodded. “Yes. It will be.” She looked down at her belly. “Honey, I can sleep without holding you tonight.”

Kevin glanced at the narrow hospital bed, then nodded. He drew the curtain and carefully lay beside her.

The next morning, Norah was woken up by the smell of food. She opened her eyes and saw Kevin. Smiling lazily, she stretched out her arms.

“I want a hug.”

“Coming,” Kevin said with a soft smile.

He set the tray down, walked over, lifted her gently, propped her up against the pillows, and kissed her forehead.

Norah pouted. “That’s not enough.”

Kevin leaned in to kiss her again—but just as he was about to kiss her lips, the door opened and a nurse stepped in.

The nurse coughed and teased, “Mrs. Edwards, you’re so lucky to have such a loving husband.”

Norah didn’t respond. Her instincts told her the nurse’s smile wasn’t as innocent as it looked.

She couldn’t pinpoint it yet, but she knew to be cautious.

“Mr. Edwards, here’s her medication,” the nurse said, handing it to him. “You’ll need to pick up another one later at the nurse’s station. They only work when taken together. And remember, she needs to take them half an hour after breakfast.”

Kevin reached for the medicine, and the nurse “accidentally” brushed his arm with her fingers.

Kevin’s expression instantly changed. He looked at her coldly. “Anything else?”

“Nope. Just don’t forget the other dose,” she replied, finally turning to leave.

Kevin went to wash his hands immediately, visibly disgusted.

Norah had seen everything and said nothing. Someone was clearly trying to seduce her husband—and she needed a plan to shut it down for good.

After breakfast, Kevin headed to the nurse's station for the second dose. No one was there. Just as he was about to leave, he heard a voice from the back room.

"Nurse, I'm here for Norah's medicine," he called.

"Mr. Edwards, right? The medicine's in here. Come in and get it," the nurse answered.

She didn't come out.

Kevin hesitated. Alone with her? Given her earlier behavior, he wasn't about to risk even the appearance of something inappropriate.

"You should bring it out. If it's not ready, I'll come back."

"Come on, Mr. Edwards," the nurse said from inside, her voice syrupy. "You don't think I'd try anything, do you? There are cameras everywhere. What could I possibly do?"

With a frown, Kevin stepped inside but stayed near the doorway.

The nurse approached quickly—and this time, she wasn't in uniform but wearing a short camisole dress. If Kevin had glanced down, he'd see everything she was trying to show off.

He kept his eyes straight ahead. "Where's the medicine?"

"I twisted my waist getting it. Would you mind giving me a little massage?" she said, grabbing his hand and pulling it toward her.

Kevin yanked his hand back immediately and stepped out of the room.

"I won't tolerate this again," he said coldly. "If you try something like that one more time, I'll report you to the hospital director. And I'm not joking."

The nurse pouted and turned away, then called out, "Fine! It's in the insulated box by the door. Help yourself."

Kevin didn't want to engage any further, but Norah needed the medication.

He walked in, opened the box, and found a small bottle inside.

"That's it. Take it all at once. Come back after lunch for the next dose. Same thing—take it half an hour after your meal."

She flipped her hair dramatically, but Kevin was already walking out.

Back in the ward, Kevin said nothing about the incident. After Norah took her medicine, he sat by her side handling some work.

When lunchtime came, Kevin went out to get food. Norah stayed in bed watching TV.

The nurse came in, put the medicine down on the table, and gave Norah a look full of disdain.

Norah smiled calmly. "Do I bother you that much?"

The nurse sneered. "Why'd you even marry Mr. Edwards? He's handsome, wealthy... and look at you. You're old and ugly. He deserves better. If I were you, I'd leave him so he could be happy."

"Oh? That's a shame," Norah replied smoothly. "Because you're not me."

The nurse's face twisted in annoyance. She leaned in, glaring at Norah. "I'm younger than you. My body's perfect. I'm exactly his type."

"Well," Norah said, still smiling, "go ahead and seduce him then. If you can get him to fall for you, I'll even help you pack."

If Norah weren't pregnant, she would've already put this woman in her place. But she couldn't risk anything—so she stayed calm.

Just then, the ward door opened.

Seeing Kevin enter, the nurse quickly grabbed Norah's hand and slapped herself across the face.

Smack.

Then she dropped to the floor, crying.

"Mrs. Edwards, I know I shouldn't have said you're old. But I'm doing it for your own good. Older women need to be extra careful during pregnancy. I didn't mean any harm."

Her tears streamed down as she played the victim.

Kevin looked at Norah.

Norah shrugged. “She said I was old, then grabbed my hand and slapped herself with it. I figured, why not help her out?”

She turned her gaze to the nurse and added with a smile, “Did you forget there’s a surveillance camera right above your head?”

Chapter 594

Kevin didn’t wait for the nurse to explain. He called the dean directly, his tone firm and cold—he wanted her fired immediately.

Hearing this, the nurse panicked. She dropped to her knees, clinging to Kevin’s leg and pleading, “Mr. Edwards, I know I was wrong! Please give me another chance. My parents used their connections to get me this job—I can’t disappoint them. You know how hard your parents worked too. Please don’t do this to me.”

Norah didn’t budge. “Dean, if you don’t fire her, I’ll hold you personally accountable. If the hospital ends up facing consequences, don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

The dean knew just how much influence Kevin had. Without hesitation, he ordered the nurse’s immediate dismissal.

The nurse was dragged out, screaming and crying, her wails echoing through the entire floor.

The dean apologized repeatedly to both Kevin and Norah, then immediately assigned the head nurse to take over the dismissed nurse’s duties.

Kevin was pleased and, before leaving, offered to sponsor renovations for the inpatient department.

The dean was thrilled and thanked him profusely.

Later, Norah drank her medicine and drifted off to sleep. Half-asleep, she vaguely sensed someone entering the room but assumed it was Kevin and didn’t think much of it.

But when she noticed the person quietly closing the door, her senses sharpened.

“You again?” she asked, opening her eyes.

It was the same nurse—standing by her bedside, eyes fierce, holding a syringe.

“What are you trying to do?” Norah asked, grabbing the pillow and locking eyes with her.

The nurse sneered. “I’ve already lost my job. What do you think I’m here for?”

Without warning, she lunged. Norah blocked her with the pillow, scrambled out of bed, and bolted for the door.

The nurse was fast. She chased her, syringe in hand. Norah spun around, grabbed the nurse’s wrist, and slammed her into the wall.

The syringe hit the floor. The nurse screamed in rage, “I’m going to kill you!”

Worried about hurting the baby, Norah held back. She shoved the nurse away and tried to flee, but the woman grabbed her again.

“You think I won’t fight back?” Norah snapped.

She hadn’t intended to escalate things, but the nurse wouldn’t let go. She reached down, trying to trip Norah.

Norah had enough. She kicked her hard, sending her flying.

Norah darted out of the room.

But the nurse wasn’t done. As she passed the nurses’ station, she grabbed a pair of pliers.

Norah couldn’t run too fast, and the nurse caught up—wrapping an arm around her neck from behind.

“If you move, I’ll stab you. You bleed out from the aorta, I might save you, but your baby won’t make it.”

Norah froze, fear clenching her heart.

“What do you want?” she asked calmly. “Maybe we can work something out.”

The nurse gave a twisted smile. “Too late. You cost me my job. Now I’ll make sure your husband loses you and the baby.”

She burst out laughing.

People nearby stood frozen in fear, terrified to act.

“Even if I die, you won’t get away with this,” Norah warned.

“I don’t care. Let’s die together. At least Mr. Edwards will always remember me.”

She was completely unhinged.

Norah forced herself to stay calm. She had to find a way out.

From a distance, Kevin spotted the commotion—and saw Norah in danger.

He rushed over, his expression dark. “Let her go. I’ll do whatever you want.”

“Good,” the nurse grinned. “Divorce her and marry me. Right now. I don’t need much—500,000 as a bride price will do.”

“If you don’t agree, I’ll kill her and then myself.”

Norah gave Kevin a subtle signal not to make any rash decisions.

He got the message and played along, lips curled in a faint smile. “Okay, I’ll call the Civil Affairs Bureau now. Just put down the pliers first.”

“No way!” she shrieked, slicing Norah’s neck slightly with the pliers. Blood appeared. The bystanders gasped.

“In that case, I’m not agreeing to anything,” Kevin said coldly. “Do what you want. I’m calling the police.”

He took out his phone and pretended to dial, all while watching the nurse carefully, ready to move if she slipped up.

The nurse started to panic. She regretted not killing Norah earlier.

Just then, the dean rushed over. “Nurse Li, what are you doing?! Let her go!”

She yanked Norah backward, retreating toward the window.

Norah whispered, “It’s not too late to stop. Once the police come, it’ll be too late for regret.”

“Think about your parents,” the dean added gently. “Put down the pliers.”

Kevin crept closer. Just as he was about to grab her, she noticed and screamed, “Come any closer and I’ll stab her!”

She looked at Kevin, eyes manic. “Mr. Edwards, remember me. I really love you. Please, don’t forget me.”

Suddenly, she tried to drag Norah toward the window.

Norah had reached her limit. She had wanted to give the woman a chance, but not anymore.

She twisted away and ran toward Kevin.

The nurse slammed into the wall and was immediately restrained by two patients’ family members. The police arrived and took her away.

Afterward, Gwen brought Norah meals every day. Kevin stayed by her side constantly.

Thankfully, there were no complications. A week later, Norah was discharged.

While handling the paperwork, Gwen clutched Norah’s hand, reluctant to part.

Norah smiled and patted her hand. “Mom, if you miss me, just call. I’ll have someone pick you up.”

“You’re always in trouble or something. I worry about you and the baby,” Gwen said, eyes wet with tears.

Kevin and Norah exchanged a look, and Kevin cleared his throat. “Okay, we’re done here. Let’s head downstairs. Dad, Mom, you should just come home with us for a while.”

Jack shook his head. “We’ve got chickens and ducks to feed back home. It’s better to stay and take care of them. We’ll make sure there’s good food for Norah when she’s recovering.”

Outside the hospital, they said goodbye. Norah watched the older couple walk away, her heart heavy.

Kevin wrapped an arm around her. “Once you’re better, we’ll go back for a visit.”

She nodded. “That’s all we can do.”

When they got home, Pharaoh had cooked all her favorite dishes.

While they were eating, Kevin stepped aside to answer a call from Kian. His serious expression didn't go unnoticed.

Pharaoh frowned. "He's always working. Daughter, why don't you come back with me? That way he can focus on his job and you won't be in danger."

Norah shook her head. "Dad, I don't want to be separated from Kevin again. We've already lost five years. How many five years does a person have? I don't want to live with regrets."

Back then, she had no choice. But now, if given the chance, she would always choose Kevin.

Bad things kept happening—but they always got through them together.

Pharaoh sighed. "I'm not saying you can't see him. He can visit you when he's free. But wouldn't you be safer back home?"

Chapter 595

Norah didn't want to argue, so she stayed silent.

Pharaoh still wanted to persuade them, but just then Kevin returned from a phone call and noticed the tense atmosphere.

He looked at Norah, then at Pharaoh. "Dad, what were you two talking about? Did something happen?"

"I want her to come back with me so you can focus on work," Pharaoh explained. His intentions were good—like any caring parent.

Kevin pressed his lips into a smile. "That's what this is about? There's really no need to make things so complicated. Kian is handling all the company's affairs."

"But isn't that too much for him? He hasn't taken a single day off in years," Norah said with concern.

Kevin chuckled. "He's on a business trip, and he's got his new secretary with him. The workload isn't that bad—he'll have a chance to relax a bit."

Kevin wasn't lying. The workload wasn't overwhelming, but it also wasn't going to be handled in a day or two. At that moment, Kian was at the airport, clearly stressed.

He had his laptop perched on his suitcase, mid-meeting, and looking frustrated.

The branch manager clearly wasn't understanding him, and kept apologizing.

Kian snapped the laptop shut in frustration. "I have no idea why I even put him in charge over there. He can't grasp something this simple."

"Maybe you're just overcomplicating things," Ophelia said casually as she looked at her phone. "Want me to send him a private message?"

"I just said he doesn't get it, and now you're saying he does?" Kian rolled his eyes.

Then he noticed it was time to board, so he stood and headed for the gate.

Ophelia didn't bother waiting for permission—she sent a short, clear message to the branch manager herself.

The two of them seemed to be holding a silent grudge and didn't say a word to each other the entire flight.

When they finally arrived at their destination, Silas—the local manager—was already waiting outside the airport.

"Mr. Kian, I have the materials you asked for and the supplier documents from the last six months. They're all in my office. If you're not too tired, we can head over now."

Kian glanced at the stack of documents and his expression softened a little. "Silas, I was thinking on the plane—if you still couldn't figure things out, I was going to make you take a day off."

Silas smiled and opened the car door for them.

Since it was already getting late, Kian suggested going to the hotel and handling work matters in the morning.

Silas and Ophelia both agreed.

But when they got to the hotel, an unexpected issue popped up. The front desk had misheard the booking—what was supposed to be two separate rooms was entered as one suite.

To make matters worse, the last available room had just been booked.

"Change hotels," Kian said coldly, his glare sending a chill through everyone nearby.

Ophelia realized the mistake was partly hers and tried negotiating with the staff.

The receptionist apologized, "There's an art festival in town, and almost every hotel nearby is fully booked. Are you sure you want to check out? I'm just worried..."

She didn't finish the sentence, glancing nervously at Kian.

"Silas, go check if she's telling the truth," Kian ordered.

Silas quickly returned with confirmation—everything nearby really was full, even the smaller inns.

Left with no other choice, Kian reluctantly agreed to stay. Thankfully, the suite had two bedrooms. The only downside? One bathroom.

Kian was still irritated, but just then Kevin called. He handed the bathroom over to Ophelia and stepped aside to answer.

"Mr. Edwards, we just got to the hotel," Kian said respectfully. "I've got all the documents. I'll send them to you soon."

"No need. Just handle it. I trust you," Kevin replied. "This issue isn't huge, but it's not small either. I only have one request: make sure no one ends up working for nothing."

Kevin placed a cup of warm milk in front of Norah and watched her drink.

"Don't worry, Mr. Edwards," Kian said. "I'll take care of it. But honestly, there's got to be consequences, or this won't work."

Kevin thought for a moment. "Punishment is fine—as long as it's fair and convincing. I trust you'll manage it well. I'm busy right now, so that's all."

He hung up, grabbed a tissue to wipe the corner of Norah's mouth, then leaned over and kissed her playfully.

Norah gave him a look.

They were used to this kind of daily teasing by now. Cooper, sitting nearby, just shook his head.

"What?" Kevin ruffled Cooper's hair. "I'm just being sweet to my wife. What's wrong with that?"

Cooper grinned. "Nothing, Dad. When I grow up, I'll love my wife like you do."

Hearing their young son talk about loving his future wife made both Kevin and Norah burst out laughing.

As night fell, the city slipped into a peaceful slumber.

Kian rubbed his eyes and stepped out of the room. After digging through files for hours, he was exhausted.

He decided to take a shower and get some rest.

But just as he was enjoying the cool water, the bathroom door suddenly burst open. Ophelia rushed in, her head down.

“What the hell are you doing?!”

Kian jumped, quickly grabbing a towel to cover himself.

Ophelia froze, her sleepiness gone in an instant.

Seeing him like that, she screamed, “You pervert! Why didn’t you lock the door?!”

“I should be asking you that! Why didn’t you knock before barging in?”

Cold water dripped down his face as he wiped at his eyes, the towel slipping dangerously low.

Ophelia, flustered, covered her eyes and shrieked again. “You’re disgusting! You did that on purpose!”

Already furious, Kian suddenly became mischievous. He smirked. “Come on, we’re both adults. It’s not like you’ve never seen one before.”

Ophelia dropped her hands and snapped back, “Whether I have or haven’t is none of your business!”

Before she could finish, Kian yanked the towel a little, sending her fleeing from the bathroom in a panic.

“Kian, you jerk! I won’t forget this!” she shouted from outside.

Instead of being angry, Kian actually laughed. For some reason, the whole situation made him feel unexpectedly happy.

Maybe this suite wasn’t so bad after all.

Back in bed, he couldn’t sleep. All he could think about was Ophelia’s shy face and her awkward reactions. A smile crept across his lips.

Ophelia couldn’t sleep either. She kept picturing Kian’s annoying smirk, her cheeks burning like she had a fever.

The next morning, Ophelia yawned her way out of the room—only to run into Kian coming out of his.

Her face tightened and she quickly turned away, avoiding him.

Kian caught up. “Want to grab breakfast? I know a local spot that serves authentic snacks. I promise you’ll love them.”

“Love your head! I’m not falling in love with anything!” Ophelia shot back.

She realized she sounded too reactive and added quickly, “I’m just picky. You can’t win me over with food.”

“Sure, sure. Just try it and see.”

Kian reached out playfully, but Ophelia dodged, scratching her head in embarrassment.

“Fine. Lead the way.”

She didn’t look at him, waiting until he started walking before quietly following behind.

The place Kian mentioned was a tiny breakfast shop, just a few square feet in size—but it was packed with locals.

As they joined the long line outside, a young guy cut in front of them.

“Hey—” Ophelia started to say something, then stopped herself.

She remembered they weren’t in the capital anymore. Best to avoid trouble when you’re far from home.

Chapter 596

Seeing what just happened, Kian stepped forward and patted the young man who had cut in line on the shoulder. “Hey, could you please get in line?”

His tone was calm but firm.

The young man, dressed in flashy streetwear, turned around impatiently. “What’s it to you? Mind your own business.”

He looked like a thug.

Ophelia quickly tugged on Kian’s arm and shook her head. “Forget it. It’s not worth causing a scene with strangers.”

Kian replied, “It’s fine. Just watch.”

He walked up to the guy. Ophelia grew nervous and gripped her phone, ready to call the police if things got out of hand.

The guy looked up, annoyed, ready to argue—until he got a good look at Kian.

"I suggest you watch your tone," Kian said, rolling his neck and wrists. The sleeves of his shirt pulled tight over muscular arms, clearly trained and strong. That was enough for the guy to back off without another word.

Ophelia was stunned. She always assumed Kian was the suit-and-tie type—soft, maybe even weak. But now that she saw what was under the suit, she wouldn't mind giving those muscles a little squeeze.

Her face turned red at the thought.

Kian turned to her. "What are you thinking about?"

Startled, Ophelia quickly straightened up and cleared her throat. "Nothing. Just... I think that was impressive."

It wasn't often Ophelia gave compliments. Kian raised an eyebrow, pleased but keeping cool. "Alright, let's go eat. We've got that meeting soon."

Ophelia smacked her forehead lightly. "Right! Let's eat, quick!"

They bought a few local dishes and found a seat. After finishing, Kian wiped his mouth, glanced at his watch, and said, "Time to go. The meeting's not far off."

Ophelia looked at her plate. "Already?"

She quickly shoved the remaining bun into her mouth in one bite, puffing out her cheeks like a chipmunk. Then she daintily wiped her mouth with a napkin, trying to look elegant—pretending she hadn't just inhaled food like a vacuum.

Kian chuckled and stood. "Let's go."

As the car drove farther out of the city, the surroundings got more and more remote.

Ophelia glanced over at Kian. "If I didn't know we were going to a factory for a meeting, I'd swear you were trying to traffic me."

Kian rubbed his temple. "Do I really look like that kind of guy?"

"Hard to say..." Ophelia stretched out her answer, teasing him.

Surprisingly, Kian found it kind of cute.

When they arrived at the factory, several men in their thirties and forties were already waiting out front.

One of them came up, smiling and extending a hand. "You must be Mr. Kian."

Kian nodded, then noticed how they completely ignored Ophelia. He took her by the arm and brought her forward. “This is Miss Ophelia Labrie, Mr. Edwards’ secretary. She’s here on his behalf to inspect the facility with me.”

The men gave Ophelia a once-over, and the second they realized she was beautiful, sleazy grins appeared.

“Oh, Miss Labrie...”

“Such a young woman and already Mr. Edwards’ right hand. Clearly not ordinary.”

Ophelia remained expressionless. She’d heard this kind of talk a thousand times before. If she reacted to every sleazy comment, she’d be furious all the time.

Kian’s tone turned sharp. “Ophelia’s more than qualified to be Mr. Edwards’ secretary. She’s actually better than me. He holds her in high regard.”

Ophelia blinked in surprise. She hadn’t expected Kian to defend her like that—especially by praising her at his own expense.

One of the executives smirked. “Sounds like Mr. Kian really likes Miss Labrie.”

The look in Ophelia’s eyes turned icy. She didn’t want to argue, but these men were clearly fantasizing out loud about her, just with different wording.

After what Kian said, if she stayed silent, she’d look weak.

She lifted her chin. “Seems like we’ve lost track of what we’re here for. I’m here on behalf of Mr. Edwards to evaluate whether this factory is worth investing in. That’s the only thing that should matter today. Don’t you agree?”

The atmosphere instantly shifted. The men sobered up.

“You’re right, Miss Labrie. Mr. Edwards is a wise man—he wouldn’t pick the wrong partner. Our factory has a full production chain...”

They began the tour, explaining their processes and showcasing their facility. As they walked, both Kian and Ophelia silently acknowledged that Kevin had made a smart call sending them here.

The setup was solid across the board.

Later, the factory manager turned to Kian, hopeful. “Mr. Kian, what do you think so far?”

Kian kept his tone neutral. “Overall, it looks good.”

The manager’s smile widened—he knew that was practically a green light.

Thinking it was time to strike a deal, Silas leaned in. “We’ve invested a lot into this place. With the current quote, we’re barely breaking even with the quality we’re delivering.”

Kian’s eyes narrowed. So this was the real reason for the flattery.

These guys were trying to renegotiate after an agreement had already been made.

His tone turned cold. “Are you saying you want to raise the price?”

Silas kept smiling. “Think about it, Mr. Kian. We’re in a tough spot too. If this deal goes through, it benefits both of us. And... we’re willing to give you a little rebate.”

Kian’s face hardened instantly.

Insulted.

Did these people really think he could be bribed with a little kickback?

Chapter 597

Kian lifted his head and said calmly, “Since you clearly have no sincerity in working with us, we’re done here. We’re heading back.”

Silas’s face tightened. He quickly tried to stop them. “Hold on, we can still talk this through. If you think the offer’s too low, why don’t you stay the night and rest up? You’ve had a long trip.”

Kian was about to refuse, but Ophelia gave a slight cough. He glanced at her and immediately changed his tone. “Alright, we’ll stay the night and rest.”

Later that night

Kian looked over at Ophelia. “Why did you want to stay?”

He didn’t believe for a second that she was just tired. Ophelia’s eyes glinted with determination. “No businessman is completely clean. I saw something earlier—this factory’s breaking the law. I need to confirm it tonight. If I’m right, we can report them and shut them down.”

Her excitement was obvious. Kian asked seriously, “Are you sure about what you saw?”

If she was right, it wouldn’t be hard for him to pull the right strings to shut the place down.

“Absolutely. I just want to get back at them. I’m not letting what happened today slide.”

They got right to it, quietly beginning their investigation. But just as they were getting into it, a cold voice called out from behind:

“Mr. Kian, Miss Labrie—what are you two doing out here in the middle of the night?”

Kian froze for a second. He turned and saw Silas holding a flashlight. Under the beam, Silas’s face looked pale and eerie.

Ophelia tensed immediately. Kian shot her a reassuring glance and replied calmly, “Just taking a walk. We’re feeling a little tired now, so we’ll head back.”

He started to lead Ophelia away, but Silas stepped forward, blocking them with a smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “Leaving already? You’ve come all this way... shouldn’t you stay a bit longer?”

“We just wandered out here. Didn’t see anything,” Kian said, even though he had already sent the evidence.

Silas squinted. “Really?”

Ophelia’s palms were sweaty. She was starting to regret her plan. She should’ve pulled Kian out earlier. If anything happened to him now, she’d never forgive herself.

Kian’s voice remained calm and even. “Mr. Edwards is waiting for us. If we suddenly go missing, I can promise you he’ll turn this place upside down.”

Silas let out a dry laugh, dropping the act. “You think President Edwards cares that much about a little assistant like you?”

Kian’s heart sank. Smart people were easy to handle—they understood the stakes. But fools? They were dangerous. You never knew what they’d do next.

Ophelia jumped in, trying to reason with him. “We’re both close aides to Mr. Edwards. If something happens to us, you’ll be in deep trouble. Just let us go. I won’t say a word about what I saw.”

She was trembling, but her voice held firm. Silas seemed to hesitate. Kian saw the opening, grabbed Ophelia’s hand, and shouted, “Run!”

They took off like bullets.

Silas snapped out of it and shouted behind them, “Get them! Don’t let them escape!”

Sweat poured from his forehead. He cursed himself for not acting faster.

Kian and Ophelia ran as fast as they could. But Ophelia couldn’t keep up for long. Her breathing grew heavy, and she was clearly struggling.

“Go on without me,” she panted. “Leave me here.”

“Not a chance,” Kian said immediately. “Hop on—I’ll carry you.”

Ophelia was stunned. “No... no need.”

“Hurry up! You’ll get caught if we waste time.”

Hearing that, she didn’t argue. She wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Am I really heavy?” she asked, feeling guilty. If she’d worked out more, maybe she wouldn’t be slowing him down now.

Kian adjusted her on his back and said, “You weigh nothing. Like a kitten.”

His exaggerated tone made her laugh.

Kian glanced back and joked, “Hey, if we die together like this, does it count as a lovers’ suicide?”

They both fell silent. Kian coughed and looked away.

Then he heard a soft voice above him. “It wouldn’t be so bad.”

Kian smiled. “Don’t worry—we’re getting out of this.”

Just as he said that, he stopped suddenly. The ground beneath him crumbled, and rocks tumbled down the cliffside in front of them.

Behind them, the pursuers were catching up. In front of them, a cliff. They were cornered.

The drop didn’t look too far. They might survive the fall... but if they got caught, who knew what would happen?

Kian looked up and asked, “Ophelia, are you scared?”

She understood immediately. Without hesitation, she said, “No.”

The moment the words left her mouth, Kian jumped—taking her with him.

The people chasing them froze.

“They jumped! What do we do now?”

“They’re probably dead or crippled. Let’s just head back and report it.”

They turned away. The pay wasn’t nearly enough to risk their own lives.

At the bottom of the cliff, Kian had done everything he could to shield Ophelia. She was only slightly injured, but Kian was in bad shape.

Ophelia forced herself to stay alert. She reached out and shook him, panicked. “Kian! Kian, wake up!”

A few seconds passed. Then, slowly, he opened his eyes. His body was scratched and bruised. He coughed weakly and muttered, “Stop yelling...”

Ophelia burst into tears of relief and hugged him. “Thank God! I was so scared... If anything had happened to you because of me—”

“I’m lucky, remember? Nothing’s taking me out that easily.”

She tried to help him up but was clearly drained herself.

“Let me help you,” she offered, moving to support him.

Together, they began walking, slow and unsteady. Sweat beaded on her forehead.

Kian wanted to say something but stopped himself. Now wasn’t the time.

Suddenly, a snake shot out of the grass.

Ophelia screamed in fright—startling the snake.

It lunged toward them, tongue flicking out...

Chapter 598

Ophelia instinctively grabbed Kian’s arm, but then realized what she was doing. She quickly let go and looked around. Spotting a stick nearby, she picked it up, took a deep breath, and tried to steady herself.

“Come on. I’m not scared of you,” she said, trying to sound brave.

Kian immediately grabbed her hand and warned, “Don’t provoke it.”

The snake’s eyes glinted with a cold light. It flicked its tongue and suddenly lunged forward.

“Ah!” Ophelia screamed and swung the stick blindly. The snake wrapped itself around the stick, struck her leg, and then slithered away into the darkness.

Ophelia cried out in pain and collapsed to the ground. She stared helplessly at the two bloody bite marks on her leg, panic setting in.

All the courage she had forced herself to muster vanished in an instant. She burst into tears. “Kian... Kian, am I going to die?”

Kian grabbed her hand tightly. “No, you’re not. You’re going to be okay. Just stay calm.”

Without hesitation, he leaned down and began to suck the venom from her leg. Ophelia was stunned, feeling the warmth of his mouth against her skin.

“Kian, stop... That’s not safe for you,” she said shakily.

He spit out the dark blood and replied firmly, “It doesn’t matter. I brought you here. It’s my responsibility to get you back safely.”

Her eyes filled with tears again. Kian had never been the type to say sweet things, but his actions spoke volumes.

“Kian, we both have to make it back,” she whispered, her voice tight with emotion.

After spitting out another mouthful of blood, Kian looked up at her gently. “We will make it back.”

His steady voice had a calming effect, and Ophelia felt a little of her fear melt away.

Kian then asked, “Can you still walk? It’s getting dark—we can’t stay out here much longer.”

They both knew wild animals roamed at night, and in their current condition, they couldn’t afford another threat.

“I can still walk,” Ophelia said, trying to sound confident, though her pale face said otherwise.

They stumbled forward through the trees, relying on instinct more than anything. Luckily, they came across a cave.

Ophelia followed Kian inside, glancing around nervously. “There aren’t any wild animals in here, are there?”

“There shouldn’t be,” Kian answered, though he wasn’t sure himself. Still, with night falling, this was their safest bet.

Once inside, they saw no signs of animals and both sighed in relief.

Ophelia sat down, catching her breath. Kian slumped down beside her, completely drained.

She looked at him with glassy eyes. “I’m sorry.”

Kian blinked in surprise. “For what?”

“If I’d just listened to you earlier, we would’ve left when the deal didn’t work out. None of this would’ve happened. It’s all my fault.”

Her voice cracked as tears streamed down her face, her red eyes looking like a little rabbit’s. Kian’s heart tightened at the sight.

“Don’t blame yourself,” he said gently. “I agreed to stay. This wasn’t your decision alone.”

It was the longest speech Kian had probably ever made, but he meant every word.

“Don’t cry. We’re still alive. Isn’t that proof that we’re lucky?”

He smiled, hoping it would ease her guilt. Ophelia wiped her eyes and nodded. “You’re right.”

A cold breeze swept through the cave, making her shiver. Kian noticed immediately and moved closer.

“It might be warmer if we stay close,” he said, awkwardly scratching his head.

His words were clumsy, but Ophelia understood instantly. Her face turned red, but her body moved closer without hesitation.

Kian’s body radiated warmth like a furnace, and Ophelia instantly felt more secure. She wrapped her arms gently around his waist, taking him by surprise.

She leaned her face on his shoulder and said softly, “Meeting you was the best luck I’ve had.”

Kian was momentarily speechless. His throat tightened before he managed to say, “Same here.”

In that moment, the chirping of the cicadas outside didn’t seem so loud or annoying anymore. Kian whispered, “When we get back, I’ll help you take it easy.”

Ophelia didn’t brush it off this time. Her heart was full of hope. If they could survive the night, they might just find their way back by morning.

“I’m buying you a meal when we get out of here. No arguing,” she said.

“Deal,” Kian replied with a soft chuckle.

Exhausted, the two of them drifted off. The first ray of sunlight had just crept into the cave when Ophelia stirred.

Something didn’t feel right.

She was holding on to something that felt burning hot. She turned her head and saw Kian’s face flushed red, his body radiating heat.

Her heart jumped. She reached out and shook him. “Kian? Kian, what’s wrong?”

The man who had been so upbeat the day before now looked sick and delirious. It was her worst fear.

Kian groaned, “Don’t wake me... I just want to sleep.”

Panic surged through her. “No! Don’t sleep. You can sleep all you want when we get out of here. Please wake up!”

She slapped his face lightly, trying to snap him out of it. Kian stirred slightly, his voice barely audible. “Ophelia... let’s go...”

But before he could finish, he collapsed with a pained grunt.

Ophelia was stunned for a moment, but quickly forced herself to calm down. She couldn’t afford to panic.

She looked at Kian and clenched her teeth. Then, slowly, she dragged him toward the entrance of the cave.

Chapter 599

Not long after they set out, Ophelia spotted a pond. Her eyes lit up with relief. She quickly helped Kian lean against a nearby tree.

Tearing a strip from the hem of her skirt, she soaked it in the pond and began wiping down his overheated body. Her voice trembled as she murmured, “Kian, hang in there. When we get back... when we get back, I’ll agree to whatever you want.”

She thought Kian was unconscious and couldn’t hear her.

But suddenly, Kian reached out and grabbed her hand tightly. His burning gaze locked onto hers. “Did you mean that?”

Ophelia jumped in surprise. If his skin weren’t still burning up, she would’ve thought he was faking the fever.

Flushed, she muttered, “I didn’t say anything. Let go.”

Kian grinned. “Nope. I heard every word.”

She lowered her head, flustered. “I think you’re faking this fever.”

Kian looked genuinely wronged. He took her hand and pressed it against his chest. “Feel for yourself—see if I’m lying.”

The intense heat from his chest wiped away her teasing mood. Frowning, she said, “You can’t go on like this. I need to get you help.”

Without wasting another second, she started dragging him forward. Just as her strength was about to give out, she spotted a middle-aged man in the distance with a hunting dog.

A spark of hope ignited in her chest. She rushed forward. “Hello! Do you live nearby?”

The man eyed her with curiosity. “What’s going on?”

“My friend has a high fever. We came here to explore, but we got lost. I’ll pay you if you have any medicine—anything to help bring down his fever.”

Her words tumbled out in desperation. She didn’t know when—or if—she’d find someone else in this wilderness.

The man scanned her from head to toe and said dryly, “You’re here for fun? You two look like you’re running from a famine.”

Ophelia glanced at herself and Kian—mud-streaked, disheveled. She couldn’t blame him for the assumption.

The man sighed and said, “Come with me. Haven’t caught anything all day, but maybe it was fate I ran into you. Maybe I’m meant to help.”

Tears of relief welled up in Ophelia’s eyes. “Thank you. Thank you so much.”

They followed the hunter to a simple but clean mud-brick house. He opened a worn box, took out two tablets, and handed them to her. “Give him these. Medicine’s expensive out here. I only go to town once every couple of weeks to restock.”

“Thank you,” she said gratefully, then helped Kian take the pills with some water.

Not long after, Kian finally fell into a deep sleep—the first real rest he’d had in days.

Ophelia exhaled in relief. She stepped outside to thank the man. “We owe you. When we get out of here, we’ll definitely repay your kindness.”

The hunter gave her a long look, which made Ophelia’s skin crawl. She suddenly felt uneasy. She knew she was pretty, and this man probably hadn’t seen a woman in ages. Was he—

Before her thoughts spiraled further, the man raised an eyebrow and said bluntly, “Relax. You’re not my type. I don’t go for skinny girls. I like ‘em with more curves.”

Embarrassed, Ophelia felt like she’d been caught red-handed in her assumptions. She looked down, awkwardly silent.

The hunter continued, “Take care of him tonight. He should be fine by morning. I’ll guide you out then. No need to thank me—just bring me two bottles of good wine next time, if you remember.”

Ophelia finally relaxed. She smiled, her white teeth showing. “Deal. I have some nice wine at home. You’ll love it.”

The hunter chuckled. “Knew you were from a well-off family. Probably the good stuff, huh?”

Ophelia laughed along. “I promise you won’t be disappointed.”

“I’ll get you something to eat,” the hunter said, heading into the kitchen.

Ophelia went back inside to check on Kian. She touched his forehead—his fever had broken. She wasn’t sure if it was his youthful strength or the hunter’s medicine, but his temperature was back to normal.

Surprised and relieved, she stood up to get a basin of fresh water. But before she could leave, her wrist was suddenly grabbed.

She looked down to find Kian staring at her with half-lidded eyes. “Where are you going?”

She beamed. “You’re awake already?”

Before he could answer, the hunter’s voice called from outside, “Hey, young man, if you’re awake, come eat. Don’t just lie there and let the girl do all the work.”

Kian chuckled softly. Even through the haze of fever, he’d vaguely understood what was going on.

He got up and said, “Let’s go.”

They joined the hunter at a rough wooden table, where four steamed buns and two simple dishes were laid out.

“Sorry it’s plain,” the hunter said. “We live simply out here.”

Then he gave Kian a pointed look. “Those clothes you’re wearing—they’re expensive. How’d you end up out here?”

There were no obvious logos or branding, but the man seemed to recognize the value of the fabric instantly. Kian realized this man wasn’t just any mountain hunter.

He smiled and replied calmly, “You’re mistaken. Just regular clothes.”

The man shrugged, letting it go. “Your girlfriend’s a good one—dragged you through all that. You better cherish her.”

Ophelia opened her mouth to explain, but before she could, Kian spoke first.

“I will.”

The hunter stood up after eating and stretched. “I’ll leave you two alone. You can clean up the table. I’m heading in.”

With that, he walked off into the other room.

Ophelia bit her lip but didn't question Kian's words.

Deep down, she didn't really want to correct him.

Chapter 600

"Thank you."

Kian's gentle, sincere voice suddenly echoed in Ophelia's ears.

She turned and saw his dark eyes fixed on her, filled with seriousness.

"No need to be so formal with me. You helped me too," she replied. "Let's focus on healing and getting out of here. Can you ask the uncle if he has a cell phone later?"

Ophelia felt like they'd already spent too much time lost in the mountains. Knowing Silas and his vengeful personality, she was sure he wouldn't rest until they were found—dead or alive.

"Yeah, I'll go talk to him," Kian nodded.

Even though the hunter had saved them, when Kian asked to borrow a phone, the man shook his head. "I live up in these mountains year-round, hunting and doing odd jobs. Where would I get a phone?"

The man's house was small but surprisingly well-equipped, which only made Kian more skeptical. He didn't believe the man truly had no way to contact the outside world.

Still, trying to stay composed, Kian said, "Uncle, could you take us to the market instead? We'll pay for the ride and call for help ourselves. Once we're in touch with our people, we'll definitely make it worth your while."

The man seemed well-dressed for someone supposedly living in the wilderness.

"Alright," he agreed, "but I have one condition."

Kian's instincts flared. "What condition?"

The man looked at both Kian and Ophelia and said slowly, "I saved you. But only one of you gets to leave."

The air instantly chilled.

Kian and Ophelia exchanged glances, their faces turning cold. The condition wasn't a request—it was a trap.

Kian's heart sank as realization hit: the "one" who was supposed to stay was Ophelia.

Without hesitation, Kian wrapped his arms protectively around her. "We're not accepting that deal."

He knew Mr. Edwards would have already noticed their disappearance and would be searching for them. If this man tried anything, Kian was ready to fight with everything he had—no matter what it cost him.

"If that's your decision, fine by me," the man said flatly, turning to walk away.

Then they heard it—the sound of the door locking from the outside.

Alone now, Ophelia looked at Kian and said, "Honestly, you could've agreed just to get out of here."

"We have no idea what he's planning. If you get hurt because of that decision, how could I live with myself? I'd rather stay here with you and figure it out together."

"Two heads are better than one, right?" she added with a small smile.

Kian gave her a look. "In your current state, dragging me around half-dead, is that really teamwork?"

They both laughed softly.

"I said I had someone to watch my back," Ophelia said, then added with a grin, "but actually... Kian, want me to tell the truth now?"

He caught on quickly. "I know you too well. Honestly, I'm in no shape to do anything right now. If the guy swung once, I'd probably be on the ground."

"Glad to see you have some self-awareness," Ophelia teased, her smile widening.

Kian admired how calm she was in the face of danger. "You're not scared? You know the situation we're in."

"What's the point of being scared?" she said. "If fate wants us dead, then it is what it is. Can we really fight that?"

She chuckled, and Kian was both amazed and ashamed.

"I brought you along on this trip, and it turned into a mess," he said, remorseful.

Whatever suspicions he'd once had about her had vanished. After everything they'd gone through, Kian knew exactly what kind of person Ophelia was.

If she had any selfishness in her, she would've abandoned him long ago. But she hadn't. She stuck with him. That said everything about her character.

"If you're really sorry, how about you stop doubting me when we get out of here?" Ophelia said. "I'm serious about training myself. Edwards Group is huge. Do you think Kevin would let me go easily if I messed up?"

Years ago, Kevin was a powerful figure in the capital.

And after all these years, he had only become stronger.

"Don't worry," Kian said firmly. "We'll get out. President Edwards will definitely find us."

Even though Kevin's current focus was on Norah and Cooper, he hadn't handed over everything. The company still relied on Kian for many critical responsibilities.

If Kevin couldn't reach Kian, he'd know something was wrong. And once he started looking, he'd figure out exactly what happened—to both of them.

"I hope you're right," Ophelia replied.

She wasn't overly anxious. They weren't lost deep in some remote mountain range, and for now, the hunter hadn't done anything other than talk.

Even if he had bad intentions, they hadn't escalated into action.

So, she figured, why panic before it's necessary?

Kian was right.

As soon as Kevin realized Kian and Ophelia were missing—and especially once he traced it back to the factory—he took immediate action.

He shut the factory down and forced Silas to give up their location.

Kevin himself led the search through the mountain region. Kian had been with him for years, like a brother, like family.

He wouldn't let anything happen to him.

Thanks to the large team Kevin had assembled, they quickly found the hunter's house.

The hunter had always suspected Kian wasn't an ordinary person. So, when he saw Kevin arrive with men and photos in hand, he dropped all pretense.

No way could he go up against people like that.

Instead, he tried to twist the situation to his advantage. “I saved them,” he told Kevin, “so you’ve got to pay me. I’m not letting them go for free.”

Kevin had already come to get them—of course he was going to pay.

“How much?” he asked without hesitation.

The hunter shrugged. “Whatever you think is fair. I saved them, didn’t I?”

Kevin glanced around the crumbling house. The man clearly needed the money.