

Mr. Edwards' Unraveled Life

Chapter 641

Kian let out a soft sigh and stood up, helping Ophelia into her seat. "You don't need to talk to me like that. Since your dad asked me to come, I'll go."

Even though Brody hadn't officially acknowledged him, Kian had already started seeing him as his father-in-law.

And a father-in-law is practically a second father.

So why wouldn't he go?

Kian planned to visit Labrie Group at noon to meet Brody.

Ophelia was worried and wanted to come with him, but he refused and told her to stay at the company.

After some back and forth, she reluctantly agreed.

At Labrie Group—

Standing before the towering building, Kian felt a wave of nervousness hit him as he stepped out of the car.

He'd met plenty of CEOs and high-ranking executives in the past. Compared to the people he'd encountered while working with Kevin, Labrie Group wasn't much.

Still, the tension lingered.

He adjusted his tie and headed inside.

The receptionist greeted him with a professional smile. "Good afternoon, sir. You mentioned wanting to see Director Labrie. Do you have an appointment?"

"Yes, Director Labrie invited me." Kian kept his answer brief.

She didn't react, just picked up the phone to confirm.

A moment later, she gestured for him to go ahead.

The chairman's office was on the third floor. Kian was escorted there and, to his surprise, faced no delays or resistance along the way.

Even he found that hard to believe.

As expected, Brody was waiting inside. He didn't even look up when Kian walked in.

"Kian, you're here. Have a seat."

Kian swallowed hard.

Anyone who knew him well could tell he was nervous.

Looking at Mr. Labrie—so composed and unreadable—Kian couldn't begin to guess what was going through the man's mind.

"I heard your company hit a rough patch recently. Lost a few contracts. I assume your capital chain is hanging by a thread."

Kian felt oddly relieved. Brody wasn't attacking him—at least not yet. "Thanks for your concern, Uncle. I can still manage."

He wasn't just bluffing. Kevin had stepped in and helped win back several contracts.

Though some were lost for good, the situation was a lot better than it had been. The cash flow had stabilized, and as long as Kian moved carefully, the business could recover.

Brody scoffed and tossed his pen onto the desk. "Even if you survive, it's still a small operation. I've spoiled my daughter her entire life—she gets anything she wants. If you plan to marry her, you'd better be ready to give her the best. Can you do that now?"

Brody's business-world dominance radiated off him like heat.

Kian felt the pressure, but he clenched his fists and met Brody's gaze without flinching. "I know I can't give her everything she deserves right now. But that doesn't mean I never will. I made a promise to Ophelia. If one year isn't enough, I'll take two. I will become someone worthy of the daughter you and Aunt have raised with such care."

"I believe it! Kian can do it. Dad, please give him a chance!"

The familiar voice startled Kian, and he turned to see Ophelia running in.

She threw herself into his arms.

The moment she hit him, Kian's heart pounded in a way it never had—even under the pressure of facing her father.

His voice trembled, “Why did you run like that?”

He sounded anxious at first, but his tone softened, not wanting to startle her. “What if you tripped? I’m not going anywhere. Don’t rush like that.”

“You shouldn’t have come here without me. Don’t ever do it again, you hear me?”

Kian gave a wry smile.

He glanced at her growing belly and sighed inwardly. Honestly, he really *didn’t* dare go alone again.

Right now, Ophelia was practically royalty in his eyes.

To them, everything seemed fine. But from Brody’s perspective, his daughter had just stormed into the office and thrown herself into a man’s arms.

“Stand up straight! Look at yourself!” Brody snapped.

Only then did Ophelia remember her father was still in the room. She quickly stepped back from Kian.

“Dad...”

“I’ve been asking you to visit the company for months, and you kept turning me down. But you come running the moment I call *him*?” Brody said coolly.

Ophelia was speechless.

Brody scoffed again, giving Kian an increasingly disapproving glare. But a promise was a promise, so he finally said, “There’s a guy I know who’s outsourcing a large piece of land for office development.”

“It’s a big project. High profits. If you’re interested, come by in two days, and I’ll introduce you.”

Kian glanced at Ophelia, noticing that she looked too guilty to meet his eyes. He immediately realized what had happened.

He frowned slightly.

Kian usually disliked accepting help—there’s no such thing as a free lunch. Help always comes with strings attached.

But this was Ophelia’s father. There was no reason for Edwards to set him up.

So, after a moment of hesitation, Kian nodded.

When they left, Brody really wanted to keep Ophelia behind. He hated the idea of her following Kian around all day.

But he could tell the two had something to talk about, so he held back.

A Porsche sat quietly in the underground parking lot.

Kian asked, "When did you ask your dad to arrange this project?"

Ophelia, sitting in the passenger seat, fidgeted uncomfortably. "I didn't. It just happened."

Seeing that Kian was still staring at her, she quickly added, "I swear—I didn't ask him for anything. He called me to come in today. Everything was his idea."

Kian's eyes widened slightly.

He genuinely hadn't expected that.

Considering how much Brody disliked him, Kian never thought the man would take any initiative.

When someone who usually avoids you suddenly gets friendly, it's a red flag. Kian knew this all too well. But when he looked at Ophelia's bright and innocent face, he paused. He just couldn't bring himself to say it out loud.

So, he agreed to join Brody on a business trip to the neighboring city in two days.

The main goal? Meet the partner Brody had mentioned, evaluate the land, and estimate the cost.

If it looked profitable, he'd take the project.

Ophelia didn't insist on going this time. She knew it was a work trip, not a vacation.

Plus, she'd been dealing with morning sickness, and traveling might make it worse.

That was still manageable. But if Brody found out, they'd both be in serious trouble.

Two days later, a flight carried them to Yanshi, the neighboring city.

That night, Kian checked into a hotel. Later, accompanied by Brody, he met the partner—a refined, middle-aged man dressed in traditional clothing.

"Mr. Labrie, who's this young man with you?"

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Brody still showed Kian some respect in public and introduced him to his business partners.

He just didn't mention that Kian was his son-in-law.

"Oh, so he's your junior, Mr. Labrie? He's quite the handsome one!" one of the partners remarked.

"That's too kind," Kian replied politely.

The subtle distance Brody showed toward Kian didn't go unnoticed—not just by Kian, but also by the partners.

After chatting for a while, they began to feel something was off about Kian's relationship with Brody.

Still, Kian remained calm and composed.

After the greetings, they all sat down to eat.

They were at a five-star hotel, and the food was lavish. While eating, Kian couldn't help thinking about Ophelia.

He knew she'd been dealing with morning sickness lately, and he usually made sure she ate properly. He wondered if she'd eaten anything today.

Frowning slightly, he discreetly pulled out his phone under the table and sent her a message.

Ophelia responded quickly.

They started chatting casually.

Kian didn't even realize the corners of his mouth had lifted into a smile.

Brody caught the whole thing. He glanced at Kian's phone and snorted.

He's pretty good to my daughter, at least.

At that point, Brody still didn't take Kian seriously. After all, he'd never actually seen him at work.

But when one of the partners brought up the project, his opinion began to shift.

The partner asked a pointed question. "I heard your company's newly established and backed by Edwards Group, right?"

Kian nodded without hesitation.

“So that’s your source of confidence?”

“We can talk about that in detail. Would you mind giving me fifteen minutes?” Kian typed one last message to Ophelia, turned off his phone, and pulled out a prepared proposal.

He had put in the work before coming to Yanshi, and he came ready.

Over the next fifteen minutes, Kian laid out everything with precision and clarity.

Brody started out indifferent, but eventually found himself captivated.

“Mr. Labrie, you really found me a great partner!” the excited partner said, pulling Brody out of his thoughts.

Brody paused and looked at Kian with a complicated expression.

On the way back to the guest room, Brody pulled Kian aside.

“You’re clearly good at business,” he said evenly. “I don’t know why you’re only working as an assistant, but you’re still not quite what I’m looking for.”

“I understand,” Kian said calmly. “I told you I’d do my best.”

Brody was momentarily speechless, like he’d just thrown a punch into thin air.

After finalizing the partnership, they agreed to sign the contract and inspect the construction site.

Since Brody was the one who made the connection, he tagged along.

Kian left his phone at the hotel to charge, so he missed a call from Ophelia.

Back at the company office—

Hearing the busy tone again, Ophelia frowned, her right eyelid twitching with unease. Something didn’t feel right, so she kept calling.

No answer—again and again.

“What are you doing, Kian... Why won’t you answer? I’m so worried,” she muttered, staring at a video she’d just come across.

It was a warning about a possible 4 to 5 magnitude earthquake in Yanshi over the next couple of days.

Her secretary brought over a coffee and tried to reassure her. “Don’t worry too much, Vice President Labrie. It might just be a false alarm.”

“But I can’t shake this feeling...”

“Well, if you can’t reach Mr. Paterson, maybe someone else can.”

That lit a spark in Ophelia’s eyes.

Why didn’t I think of calling Dad?

She immediately dialed Brody’s number, her heart pounding with fear.

The moments before the call connected were agonizing. She silently prayed for good news.

Finally, the call went through.

“Hello... the signal here’s... not great,” Brody’s faint voice came through the static.

The connection was terrible and kept cutting in and out.

Ophelia’s heart clenched. Raising her voice, she shouted, “Dad, where are you? I saw a video—there might be an earthquake in your area!”

“What? I can’t... hear you clearly...”

“I said there might be an earthquake! Don’t go outside!”

Right then, the call suddenly became clear. Just as she felt a flicker of relief, she heard Kian’s voice in the background, urgent and loud:

“There’s an earthquake! Uncle, get out now!”

The call dropped.

Ophelia collapsed into her chair, her hands ice-cold and her body shaking.

The secretary tried to snap her out of it. “Vice President Labrie, please calm down. Try to think positive. Maybe they’re fine.”

“I didn’t hear any loud noise when the call ended. That might mean the quake wasn’t strong. They could be totally fine.”

Ophelia clung to that sliver of hope.

The secretary had a point.

Until they had real news, all the worst-case thoughts were just that—thoughts.

She quickly called Paloma and explained everything. Paloma was also extremely worried when she heard about the quake in Yanshi, where Brody and Kian were on business.

Ophelia booked a flight and left for Yanshi with her mother that same night.

After landing and checking with several sources, they finally learned that Brody and Kian had been taken to the hospital.

“Kian, are you okay? Where’s my dad? Is he alright?”

Ophelia rushed into Kian’s arms, her face drenched in tears. Before she arrived, she had prepared herself for the worst—prepared to never see Kian again.

Now, seeing him safe and sound, all that fear melted into relief, and the tears just kept coming.

Kian gently wiped her tears away but said nothing.

His silence made Ophelia freeze. She stepped back, slowly pulling herself from his embrace.

“My dad... what happened to him?”

Kian opened his mouth to speak, but Paloma’s voice came from the hallway: “Doctor, is the patient inside Brody Labrie?”

Ophelia’s face went pale.

Through the crack in the door, she saw the man lying in the hospital bed. The gray in his hair pierced her heart—she instantly knew it was Brody.

“Ma’am, are you family? You can’t just rush in like this!”

Ignoring the nurse, Ophelia ran to her father’s bedside, her eyes fixed on his still body turned away from her.

She used to think of Brody as a stubborn old man stuck in his ways.

But now, seeing his hunched back and the slight curve of his shoulder blades...

She realized something she never had before.

Her father was no longer young.

Chapter 643

Mr. Labrie’s lower body was covered with a quilt. From the conversation between Mrs. Labrie and the doctor outside the room, Ophelia figured her father must have injured his leg.

But she didn't dare lift the quilt to check.

Before she realized it, tears were steadily streaming down her face, soaking into the fabric.

Leaning against the hospital bed, Ophelia felt a deep sense of regret for the first time—for her stubbornness, for not listening to her father. "Dad, I was wrong. I really was..."

"Why are you crying? I'm not dead or crippled."

A strong, familiar voice came from above. Surprised, she quickly looked up and saw Brody sitting there, his face flushed and healthy.

He was still stern as ever, his thick brows furrowed in a way that made her feel like she was being silently scolded.

But the rebellious streak she once had was completely gone.

With red-rimmed eyes, she threw her arms around Brody. "Dad, I'm sorry I got here so late."

"It was just an earthquake." Brody looked a little awkward, unsure what to do with his hands. "When I was younger, I went through way worse than this. This is nothing. Just a minor fracture."

"So, it *is* broken?"

As soon as the words left her mouth, Ophelia realized she'd said the wrong thing.

Sure enough, Brody's expression turned cold. "Who told you my leg was broken?"

The commotion drew Brody and Kian into the room.

Ophelia's mother, who had also overheard, looked confused. "Who said your dad's leg was broken? I asked the doctor—he's fine."

"It's just a minor fracture," she added. "He can be discharged in a couple of days."

Ophelia immediately looked at Kian.

Kian avoided her eyes, clearly guilty. "I never said Uncle's leg was broken..."

After all that panic, it turned out to be a misunderstanding.

Paloma and the others didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Ophelia dabbed her tears with a tissue, feeling a little embarrassed, but her heart was full of relief.

She'd gladly make a fool of herself a hundred times if it meant her father was safe. Thank God it was just a false alarm.

Later, Paloma asked about what happened during the earthquake. Surprisingly, Brody glanced at Kian, his expression softer than usual.

"It happened suddenly. The area was full of old buildings marked for demolition. Right as the quake started, the ground beneath me gave way," Brody explained calmly. "My legs got stuck. I couldn't move. Kian saved me."

Paloma was stunned. "Wait, Kian's the one who saved you?"

Brody didn't deny it.

Ophelia quietly grabbed Kian's hand and asked tentatively, "So... does that mean you're okay with me and Kian being together?"

Brody shot her a look, and she instinctively let go.

But Kian held on tightly.

She glanced at him and noticed the subtle smile on his lips, calm and full of confidence.

Ophelia had a feeling—and it was confirmed by Brody's next words.

"Kian's a good man. I was wrong about him before. A person's background doesn't define who they are. He's driven and responsible. I believe he can give you a good future. I approve."

Even though she'd had a feeling, hearing it out loud was still overwhelming.

Her heart swelled with joy. Unable to hold back, Ophelia hugged Kian. "This is amazing! My dad approves!"

Kian hugged her back, a small smile playing on his lips—his happiness clear.

Ophelia almost jumped for joy.

Kian quickly steadied her. “Easy, careful.”

“Alright, enough with the lovey-dovey stuff,” Brody grumbled, clearly annoyed watching them act like a couple in front of him. “I may have approved, but you two better behave yourselves. Don’t get carried away before the marriage certificate’s signed.”

Ophelia froze. She didn’t know whether to let go or not and glanced at Kian for help.

Thankfully, he understood right away.

Paloma stayed behind to take care of Brody. Ophelia and Kian didn’t linger and left soon after.

The only reason they hadn’t gotten the marriage certificate earlier was because her family hadn’t approved. Now that Brody had given his blessing, Ophelia didn’t want to wait and risk something going wrong.

She happened to have her household registration booklet with her, so they went straight to the Civil Affairs Bureau to register their marriage.

Soon, with the red booklet in hand, Ophelia beamed as she reached for Kian’s hand. “Mr. Paterson, from now on, I’m officially your boss. Be ready for some serious guidance.”

Kian’s handsome face lit up with a charming smile, like fine wine—intoxicating.

Seeing no one around, he gently held her face and kissed her softly, as if she were the most precious thing in the world.

“I’ll be counting on your guidance too.”

Ophelia didn’t tell anyone at work about the marriage certificate. The company was still in its early stages, and she wanted to keep things low-key.

But she did tell her parents.

When Paloma found out, she was stunned. They’d gotten married while Brody was still in the hospital.

Paloma later told her that Brody’s face stayed dark for two full days. He even told her not to come home unless it was absolutely necessary—just to avoid seeing him.

Ophelia muttered in frustration, “But he agreed. Why is he mad now?”

“Agreeing to the marriage and being *told* you’re already married are two different things,” Paloma replied sharply over the phone. “Imagine you raised a flower with great care, afraid it might wilt if you held it too tightly. Then one day, someone just hands you the whole pot like it’s no big deal. How would you feel?”

That analogy hit home. Suddenly, Ophelia understood why her father had been so reluctant before.

She suspected this was probably one of the main reasons behind it all.

They chatted a little longer and ended the call.

That’s when Ophelia remembered something important. “Oh, Mom—remember how you were trying to set me up with Emilio? Well, that’s not necessary anymore. I’ve got the marriage certificate. When you get a chance, please tell Aunt Fletcher to stop matchmaking.”

“Oh, I totally forgot!” Paloma said. “Alright, I’ll let her know next time I see her.”

Only then did Ophelia feel completely at ease.

Mrs. Fletcher had always been kind to her. When she was little, she often went over to their house to play and even stayed for dinner sometimes.

Mrs. Fletcher would joke, “Ophelia is so sweet. I’d be thrilled if she became my daughter-in-law someday.”

Thinking back on those childhood memories, Ophelia sighed.

Mrs. Fletcher was a good woman—just not the right match for her son. She couldn’t force something that wasn’t meant to be.

Now that her mom had agreed to handle it, and with the company keeping her busy, Ophelia pushed the whole Fletcher situation out of her mind.

After landing the big Salt Market deal, everyone at the company was working overtime.

With so much to do, she didn’t want to just sit around. She pitched in—fetching coffee and helping with tasks.

She was so swamped that she completely forgot about Mrs. Fletcher.

Until a couple of days later, when her phone rang.

She picked it up.

Mrs. Fletcher's voice came through the receiver:
"Ophelia, dear, I'm attending a charity dinner in a few days. Would you like to come with me?"

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Ophelia instinctively wanted to say no, but Mrs. Fletcher seemed to anticipate her refusal. "It's been so long since I last saw you, sweetheart."

She added, "I still remember when you were just a tiny thing. Now look at you—all grown up. Don't tell me you're trying to distance yourself from your aunt?"

After all that, if Ophelia still declined, it would come off as heartless. So, she reluctantly agreed.

After hanging up, she felt annoyed that she hadn't thought to ask whether Emilio would be attending too.

She really didn't want to see him.

But if she backed out now, it would seem intentional.

She sighed and muttered, "Whatever. I'll just be upfront when the time comes."

Inside the Fletcher family's living room, after ending the call, Mrs. Fletcher turned and said, "I made the call for you. Now it's up to you to seize the opportunity."

Next to her sat a man dressed in dark gray loungewear.

The silver-framed glasses and casual clothes made him look approachable, but the sharpness in his eyes added a sense of danger that contradicted his laid-back appearance.

He was deep in thought, but a faint smile played on his lips. "Ophelia, we'll be seeing each other very soon."

...

Ophelia debated for a while, unsure whether she should tell Kian that Mrs. Fletcher had invited her to the dinner party.

She wanted to tell him—afraid he'd overthink it.

But if she didn't say anything, it might look suspicious.

Her hesitation vanished when she spotted the gold-plated invitation sitting on Kian's desk.

"You're planning to go to this charity dinner too?" she asked.

Kian paused, catching the meaning behind her words. "You mean this one?"

"Mrs. Fletcher invited me," Ophelia replied, watching his expression. "I already agreed. Are you mad?"

At first, Kian did feel uneasy.

The memory of that day at the record store flashed in his mind—the man's lips silently mouthing words as he walked by.

He'd heard Ophelia's call.

His eyes flickered, and he quickly came back to himself. He smiled, "If you want to go, that's great. I'll go with you."

Ophelia saw that he really wasn't mad, but for some reason, that made her more upset.

"Kian, be honest. Do you not care about me? I mean, you didn't react at all when someone was clearly trying to pursue me." She moved in closer, pressing him, "Aren't you even a little jealous?"

She leaned over, placing her hands on the table.

It was an assertive move—forcing Kian to look up to meet her eyes, giving her the upper hand. But he didn't seem to mind the imbalance at all.

He leaned in slightly, his voice soft in her ear. "What if I do care?"

Kian's voice was low—not deliberately deep, but naturally magnetic.

His breath tickled her ear, and she didn't catch what he said.

So he leaned even closer.

Ophelia tilted her head, ready to listen.

But instead of whispering again, he gently bit her earlobe.

She jumped up, her ears flushing red. "Do that again, and you'll regret it!"

Kian only smirked, eyes glinting. "Only if it works."

He didn't give her a straight answer.

After that, Ophelia couldn't stop thinking about his playful bite. Kian, on the other hand, clearly avoided the topic and never brought it up again.

Two days later, on a luxury cruise ship docked at the harbor—

Men and women mingled on the deck, sipping wine as light from the chandeliers made their glasses shimmer.

Waiters moved between guests, offering drinks.

When Ophelia arrived with Kian, they instantly drew attention.

Everyone turned to look—because Ophelia was breathtaking.

Her deep blue gown, scattered with shimmering crystals, sparkled like starlight. From afar, it looked like waves rippling on the ocean's surface—mysterious and dazzling.

Her loose curls completed the look. As she held her skirt and walked across the deck, she looked like a real-life mermaid.

The crowd on the ship was a mix of new-money businessmen, overseas moguls, and wealthy men there for one reason—to chase after beautiful women.

Every woman at the party drew attention. When someone spotted a beauty, they didn't hesitate to approach her.

And Ophelia? She was their ultimate prize.

"Damn, she's hot. Think I could get her number if I banged her?"

"Please. You'd be lucky to get a normal girl, let alone someone like her."

"Screw you!"

Kian's expression turned icy as he silently stared down the men ogling her.

Under his sharp gaze, a few guys finally realized Ophelia wasn't someone they could mess with. One of them clapped his buddy on the shoulder. "Forget it, man. She's clearly taken. You're not gonna win this one."

They glanced at Kian again—visibly intimidated—and backed off.

The heated stares that had followed them since boarding finally faded.

Kian gripped Ophelia's hand and leaned down. "Stick close to me. Don't wander off in this crowd."

Ophelia had noticed the hungry stares too. Understanding the risk, she stayed right by his side.

The banquet hall was inside the ship. The open deck was just for drinking and socializing.

The interior had three floors, an elevator, a spiral staircase, and sparkling crystal chandeliers that lit up the entire space.

The theme for the evening was a charity auction.

But it hadn't started yet. People were still milling around, making small talk and toasting one another. When they spotted acquaintances, they'd stop to chat.

Ophelia came here mainly because of Mrs. Fletcher—who had personally sent her the invitation.

So as soon as she stepped inside, she scanned the crowd for her.

"Mr. Paterson! It's been a while. You're here for the auction too? And you brought a lady—who might she be?" asked an elegant man who walked up to them.

Kian reached out to shake his hand. "Mr. Wu, you're too kind. This is my wife, Ophelia."

At the word "wife," Mr. Wu's eyebrows lifted, clearly surprised.

Most upper-class men kept their marriage separate from their social lives. He'd seen plenty of men rotate through female companions faster than they changed suits—but this was the first time someone like Kian brought his actual wife.

It made Mr. Wu view him with newfound respect.

"I wish you both a lifetime of happiness." He raised his glass toward them.

The two men quickly dove into a business conversation.

Kian worked in real estate, and as it turned out, Mr. Wu owned a chain of hotels. He'd just bought a plot of land and was planning to build a new location.

Naturally, the conversation flowed effortlessly.

After a while, as they kept talking, Ophelia started to feel a little tired. She leaned closer to Kian and said quietly, "I'm going to the restroom."

Kian hesitated for a brief moment.

Chapter 645

Ophelia knew what Kian was worried about and reassured him gently, “It’s okay, I’ll be back soon. If I’m not back by the time you finish talking to Mr. Wu, come find me. That way, you’ll feel better.”

Only then did Kian let her go.

The cruise ship was huge, and it took Ophelia a while to find the restroom.

The restrooms here looked like they were made of gold.

The walls gleamed in gold, and the mirror above the sink was framed with intricate designs, oozing luxury from every corner.

Ophelia washed her hands and was about to head back when she paused at the door.

“Ophelia, what a coincidence running into you here.”

She looked up and saw the man in front of her—who else could it be but Emilio?

“What are you doing here?” she asked, annoyed.

Mrs. Fletcher was here, and as her son, of course Emilio wouldn’t be absent.

She realized right away how pointless her question was.

Emilio smiled and looked at her deeply, his gaze so intense it made Ophelia uneasy. “You’re still just like you used to be.”

Ophelia frowned, about to tell him again not to bring up the past.

To her, all of that was long gone. There was no point dredging it back up.

But Emilio seemed to know what she was going to say.

Before she could speak, he changed the subject. “I heard there’s a rare gem at tonight’s auction—a rough stone specially carved by a well-known foreign designer. They call it *Devil’s Love*.”

“It means the devil’s love,” he added.

“But actually, it’s a purple gem. Its symbolism around love isn’t nearly as dark—the designer twisted its meaning.”

The light from the corridor hit Emilio’s face just right, making his features look even sharper against the shadows.

It was a little disorienting.

Ophelia frowned, not wanting to stay with him another second.

“I’m not interested in the gem. But thanks for the info. I’m leaving now.” With that, she walked off.

A moment later, a man in a suit walked up and bowed respectfully to Emilio. “Mr. Fletcher, everything you asked for has been arranged.”

“When the auction begins, that person will approach Miss Labrie.”

“Mm.” Emilio nodded, his tone much colder now. It seemed he only wore a smile when Ophelia was around.

The assistant didn’t dare look Emilio in the eye. One glance was enough to send a chill down his spine. He silently pitied Ophelia for being caught in this man’s sights.

Emilio smoothed the wrinkles on his sleeve, paused as if remembering something, and asked, “Is the auction ready?”

“Yes,” the assistant said quickly. “We’ll place the bid directly. Don’t worry, Mr. Fletcher. I’ve already informed the organizers. We’ll definitely win the gem.”

Emilio said nothing more.

Ophelia walked quickly, like something was chasing her. Her high heels nearly sparked on the floor.

The look Emilio had given her just now—the dark, devouring gaze—made her shudder. Goosebumps rose all over her skin.

Why wouldn’t he just leave her alone?

Wasn’t their childhood long behind them? What kind of person clung to the past like that?

She was moving so fast, she accidentally bumped into someone.

The man had just come out of a private room.

This was the inner corridor, with the main hall just beyond.

Now and then, men and women could be seen embracing in the hallway, the air thick with flirtation. Soon enough, they’d get pushed into rooms, and everyone knew what that meant.

Ophelia saw that the man smelled like alcohol and cheap perfume. She didn’t want to be anywhere near him.

She lowered her head, quickly apologized, and tried to leave.

“What the hell? You bump into me and just think you can walk away with a ‘sorry’? Not happening!” the man growled and yanked her arm hard.

Ophelia cried out, slamming into the wall.

The man sobered a little, then looked her over.

His eyes lit up.

“You’re hot. How much for a night? I’ll pay!” he said shamelessly, staring at her like she was for sale.

Clearly, he thought she was just another woman here trying to catch a rich man.

And yeah, there were plenty of women like that on board—desperate to get close to someone wealthy and strike it rich overnight.

But Ophelia wasn’t one of them.

“Get lost! Have you seen yourself? Don’t even think about touching me!” she snapped.

Then she stomped on his foot. As he howled in pain, she lifted her skirt and took off running.

But the man wasn’t done.

“You bitch! Sneaking up on me like that? I’m gonna kill you!” he yelled, chasing after her.

Just then, the door to the room he’d come from swung open and a bunch of bodyguards poured out. The hallway was suddenly packed.

The man shouted for them to grab her.

But Ophelia was too fast.

No one could believe how a woman in high heels could move like that.

She darted around a corner and sprinted into the hall.

Still, they didn’t let her go. Two of them caught up and grabbed her by the arms, lifting her off the ground.

The old man, panting heavily, ran up behind them.

“You were running pretty fast just now, huh? Let’s see you try that again,” he sneered.

Ophelia shot back, “You should catch your breath first before you talk. Otherwise, I’d think I was talking to a mutt.”

“You—!”

Furious, he ordered the guards to drag her out.

But before they could do anything, screams erupted—and the bodyguards went flying.

“Ophelia!”

Her eyes softened instantly. When she saw who it was, tears welled up.

“I told you to come over after you finished talking to Mr. Wu. What took you so long?”

“I’m sorry... I was too late,” Kian said, holding her tightly, his voice full of guilt.

His gaze dropped to her swollen ankle, and a terrifying coldness swept over his face.

“Who the hell are you? I’ll have you know, I’ve got special connections with the auction organizers!” the old man barked, pointing at Ophelia. “This woman disrespected me. If you protect her, you’ll both be thrown into the sea and fed to the sharks!”

“You’re the one who’ll be shark food.”

A voice as cold as ice rang out.

Emilio walked into the hall, face hard as stone.

The old man’s expression changed instantly when he saw him. His tone shifted to flattery.

“Mr. Fletcher! You know her?”

“Oh, why didn’t you say so earlier? If I’d known she was with you, I wouldn’t have said a word. This is all just a big misunderstanding. You guys, what are you standing around for? Didn’t you see Mr. Fletcher come in?”

The bodyguards immediately backed off. Compared to how aggressive they were just moments ago, the change was unbelievable.

Ophelia had seen it with her own eyes—what it really meant to switch faces faster than flipping a page.

Emilio didn’t acknowledge the old man’s groveling. He gave his assistant a glance.

The assistant immediately dragged the man away.

The old man's pleas echoed across the silent hall.

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Emilio's gaze landed on Ophelia, but he addressed the crowd instead. "The auction's about to begin. If you don't want to miss anything, now's the time to get ready."

He clearly didn't want to say more, and the people around him were smart enough to catch on quickly.

"You're right, Mr. Fletcher. This auction is a must-see! Time to head in."

Just as the words left his mouth, the lights in the venue dimmed.

Amid the gasps from the crowd, a single spotlight lit up the center of the room, shining on the host as he stepped forward. After a few polite remarks, the auction officially kicked off.

Everyone found their seats, and Ophelia followed Kian to one side.

As they were leaving, Emilio told her, "See you after the auction."

Ophelia glanced at him but didn't respond.

She and Kian found seats with a clear view of the stage. Once seated, she quickly grabbed his hand and looked it over.

Seeing the red, bruised knuckles, Ophelia frowned, both angry and worried. "I asked you earlier and you said you were fine. Look at this—does this look fine to you?"

Kian didn't think it was a big deal.

He'd injured his hand beating up the people who had taken Ophelia hostage. If it happened again, he wouldn't hesitate to do the same. They had crossed a line.

"I'm fine," he said softly, holding her hand in both of his warm palms. "It's not even scratched. Let it go, okay?"

He gently coaxed her a few more times until she finally sighed and stopped fussing.

By that point, five items had already been auctioned off.

The first few were minor collectibles—old copper coins, calligraphy, paintings. Only later did items of real value begin to appear.

Like the gemstone Emilio had mentioned to her earlier.

The moment it was unveiled, Ophelia heard a wave of gasps ripple through the crowd. Many people reached for their phones to take photos.

She glanced at the purple gemstone, about the size of a thumb, cradled in the host's palm.

It sparkled under the lights—like a lover's eyes.

Even Ophelia found it hard to look away.

She finally understood why those rich ladies and heiresses were all obsessed with it.

"If you want it, we'll bid," Kian said, placing the paddle in her hand.

Ophelia froze and quickly pushed it back. "Who said I wanted it? I don't want it! It's just a gemstone. What's the big deal? I've got tons like that."

But she didn't. This purple gem was one of a kind.

She only said that because she was thinking about Kian's current situation.

Their company was doing well, but they were still in the early stages. The gemstone obviously wasn't cheap. Spending that much money now felt wasteful and unnecessary.

She voiced her concerns to Kian, but he insisted, holding the paddle out to her again. "Don't worry about the money. If you want it, I'll make sure you get it."

Warmth spread through Ophelia's chest.

Soon, the host finished introducing the gemstone.

Ophelia braced herself for the fierce bidding war that was sure to follow.

But the host gave an apologetic smile instead. "This purple gemstone was supposed to be the grand finale of our event. Normally, it would go to the highest bidder here tonight."

“But unfortunately, because of someone who’s done a huge favor for our company, we have to make a special exception. We apologize to everyone here—the auction for this gem is officially canceled. It’s being gifted directly to that person.”

“What? That’s not fair!”

“Yeah, we came for the auction because we respect your company!”

“You’re just giving it away without warning? That’s ridiculous!”

The crowd erupted with complaints.

The host wiped the sweat from his forehead. But he had no choice now. He pushed through the rest of his announcement.

“This gemstone will be given to Mr. Fletcher.”

At the mention of the Fletcher name, the angry crowd quieted a little.

After all, the Fletcher family wasn’t just any family. Half the city practically belonged to them, and the other half to the Edwards family.

Everyone knew that Emilio was the only son in the Fletcher family’s generation—recently returned from studying abroad.

“Mr. Fletcher, please come up to collect your item,” the host said.

A man in the audience stood and walked forward.

Even from the way he carried himself, it was clear he came from a top-tier family. He had sharp eyes, refined features, and a commanding presence.

He accepted the box from the host, then suddenly turned and looked toward a certain part of the crowd.

Many didn’t know who he was looking at.

“Did he just look this way?”

“No way, you must be seeing things.”

“No, I saw it too! I just don’t know who Mr. Fletcher was looking at. If it was someone here, they’re about to marry into wealth and never worry about anything again!”

Everyone was whispering with envy—except Ophelia.

Her heart skipped a beat.

She knew better than anyone—Emilio had been looking at her.

Her palms turned cold. But then, a hand reached out beside her and held hers tight, instantly calming the storm in her heart.

Ophelia looked at Kian. Their eyes met, and she steadied herself.

Meanwhile, Emilio had returned to his seat. He didn’t come over or hand her the gift in person as she’d expected.

And somehow, that made her even more confused.

“Miss Labrie.” A staff member quietly approached, holding the same box Emilio had just taken. “President Fletcher asked me to give this to you. He said it belongs to you.”

Ophelia didn’t take it. “I can’t accept that. Please take it back.”

“But—”

“I’m not close with President Fletcher,” she said. “I didn’t do anything to deserve a gift like this. Accepting something this valuable for no reason would make me feel guilty.”

The assistant looked conflicted. He hesitated, clearly unsure what to do.

He even thought about just handing it to her and walking away.

He had strict orders to make sure she got it.

If he brought it back untouched, Mr. Fletcher might actually skin him alive. Just the thought made him shiver.

But just as he was about to push forward, a hand reached out and took the box from him—only to hand it right back.

“Didn’t you hear what my wife just said?” Kian’s voice was low and cold, sending a chill through the assistant. “Take it back.”

Even Ophelia was startled.

Kian had always been known for his calm and gentle nature. Working with Kevin for years, he had learned how to manage people and relationships smoothly.

She had never seen him this angry before—until today.

