

My Ex-Husband is Out of Control Chapter 49

Sophia's POV

I leaned against the old oak tree, my breath catching in my throat as I remembered watching Reese play at the park with none other than Elijah! It had definitely been a shock to me, and panic had immediately gripped my heart.

Elijah's laughter had filled the air, mingling with Reese's giggles. Seeing him then, so patient and kind with Reese, stirred something deep within me.

Should I tell him the truth? It was what had gone through my head in that instance. Should I let him know that the little girl he's playing with is actually his own flesh and blood?

Suddenly, my phone rang, jarring me from my thoughts.

"Hello?" I said, trying to keep my voice steady.

"Sophia, thank God," Daniel's voice was tight with concern. "Where's Reese? Is she with you

"Yes, she's right here," I assured him quickly, as I smiled down at Reese who was resting on the

grass beside me. "I asked the nanny's sister to find her and play the role of her mother, since you

know I can't risk Elijah seeing me together with Reese..."

now?"

Daniel let out a breath I hadn't realized he'd been holding. "Yeah, I understand... Well, that's a relief. I was so worried. I'm really sorry, Sophia."

"It's fine," I assured him. "What's important is that she's okay now and she was never really lost."

We chatted a bit more before hanging up. Reese was grinning at me, so I pinched her nose affectionately.

"Mommy... I have a new friend... today!" Her eyes were twinkling. "He's a... new uncle. Kind. Handsome. So fun!"

"That sounds wonderful, sweetheart," I said, knowing that she was talking about her own dad. "I'm glad you had fun."

Is it wrong for me to hide her from Elijah? I wondered, feeling a bit guilty.

But I felt fearful and hesitant, because I wasn't sure if Elijah would be a good father in the long run. Maybe it was better and much less complicated this way.

Reese and I were preparing to leave already when Trevis called, asking me to head back to the building and urgently meet him in Elijah's office!

I called out to the nanny and her sister, and asked them to take Reese home.

"Mommy has to go back to work, sweetie," I said, crouching down to Reese's level. "Be good, okay? I'll see you later at home."

Reese pouted but nodded. "Okay, Mommy."

I gave her a quick hug before heading back to the building.

Soon I was walking into Elijah's office area, my heart thumping against my chest.

Just then, I caught a glimpse of Elijah's stepmother through the open door of Elijah's office. Why is she here? Is she involved with this project too?!

Morgana looked elegant as always, her polished appearance masking the cold, calculating persona beneath.

I stopped short, hoping to avoid her, but fate had other plans. I couldn't help but overhear her conversation with Elijah.

"I'm very happy with the project, Elijah," Morgana said in her usual haughty tone. "Make sure you keep this designer, no matter what."

A pang of nervousness hit me. I took a deep breath and walked in. Elijah glanced up, his eyes meeting mine. Without missing a beat, he pointed to me.

"Okay... This is our designer, Sophia Sinclair..." He froze afterward, his eyes widening. Then he cleared his throat and corrected himself. "I mean, Sophia Bennett."

Morgana's face contorted in surprise, quickly turning to a frown. Her eyes narrowed, and her lips pursed in displeasure.

"Sophia," she spat out my name like it was a curse. "I didn't know you were back, and you're working as a designer at Urban Next?! Hah!"

She looked me up and down with disgust. "You managed to squeeze your way back here, didn't? Still stuck on Elijah, I see."

you?

I stood my ground, my heart pounding. Morgana had always had a way of making me feel small, but not today. She wasn't getting away with treating me like this anymore.

"As a matter of fact, I'm one of the top designers now in Urban Next, Morgana. And it just so happened that the company partnered with Elijah's company." My heart was pounding insanely, but I lifted my head up high and looked her in the eye.

"And actually, I don't think I'm the one stuck on Elijah... Maybe you should ask him why he kept going back to Paris while I was there, and why he keeps dropping by our office downstairs."

Her eyes flashed with annoyance. "You think you're so special now, don't you? No matter how good your proposal is, I won't agree to have you as my designer."

She held up another proposal, her eyes gleaming with vindication. "This designer's proposal is just as good. Maybe even better. And I know that this was the one chosen by my son too."

Suddenly, I heard Julia's voice. "That's my proposal," she said with a huge smile as she breezed into the office and joined us. Trevis followed behind her.

"Julia Stanford," Morgana murmured, reading from the proposal, a peculiar light entering her eyes. Aren't you the Baker family's long-lost daughter?"

Julia, standing across the room, tensed visibly. Her usually confident demeanor wavered for a fraction of a second before she regained her composure. Meanwhile, Morgana's expression

+16 BONUS

transformed into one of delight, a rare sight that sent a chill down my spine.

"Elijah," Morgana called out before Julia could answer. "I want you to assign this project to Julia. She's perfect for it."

Julia's face lit up with a mixture of pride and something else I couldn't quite place. She glanced at me, and I saw the triumph in her eyes before she quickly masked it with a polite smile.

Morgana turned her attention to me. Her delight morphed into disdain. "Sophia, you're useless here," she said coldly. "Everyone knows you only came to work here to be close to Elijah."

The sting of her words hit me hard, but I didn't bother to argue with her this time. Instead, I kept my expression neutral and looked to Trevis, who stood quietly at the back of the room. I needed him to intervene, to maybe offer some solution to this matter.

Trevis opened his mouth to speak. But then, Elijah stepped forward, his voice ringing out clearly.

"Sophia is actually a professional designer who graduated at the top of her class at the Gold Institute of Art in Paris," he said to everyone, but most specifically to Morgana,

"I hired her for this job... It's not her who can't get over me, it's me who can't get over her."

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Sophia's POV

I held my breath, wide-eyed, as I listened to Elijah. He didn't even glance at me, but was looking straight at Morgana. "Even though you initiated this project, this company is still mine. I have the right to choose my own designers."

The tension in the air just escalated even more.

Morgana suddenly looked flustered. "I'm sorry, but just remembered I have something urgent to take care of," she said, standing abruptly.

As she left, she called Julia, who had been sitting quietly, observing. Julia's eyes flicked from Morgana to Elijah, and I saw a hint of anger and pain that she seemed to be holding back. After all, Elijah was now saying that he was choosing my work after having declared at the meeting that he'd decided to use Julia's proposal over mine.

"Excuse me, Elijah," Julia said softly, standing up and giving him a nod. "I need to go, too."

Elijah didn't respond, his eyes fixed on the papers in front of him, but I noticed a flicker of something in his expression, something vulnerable.

Trevis, standing behind me, broke the silence with a loud, hearty laugh. "Well, this is a first," he said, shaking his head in amusement. "I've never seen Elijah express his love for someone so bluntly."

Elijah looked up for a while but his expression was unreadable.

My face burned with embarrassment. I felt the urge to leave, to escape this awkward situation. I stood, ready to make my exit. "I should get going too," I muttered, avoiding eye contact.

"Sophia, wait," Trevis called out just as I reached the door. I turned reluctantly to face him. He had a serious expression now, his earlier amusement gone. "I'd like to take you and Elijah out to dinner tonight. We need to discuss the design case in detail

I hesitated, my first instinct to decline. The thought of spending more time with Elijah, especially after this embarrassing display, was daunting. "I don't think-

"Please, Sophia," Trevis interrupted, his tone firm. "This is important."

I looked at Trevis, then at Elijah, who was now watching me with an intensity that made my heart race. I could see the seriousness in Trevis's eyes, the genuine need to discuss the project. Reluctantly, I nodded. "Alright. Dinner it is."

It wasn't long before the three of us were sitting together in a nearby restaurant. Elijah sat across from me, his eyes scanning the menu with a thoughtful expression. When the waiter came, Elijah surprised me by ordering my favorite dishes without asking. I looked up, meeting his gaze, and he gave me a small, reassuring smile. It was a simple gesture, but it meant more than words in that moment.

As we waited for our food, Trevis broke the silence. "Sophia, I have to say, I don't think you copied Julia's design. I don't think Elijah does either." His tone was earnest.

I was a little surprised by his confidence, so I glanced at Elijah, who nodded his head in agreement. Relief washed over me, but it was quickly followed by a flood of questions.

Trevis continued, "The biggest problem now is figuring out why your and Julia's programs are so similar." He paused, taking a sip of his drink. "From what I know of Julia, she doesn't seem like someone who would plagiarize someone else's ideal

Elijah leaned back in his seat, his expression thoughtful. "That's not necessarily true," he said, his voice calm but firm. "People can surprise you, especially under pressure. Julia might not seem like the type, but we can't rule anything out yet."

Why is he saying this? Isn't Julia his beloved Sabrina? He doesn't seem to trust her at all now.

"I had a conversation with Morgana this afternoon," Elijah suddenly revealed, his voice low but clear. "It was only then that I realized something crucial about Julia's design."

I leaned in, every word he said holding my full attention. Trevis mirrored my posture, both of us waiting for Elijah to continue.

“There’s a not-so-obvious flaw in her design,” Elijah said, pausing to let his words sink in. “It’s a small detail, but it proves there’s no correlation between what she originally did and what she’s presenting now. Julia’s initial schematic and the current version—there’s a clear discrepancy.

A wave of relief washed over me, mixed with a hint of vindication. I had known all along that Julia’s accusations were baseless, but hearing Elijah confirm it brought a sense of justice.

“So, you’re saying that the schematic Julia made in the beginning isn’t the same as the one she’s claiming now?” Trevis asked, his voice steady.

Elijah nodded. “Exactly. The flaw is subtle, but it’s there. And it’s enough to prove that Julia’s version. isn’t the original.”

My heart raced as I tried to process the implications. “But Julia keeps insisting that I copied her work ... She’s been so adamant about it, despite all evidence to the contrary.”

Elijah’s gaze met mine, his eyes filled with concern and determination. “I know, Sophia. But this flaw -this discrepancy—it’s irrefutable proof that you didn’t copy her.”

I gasped. I couldn’t believe it. Yet at the same time, it was very sad that Julia and I had to come to this. We weren’t even talking anymore.

Trevis placed a reassuring hand on my arm. “This changes everything, Sophia. We have the evidence

we need to clear your name.”

I nodded in understanding. “I only told you I was quitting so that you would really look into all of it,” I admitted to him. “But I’m not leaving, Trevis. Thank you for acting on this quickly and seeing it through

Perhaps Elijah was waiting for me to thank him or something, but I couldn’t. I remembered how he’d also doubted me and had immediately jumped to Julia’s side. So for the next few minutes, I ate in silence while the men discussed the project further.

After dinner, Trevis thanked me. “Sophia, thank you for coming with us and for all your hard work. Elijah and I will take care of this plagiarism issue, so don’t worry anymore about it.”

“Alright, thank you,” I said with a faint smile. “And thanks for dinner. See you at work tomorrow,” I stood up and said goodbye, then turned toward the exit.

But then Elijah’s voice stopped me in my tracks.

"I'm sorry," he called out, his tone uncharacteristically gentle. "Sophia, I apologize for misunderstanding you."

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Sophia's POV

"I'm so sorry, Sophia," Elijah repeated. "For everything."

I was certainly caught off guard and didn't know what to say. Elijah, always so composed and arrogant, rarely showed such vulnerability.

Eventually, I said, "It's okay," I wanted to end the conversation already because I had a feeling he wanted to talk about personal things already.

"No, it's not okay," he insisted. "I, uh... I'm not okay. I need to talk to you about the past."

Just then, Trevis followed us, curiosity evident on his face. "What's going on here?" he asked, looking between Elijah and me. There was a mischievous glint in this eye as he fixed an amused gaze on Elijah.

Elijah shot him a look that could freeze water. "Let us talk first. This is between Sophia and me."

Trevis hesitated, clearly intrigued by the unusual display of emotion from Elijah. But a firm gesture from his friend finally sent him back to his chair, albeit reluctantly.

I sighed, crossing my arms. "There's nothing to talk about. The past is the past."

His eyes softened, a look of regret washing over his features. "I was wrong, Sophia. I handled things, badly. I just... I need to make things right."

I shook my head, trying to keep my composure. "Elijah, I appreciate the apology, but I really need to go."

He stepped closer, desperation creeping into his voice. "Please..."

I glanced at my watch, feigning urgency. "I'm sorry, but I have somewhere I need to be."

Before he could react or say anything. I turned on my heel and quickly walked away. The last thing I wanted was to dredge up old memories.

At home, I walked into the living room and saw Daniel was on the floor, still playing with Reese. They- looked up as I entered, and Reese's face lit up with a smile that chased away some of my lingering stress.

“Mommy!” she called, running over to hug me. I scooped her up, holding her close for a moment before setting her down.

“Hey, sweetheart. Did you have fun with Uncle Daniel?” I asked, ruffling her hair.

Reese nodded enthusiastically, then scampered back to her toys. I glanced at Daniel, who was watching me with a serious expression. He stood up, brushing imaginary dust off his jeans.

Sophia, can we talk for a minute?” he asked, his tone unusually formal.

I nodded, following him into the kitchen where we could have a bit of privacy. He leaned against the counter, crossing his arms, a pensive look on his face.

+15 BONUS

“I’m sorry about this afternoon,” he began softly. “I shouldn’t have looked away even for a few seconds

“Stop, Daniel,” I quickly responded, raising my palm. “It’s over, so let’s not talk about it anymore. I’ve already told you it’s fine. Reese is happy.”

He nodded, a slight smile touching his lips before fading. “There’s something else. While you were out, I noticed something. Reese... she seems to know Elijah...”

I sighed. “Yeah, I didn’t tell you yet. I saw them playing at the park this afternoon. But thank God Elijah didn’t see me.”

Daniel’s eyes widened in alarm. “I really shouldn’t have brought her near your workplace. It’s risky. And if you really want a new life, we can’t let that happen again. You can’t get caught up in the past.”

I was quiet for a while, remembering the thoughts I had while watching my daughter play with my ex- I

husband who had no idea that he was Reese’s father.

“I don’t know,” Daniel said, running a hand through his hair and looking anxious. “I honestly think that Reese and Elijah shouldn’t get to know each other.”

I looked away, my mind racing. Shrugging, I told him the truth. “It had crossed my mind... to let them finally meet as father and daughter. But I need to think about it more. This is a lot to process.

Daniel nodded, pushing off the counter. “I understand. Just... consider what’s best for Reese. And for you.”

With that, he turned and left the kitchen, leaving me alone with my thoughts. I could hear Reese's laughter from the living room, a bright spot in the darkness that seemed to be closing in around me.

Later that evening, as I tucked Reese into bed, I listened to her telling me more about her newfound friend – Uncle Elijah.

"So you had a good time with him?" I asked, smiling even though my heart was thumping wildly.

Reese nodded as she yawned. "Fun, fun, fun uncle..." she murmured sleepily.

I couldn't resist the urge to dig a little deeper. "Do you like Uncle Elijah better or Uncle Daniel better?"

Reese furrowed her brow, thinking hard. After a moment, she sheepishly replied, "Uncle Elijah better."

Her answer surprised me. "Why's that, sweetie?"

"He's just soooo nice," she said with a small smile.

I wanted to laugh sarcastically, thinking how bizarre this seemed to be. I leaned closer, intrigued.

How nice?"

Reese pondered for a long while, her tiny face scrunched up in concentration. Finally, she looked up at me with earnest eyes. "Super nice! Like a daddy... I want a daddy like Uncle Elijah."

Her words struck me with overwhelming force. I fought to keep my composure as my mind raced. "That's a big thing to say, Reese."

She nodded, already half-asleep. "I know, Mommy. Good night."

"Good night, sweetheart," I whispered, kissing her forehead.

As I walked out of her room, my chest was bursting with emotions. Reese's innocent declaration had opened a floodgate of thoughts and memories I wasn't prepared to deal with.

Over the next few days, I tried to push the conversation to the back of my mind, focusing instead on my work at the office. It was easier to bury myself in projects than to confront the complicated feelings Reese's words had stirred.

Indeed the new project was keeping me busy as it had been granted to me instead of to Julia who's been avoiding me completely.

Then one day, I was shocked to read a memo handed out to all the employees of Urban Next. The announcement read:

We regret to inform you that Architect Craig Miller is no longer associated with Urban Next Design Studio, effective immediately. This decision follows the violation of an important company policy...

My heart dropped. No damn way.

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Elijah's POV

The morning after my meeting with Sophia and Trevis, I walked into the office with a clear goal in mind: investigate Julia's plagiarism. It was the first thing on my to-do list, and I wanted it done. without delay. As I settled into my desk, I opened the file containing Julia's designs and the alleged copied work of Sophia.

Just as I was making headway, Chris barged in, a stack of invitations in hand. He placed them on my desk with a flourish.

"Here are the invitations for the reception celebrating Julia's return," he announced with a grin. "Or rather, Sabrina's return to the Baker family!"

Before I could respond, Julia swept into the room, her presence quite overbearing. I noticed how she linked her arm with Chris's and grinned excitedly. "Thanks so much, my brother!" she gushed. Then turning to me, she sweetly smiled and said, "Elijah, you must come to the party!"

Before I could respond, though, I saw her glance down at the papers spread across my desk and frowned. "What are you looking at?"

I met her gaze, feeling both angry and disappointed. Julia, these are your designs, aren't they?" I then pointed out what I'd noticed before and how it seemed like she was the one who did the copying, not the other way around.

She gasped, her eyes shining with tears. "I... uhm.... Elijah, I can explain."

"You better!" I said, crossing my arms. "Because from where I'm sitting, this looks like blatant plagiarism. And we have strong evidence to support that."

Julia's face flushed. For a moment, she looked like a child caught with her hand in the cookie jar. She glanced at Chris, who stood awkwardly by the door, before returning her

attention to me. “I wasn’t copying,” she began, her bravado faltering. “I was... inspired by Craig’s proposal. I didn’t even know that he was Sophia’s partner! I was looking at his work, yes, but only for ideas. I didn’t mean to copy it so closely.”

“Inspired?” I repeated, my voice hard. “Julia, the elements are almost identical. Inspiration is one thing, but this... this is crossing a line.”

“I didn’t realize how much I had taken from his work, she admitted, her tone now genuinely embarrassed. “I should have been more careful. I was pressured to create something exceptional and

I guess I got carried away.”

I sighed, feeling a headache coming on. “Julia, you know how seriously we take originality here. This isn’t just about pressure. It’s about integrity.”

Chris stepped forward, trying to ease the tension. “Why don’t we give Julia a chance to make things right?” he suggested. “After all, this is just a small thing. You can simply assign a different project to her, right? Then everything will be okay.”

“It’s not a small thing, Chris,” I replied in an exasperated tone. “It’s plagiarism. We can’t just let it go

+15 BONUS

like an insignificant mistake.” I couldn’t control the fury rising even more within my chest. “And did you know that Julia also accused Sophia of copying her work? She was trying to turn the tables to avoid getting into trouble.”

Julia bowed her head right after I saw a tear fall down her cheek. She took a few steps back, hiding behind Chris like a little girl. But I couldn’t make myself feel sorry for her. I couldn’t even reconcile the fact that she could really be Sabrina!

“Elijah,” Chris started, looking worried. “Why don’t you let Julia off the hook? I’m sure she didn’t do it on purpose and she’s certainly going to be more careful next time. Come on, you can just blame it all on that architect,”

“No,” I said firmly. “I won’t do that. Craig is innocent, and throwing him under the bus isn’t going to solve anything. The truth must come out.”

“Elijah, listen,” Chris pleaded, his tone growing more desperate. “Julia doesn’t deserve this. She made a mistake, yes, but humiliating her and ruining her career over it is too much.”

Julia began to sob. “Please, Elijah! I didn’t mean it and it won’t happen again!” she begged.

I shook my head in disbelief. This wasn't just about Julia's mistake. It was about the integrity of Sinclair Realty.

"Elijah," Chris interjected, stepping closer. "As a major shareholder of Sinclair Realty, I'm asking you to do this. Blame it on Craig. Julia's been through so much and you know that! For years, she had to live like a different person. And now that she's back in our family, you're going to do this to her? What kind of best friend are you? She deserves another chance! T

He began pointing out too that his parents had long supported his company and that some members of the Baker clan are also shareholders. I frowned, knowing that he was feeling really desperate to do this sort of blackmailing.

Taking several deep breaths, I sat back on my chair, thinking hard. I felt like I had no choice, especially knowing that Chris has great influence over many of the shareholders. Eventually I nodded, though my heart was screaming in protest.

A few days later, I released the memo with the announcement about Architect Craig Miller. That same afternoon, Trevis went to see me. "What's this?" he asked, waving the memo in front of me. "What happened?"

I told him the truth about Chris wanting to protect Julia because he believes that she's his missing

sister.

"Oh, man," Trevis whispered. "What a mess."

"I know..."

Looking at me earnestly, he then said, "But knowing Sabrina as our friend before, I don't think she could be capable of something like this."

"My thoughts exactly," I agreed. "Unless she really grew up in a harsh environment after she went missing and then simply changed."

"Or..." Trevis added, his eyes lighting up. "...unless Julla isn't really Sabrina."

My heart skipped a beat. He'd just echoed my sentiments.

A knock came at the door, followed by my assistant popping in. I motioned for Connor to come forward. "What is it?"

He glanced at Trevis hesitantly but I told him it didn't matter if Trevis was there.

Connor looked at me seriously, taking a deep breath. “Mr. Sinclair, in my investigation of Craig Miller, I found out that he’s very closely associated with Ms. Serena Foster.”

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Sophia’s POV

Seeing the memo that Craig was no longer with the company hit me like a punch to the gut. I sat at my desk, my mind racing and my heart bursting with various emotions.

It’s so unfair that Julla got away with the plagiarism issue scot-free while Craig was blamed and fired! The injustice of it all churned my stomach.

Craig had always been a stickler for the rules, almost to a fault. The idea of him violating company policy was ludicrous.

Something’s not right, I thought. This is fishy.

My initial shock quickly gave way to anger, and I stood up, determined to march straight to Trevis’s office to get some answers.

As I grabbed my phone and headed toward the door, it buzzed in my hand. I glanced at the screen and saw Craig’s name. Speak of the devil...

“Sophia, can you meet me at the café in the lobby?” Craig’s voice was tense, yet calm.

“Craig, I was just about to-”

“Please, Sophia. I need to talk to you.”

“I’m going to help you, Craig. Don’t worry about it. I’ll have to talk to Trevis and Elijah and-”

“Sophia, I’m so sorry,” he cut me off. “There’s something I really have to tell you about why we became partners for that design in the first place, why we became close friends.”

There was a note of urgency in his voice that made me change course immediately. And his words were certainly alarming. What was he talking about?

So instead of heading to Trevis’s office, I took the elevator down to the lobby, my mind running with questions and theories.

When I arrived at the café, Craig was already there, seated in a corner booth. He looked tired, his usual confident demeanor replaced by a weary expression. I slid into the seat across from him, trying to read his face.

“Thank you for coming,” he said, offering a weak smile.

“Craig, what’s going on? I saw the memo. This is insane. You didn’t do anything wrong... And And what were you saying about why we became friends or partners?”

He sighed, running a hand through hi

hair. “There’s a lot more to this than you know,”

“Then tell me,” I urged, leaning forward. “I want to understand.”

The hum of the espresso machine and the soft murmur of conversations faded into the background as I listened intently to Craig’s explanation.

+15 BONUS

“When I graduated as an architect,” he started, “I was approached by a woman named Serena Foster. She promised me a high-paying job at Sinclair Realty, but there was a catch.”

I raised an eyebrow, urging him to continue.

“She wanted me to steal designs from you,” he said, the words tumbling out in a rush. He gazed into my eyes shamefully.

“I know it sounds awful, and it is. I didn’t realize how underhanded it was at first because I was ambitious and I needed the money. Trevis took me on at Urban Next temporarily, but my real employer was Sinclair Realty.”

The revelation landed like a heavy blow. I had always prided myself on my judgment of character, and Craig had seemed like a promising and dedicated young architect. But now, my trust felt like a fragile thing, teetering on the edge of shattering.

And Serena strikes again... God, I never thought she was that evil!

My lips tightened. I didn’t say anything, but my heart felt heavy.

Craig went on. “During my time at Urban Next, I learned a lot from you, Sophia. I got to appreciate your talent, your hard work, and your professionalism. I realized that what Serena asked me to do was wrong. I never revealed your designs to anyone. I promise you that.”

I studied his face, searching for any sign of deceit. But all I saw was sincerity and regret. His shoulders were hunched, his eyes pleading. I could tell that this confession wasn’t easy for him, that it had been weighing on him heavily.

“You’ve never told anyone about my designs?” I asked, needing to hear it again.

“Never,” he affirmed. “I couldn’t do that to you. You trusted me, and I couldn’t betray that trust.”

A wave of relief washed over me, blending with the lingering shock. “I believe you, Craig. Thanks for telling me the truth.”

He let out a breath he seemed to have been holding. “Thank you, Sophia. I know this doesn’t excuse what I did, but I want you to know that I regret it deeply.”

We were quiet for a short while. Then suddenly, he reached out and placed a hand over mine, gently and briefly. His eyes bore a hole through mine.

“Sophia, there’s something else... I just... I think you already know it, but I... I really like you. I’ve had a crush on you for the longest time, but I’ve never pursued a romantic relationship because I could tell that you weren’t ready. I also wanted to begin from a clean slate.”

I was taken aback. There were some instances when I sensed it, but hearing him say it had a different effect. “Ohhh... I really appreciate the friendship we’ve developed, Craig,” I started carefully. I wanted to be honest with him too. “But you should know that I see you as more of a brother.”

He looked sad but he still smiled. “I kind of expected that,” he admitted. “But it’s okay. I’m leaving, anyway. We probably won’t see each other again.”

Since he’d become a good friend already, it was difficult for me to accept that. And besides, it wasn’t

+15 BONUS

right. “I’ll talk to Trevis,” I told him quickly. “Perhaps Serena pulled some strings and you were blamed because you didn’t keep your promise to her.”

“No, it’s fine, Sophia,” he said. “It’s too embarrassing for me to stay here. Besides, Mr. Sinclair already set me up for a job at another branch of their company.”

My eyes widened. “Elijah?” I asked in shock. I didn’t think he could be that considerate. And I’ve seen how he looked at Craig with disdain.

Craig nodded. “Yes, it’ll be a fresh start for me.” He didn’t offer any more details, but I asked him to please keep in touch, to which he agreed. We eventually said goodbye.

Back in my office, I couldn’t focus on my tasks. I kept pacing back and forth, thinking about what Serena had done and what she could still do to me.

Then Suddenly, I heard a knock on the door. To my bewilderment, it was Julia who came in, smiling sweetly like we were still close friends like before.

She held a white envelope in her hand with my name elegantly printed on the outside.

My Ex-Husband is Out of Control Chapter 54

Sophia's POV

"Sophia, can we talk?" Julia's voice was soft, almost hesitant. I glanced up, seeing the remorse in her eyes. She looked genuinely sorry, but I couldn't shake the irritation bubbling within me.

"Sure," I replied, trying to keep my tone neutral. Julia closed the door behind her and took a seat across from me.

"I owe you an apology," she began, wringing her hands nervously.

"I know my design was too similar to yours, and I'm sorry that I thought there was a chance you copied some of my elements. Honestly, it wasn't intentional. I saw some of Craig's sketches accident, and they must have stuck in my mind. I didn't know that you two have been workin together."

I raised an eyebrow. "So you're saying it was subconscious?"

"Yes," Julia nodded vigorously. "I never meant to cause any harm. And now, Craig is the one suffering for it, and that's not fair. I've withdrawn from the project, hoping it might make things right."

I sighed, leaning back in my chair. "It's not Craig who should be suffering, Julia. He's one of our best designers and a great architect too. He follows all the rules."

"I know," she said, her voice breaking slightly. "I feel terrible about what happened to him. I just... I hope you can forgive me."

For a moment, I considered her words. I had always had a soft spot for Julia, with her bright personality and genuine passion for design. It was hard to stay mad at her, even now. I took a deep breath, letting go of the lingering resentment. Besides, I didn't like holding grudges.

"Alright, Julia," I said, my tone softening. "I forgive you. But you need to be more careful in the future."

Her face lit up with relief. "Thank you, Sophia. I promise I'll be more mindful. And... I wanted to give you this." She handed me a small, elegant envelope.

I took it, curious. “What’s this?”

“An invitation to my party next week,” Julia said with a hopeful smile. “I’d really like it if you came. It’s just a small gathering, but I think it could be fun.”

My eyes narrowed as I glanced at the invitation, then back at Julia. “I’ll think about it.”

“Great,” Julia said, standing up. “Thank you, Sophia. It means a lot.”

Days passed and I threw myself fully into the project driven by the need to prove that I was worthy of being assigned to it despite all the issues. I also wanted to show Morgana that I could do it with flying colors.

Over the weekend, though, I decided to take a little break. Besides, my best friend Kayla was coming home from France so I was excited.

The airport was bustling with the usual chaos of weekend travelers, but all I could focus on was the excited chatter of my three-year-old daughter, Reese. She clutched her stuffed bunny as we waited -near the arrivals gate, her eyes scanning every face that emerged.

“Mommy, is Auntie Kayla here yet?” Reese asked for the fifth time, her small hand tugging on mine.

“Soon, sweetie,” I replied, brushing a stray curl from her forehead. “She’ll be here any minute now.”

Just as I said that, a familiar figure appeared, wheeling a suitcase and waving energetically. Kayla’s smile was as radiant as ever.

“There she is!” I pointed, and Reese’s face lit up with pure joy.

Reese squealed, running toward her. Kayla scooped her up in a big hug, spinning her around before setting her down. “Oh, I’ve missed you so much, little one!” she exclaimed, then turned to me with a wide grin. “And you, Soph! It feels like ages.”

I hugged her tightly. “I know... Welcome back, Kay.”

After chatting a bit about Paris, Kayla suddenly asked me, “By the way, did you get an invitation from the Baker family?”

I blinked, the question catching me off guard. Images of Julia’s face flashed in my mind, along with the invitation she’d handed me a few days ago. Julia is being welcomed back as Sabrina, I thought bitterly. That makes it so official.

“Yes,” I said slowly. “But I’m not going.”

Kayla looked at me curiously. "Why not? I thought you and Julia had made up already. And this could be a good way for you to meet new people again, to take a break from your work routine..."

"Well, you know it's complicated," I said, glancing down at Reese, who was now entertaining herself by making her bunny hop along the tiled floor. "Julia and I aren't the friends we used to be anymore... Plus Elijah's going to be there, and I don't want to entangle myself with their history."

Kayla nodded, her expression understanding. "I get it. But you know, sometimes facing the past can be the best way to move forward."

I sighed, knowing she was right but feeling unprepared to deal with something like this. "Maybe... don't know..."

"And don't you want to show Elijah that you're not affected by Julia turning out to be Sabrina, his childhood love and best friend?" Kayla added, her tone a little bit teasing.

She did have a point. 1

"And... Do you really want Reese to grow up without a daddy?" Kayla asked, lowering her voice.

Suddenly, Reese looked up at us and began chanting "Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!"

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. It was definitely a shocking moment.

"There you go..." Kayla pointed out jokingly. "If you're really over him..."

"Okay, fine," I finally said. "Maybe I'll drop by just to show them I'm not affected. But about the dad thingie... Let's see..."

Kayla grinned. "You're strong enough now, Sophia. Everything will be good."

That same afternoon, the three of us went shopping together after Kayla settled in at home.

"Why don't I buy you a new dress for that party, huh?" Kayla offered with a huge grin, pointing to a beautiful blue dress in a boutique. "Your beauty, your confidence, and this dress will blow their minds, for sure."

We both laughed. But I could certainly picture it in my mind.

Just then, hearing some voices made my heart skip a beat. I'd certainly recognize those voices.

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anywhere! And when I turned around, I was right. It was Elijah and Julia, going around the same boutique together. Holy shit.

When Elijah turned his head, I immediately ducked and crouched down, pretending to speak to Reese. Meanwhile, Kayla had wandered somewhere else.

Reese and I have to get out of here, I thought in panic. I grabbed my daughter's hand and hurriedly led her out of the shop.

We stopped at a bench outside the boutique, which was partially hidden by some trees in the mall's pocket garden. I decided to just send Kayla a message to inform her where we could meet.

But suddenly, a familiar male voice rang in my ears. "Sophia?"

My heart dropped to the ground.

My Ex-Husband is Out of Control Chapter 55

Sophia's POV

"Uncle Daniel!" Reese exclaimed.

I turned, relief flooding through me as I saw Daniel's kind smile instead of Elijah's piercing gaze. Reese ran up to him, her tiny arms wrapping around his legs. I took a deep breath, beginning to relax.

"Daniel," I said, my voice steady. "Thank goodness it's you."

He bent down to Reese's level, ruffling her hair before straightening up to face me. "Sophia, what happened?"

I glanced around, ensuring no one was eavesdropping, then told him everything. The words tumbled out in a rush.

"Reese and I were shopping with Kayla when I heard Elijah and Julia talking... I'm not sure if Elijah saw me and my daughter, but he could have, you know? He turned around and I tried to hide! Then we immediately left the store!"

I could hear the tension and anxiety in my voice. My ex-husband could find out the truth about Reese, and it wasn't something I was prepared for yet. "I'm just so scared that he might try to check the security cameras just to make sure!"

Daniel listened attentively. "You really think he'd do that?"

I shrugged, becoming more worried. “Maybe. I don’t know. But he can’t see us together! You know how he’s always been suspicious even when we were in Paris” I hissed. “God, I feel like a ticking bomb whenever Reese and I are together in public!”

I didn’t care if I sounded paranoid. Daniel needed to understand the gravity of the situation.

Daniel placed a reassuring hand on my shoulder. “Sophia, don’t worry. The mall is on my family’s property. I just happen to be inspecting something here today. I’ll handle it.

I was about to respond when I heard footsteps approaching. My heart began to thump faster as I turned around. Thank God, it’s Kayla!

“Hey, Daniel,” Kayla greeted upon joining us. “It’s been a long time! How are you?”

But then, she noticed the expression on my face. “Soph, what happened? You’re so pale!”

I immediately recounted what had happened.

“Oh, I didn’t see them inside,” she said, wide-eyed. “But don’t worry, we’ll get out of here now, okay?”

“Uh, perhaps I’ll stay and check things with Daniel first,” I told her. “Can you take Reese home?”

“Of course.”

When Kayla and Reese had left, I stood there with my heart pounding in my chest. I watched Daniel speak into his walkie-talkie, instructing the surveillance staff on what to do. I tried to appear nonchalant, but inside, I was a mess.

After what felt like an eternity, Daniel finished his call and turned to me. “It’s done,” he said, his voice low. “They’re removing the footage now.”

I nodded, grateful. He squeezed my hand and smiled. “I just have to finish something. Are you going to be alright on your own?”

“Yes, I’ll head home now. Thanks so much.”

I needed to see for myself, though. I needed to know if Elijah had recognized me, if he had indeed seen Reese, and if he’d gone through the trouble of checking the security cameras. So, I made my way to the men’s clothing store closest to the surveillance room.

After just a minute or two, I saw Elijah and Julia coming out of the surveillance room, their heads closed in conversation. Wide-eyed, I watched them closely. That was a close call, I thought. It's a good thing Daniel had already called the staff.

Suddenly, they turned toward the store where I was watching them. When they entered, I hid behind a pillar. I could hear them talking, though.

"What exactly was missing?" Julia asked Elijah, sounding puzzled. "What were you looking for in those footage?"

I didn't hear Elijah's answer, though.

My eyes began to survey the shop, which wasn't too big. Sooner or later, they would chance upon me. I must leave now.

I saw Julia beginning to pick out clothes for Elijah: "This will surely look nice on you!" she exclaimed.

I ducked behind a rack of shirts, tiptoeing toward the exit. I could slip out unnoticed now while they were both preoccupied.

But just as I was about to leave through the door, I felt someone suddenly grab my arm and quickly drag me to the nearest dressing room. I gasped, trying to pull away, but the grip was firm.

I stumbled into the dressing room, and the door closed behind me with a soft click. I turned around to see who had caught me, my heart still racing.

"Elijah!" I stood in the cramped dressing room, staring at Elijah, my heart pounded wildly in my chest.

His gaze was fixed on mine, staring intensely. I could sense the immense tension in the air.

"Sophia..." he whispered, making my heart skip a beat. His face was inches away from mine. I couldn't read the expression on his face.

Was he angry, suspicious, doubtful? Or was he suddenly confused by the strong emotions that had engulfed us both as we were thrown into this situation?

Just then, Julia's voice echoed from outside, breaking the fragile bubble we had created.

"Elijah, are you there? Did something happen?" Her voice was filled with concern, with a hint of suspicion.

My Ex-Husband is Out of Control Chapter 56

Elijah's POV

"No, everything's fine," I replied, my eyes locked on Sophia's. "I'll be out in a while."

At that moment, she stomped on my foot, her eyes flashing with anger. But instead of reacting with pain, I simply grinned at her. The look of astonishment on her face was almost comical, and she glared at me, her fury evident.

The cramped dressing room was suffocating, the walls pressing in on us as Sophia and I stood mere inches apart. I had dragged her in here, desperate for a private moment. And now that I found myself facing her closely, our breaths blending with one another, I could feel my heart jumping to my throat.

Julia's voice faded as she moved away, leaving us in silence. My eyes didn't leave Sophia's. "What are you doing here?" I asked her.

"Shopping with Daniel," she said, her voice calm but defiant. "He had to leave earlier, so I came in here to buy a shirt for him."

Her words felt like a sharp blow to my stomach. Something in my chest ached.

Daniel. This man's name again from her lips. I felt a surge of jealousy and rage. "I don't want to hear about Daniel," I snapped, my voice low and dangerous. Is he always going to be a part of her life?!

"Not that it's any of your business," she added in a daring tone.

I lifted an eyebrow. Since she'd come back from Paris, I've noticed how confident and bold she'd become. She had a quiet strength and self-assurance now about her that I found very attractive. What's more, she was gorgeous and stylish, and certainly irresistible.

The fitting room was too small, too intimate. Our proximity only fueled my anger and my desire. My heart began to hammer hard against my chest.

"You know Daniel has always been—she began to say.

That was the last straw. I quickly cut her off by leaning forward and pressing my lips against hers, closing the distance between us.

I heard her gasp, but her lips responded to mine. For a brief, exhilarating moment, she kissed me back. With equal passion.

But then, panic flashed in her eyes, and she pushed me away, her hands trembling. "What the hell, Elijah?" she hissed, her voice filled with confusion and fear.

I stepped back, my heart pounding. "Why are you really here, Sophia?" I asked again, my voice softer now, tinged with desperation.

She looked away, her expression conflicted. "I told you, I'm shopping," she said, but her voice lacked conviction.

"Right, with Daniel," I repeated sarcastically, the name like acid on my tongue.

Sophia's eyes met mine, and for a moment, I saw a flicker of something—regret, maybe, or sorrow. But then it was gone, replaced by the familiar mask of defiance. "Like I said, it's none of your business, Elijah," she spat out.

"Sophia," I began, my voice barely more than a whisper. "I can't stand seeing you with another man. Be it Daniel or Craig. It drives me insane."

Sophia's eyes widened for a moment before narrowing into a sneer. "You have no right to interfere with my life, Elijah. Not when you're parading around with Julia."

I felt a pang of guilt at her words. "It's not like that with Julia. I think of her as a sister."

Sophia crossed her arms, her gaze piercing through me. "And what about your childhood friend Sabrina? Didn't you have a crush on her? Isn't she your first love?"

The question hit me hard. I stared at Sophia, her expectant look making it impossible for me to lie. Memories of Sabrina flooded my mind—the way she laughed, her infectious energy, and how she made everything seem brighter.

I couldn't deny it. I had liked Sabrina, and it was that resemblance that had drawn me to Sophia in the first place. The silence stretched between us, heavy and suffocating.

Sophia's expression shifted, a mix of hurt and understanding. "So, it's true. You only approached me because I reminded you of Sabrina."

I swallowed hard, feeling the weight of my past mistakes. "At first, maybe. But when I got to know you, when we got married, I learned to appreciate everything about you. Yes, you're a reminder of someone I once knew. But it's different now."

She glared at me. "It doesn't matter anymore, Elijah. We've long been over. And your Sabrina's back, anyway."

Sophia pushed me away and stormed out of the fitting room, leaving me in a whirl of emotions. The door swung shut with a decisive click, the sound echoing through the silence that followed.

I sat down heavily on the bench, my head in my hands, trying to make sense of everything that had just happened.

Just earlier, I thought I saw her- a woman who looked so much like Sophia, holding the hand of a little girl, wandering through the aisles of that boutique. I had paused and turned around, hoping to catch a closer look, my breath catching in my throat, my heart pounding with a painful hope.

Could it have been her? Could that little girl have been ours, in some alternate reality where we didn't fall apart?

But that hope was thin and weak, and it burst quickly, I chuckled sarcastically, shaking my head. I who looked checked the security cameras. No sign of Sophia with a little girl. No sign of anyone remotely like Sophia.

It was all in my head, a cruel trick my mind played on me, reflecting my deepest desires and regrets.

I leaned back against the cool wall, the cold seeping into my back and grounding me in the harsh reality of the present. Sophia and I had divorced. That was the truth, plain and simple.

Did we have any happy memories at all? Was she even happy the whole time we were married?

I couldn't help but let my mind drift back to the days when we were still together. I remembered the way she used to look at me, her eyes sparkling with warmth and affection. And I remembered the way she used to hold me, her touch soothing and reassuring, making me feel like everything would be alright.

But those days were gone. She had left me, and no amount of wishing could change that. I had to face the fact that I had lost her, and with her, I had lost a part of myself.

Days passed. I tried my best to focus on work and to not think about Sophia. But it was almost impossible.

Finally, the evening of Julia's welcome back party arrived. I stood in the corner of the Baker residence, clutching a glass of wine, staring at Julia who was currently the center of attention.

Chris motioned for me to join him, Julia, and their parents. I mouthed later, and then walked away, feeling torn about the rush of nostalgia engulfing me and the doubts about Julia that still dawdled in my heart.

I had prepared myself for such feelings, though. What I hadn't prepared for was the sight that now held me captive.

Sophia walked into the room, and for a moment, the air seemed to shimmer around her. She wore a dress that hugged her in all the right places, a vibrant shade of blue that made her eyes sparkle. But it wasn't just the dress. It was the way she carried herself—confident, happy, relaxed.

My heart lurched, confusion and something else—something dangerously close to longing—twisting inside me.

She's so goddamn beautiful. And I want her back so badly.

My Ex-Husband is Out of Control Chapter 57

Sophia's POV

Kayla and I arrived at the Baker's estate, the grand house already buzzing with activity. The party was in full swing, and I felt a pang of nervousness as we walked up the driveway.

Kayla must have noticed the look on my face. "Hey, relax," she whispered with a smile. "You look amazing."

With my best friend by my side, I managed to smile and feel more confident. "Well, you did do my makeup," I joked. "And you did pick out this dress for me."

Kayla laughed. "Yes, you're so lucky to have me as a friend!"

We both giggled.

"But really, Sophia, you look fabulous!"

I squeezed her hand gratefully. "Thank you. I do feel fabulous tonight."

Inside, the house was a swirl of colors, laughter, and music. Chris Baker and his parents had spared no expense for Julia's party. I spotted Julia across the room, looking radiant as ever, surrounded by a group of admirers including her brother and parents.

For a moment, I felt a twinge of insecurity, but it quickly dissipated. Today, I was determined to enjoy myself.

"Come on," Kayla whispered, linking her arm with mine. "Let's mingle."

We moved through the crowd, exchanging pleasantries and small talk. Kayla was her usual charming self, effortlessly drawing people into conversation. And soon I was also beginning to relax and feel

awesome.

Suddenly, I spotted Elijah from a distance, standing by the bar. He stared at me, his eyes unwavering and intense. My heart jumped, a familiar flutter that I tried to suppress. I quickly turned away, seeking solace in the crowd.

“Sophia, come here, I want you to meet someone,” Kayla said, guiding me toward a handsome man standing near the large bay window. “This is Andrew. He’s a family friend of the Bakers.”

Andrew gave me a genuine smile and extended his hand. I politely shook it, and noticed that his touch lingered just a bit more than usual.

Kayla—then said, “Oh, wait, guys.... I’m sorry but I have to catch up with an old friend I ran into earlier. I’ll be back in a bit.”

My eyes narrowed for a while as I wondered if Kayla was doing this on purpose to push me to meet new people.

Luckily, Andrew was charming and polite, his smile warm and inviting. It was easy to speak to him. We chatted for a bit, exchanging pleasantries about the party and the people there. Then he began asking me about my work, so I ended up telling him about studying in Paris and then working at Urban

Next

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“That’s wonderful, Sophia!” he exclaimed. “I’m quite fortunate to meet an amazing woman like you. Beauty and brains rolled into one.”

I blushed a little bit. I wasn’t used to being praised like that.

“So tell me...” he started, leaning forward. “A woman like you must be with someone already, right? Do you have a boyfriend?”

I was surprised at how straightforward he was, considering we’d only met. But I answered truthfully. Actually, I don’t. But I do have a child.”

The words slipped out before I could think twice, and I immediately regretted them. Should I have said that at all? What if he knows Elijah or tells the Bakers who then mention it to Elijah? Oh, gosh!

Andrew froze, his smile faltering as he looked at me, a little embarrassed.

“That’s... uh, that’s great,” he stammered, clearly taken aback. “How old is your child?”

“Three,” I replied, forcing a smile.

Andrew nodded, trying to recover his composure. "That's wonderful. I'd love to meet her sometime."

I felt a pang of alarm, my mind racing with the implications of what I'd just said. If word Elijah... I glanced around, half-expecting him to appear out of nowhere

got

back to

Andrew quickly picked himself up, his charm returning. "Well, I'd still love to get to know you better, perhaps take you out on a date sometime," he said, his eyes hopeful.

Before I could respond, I saw Elijah walking toward us, his gaze locked on me. My breath caught in my throat, and I felt a rush of panic. Elijah's presence was magnetic, drawing me in despite my best

efforts to resist.

Andrew followed my gaze and seemed to understand. He stepped back slightly, giving us space. "Leave you to it," he said with a nod. "But the offer stands."

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I barely heard him, my focus entirely on Elijah as he closed the distance between us. The room seemed to fade away, leaving just the two of us standing there, a thousand unspoken words hanging in the air.

But then, I remembered what had transpired with Elijah the last time we were together in that dressing room. In that split second, I made a spontaneous decision. I quickly grabbed Andrew's arm before he could turn away completely.

"Yes," I breathed, gazing into his eyes.

"Huh?" He seemed confused.

"Yes, I'd love to go out with you," I told him, my heart pounding.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Elijah stop, his brows furrowing and his features darkening. Obviously, he heard me. I didn't know what to do so I pulled Andrew toward the buffet table.

"Maybe we should get something to eat now," I suggested, wanting to get away from my ex-husband. Andrew chuckled, a playful glint in his eye. Leaning closer toward me, he whispered, "So.... he's the one you care about."

My Ex-Husband is Out of Control Chapter 58

Elijah's POV

I'm supposed to be celebrating Sabrina's return, I thought.

But to be honest, I wasn't in the mood to celebrate because I still had doubts about Julia.

My mind was elsewhere, tethered to the woman in the blue dress.

Sophia looks so beautiful tonight. Her laughter was genuine, but there was a tension in her shoulders that only I seemed to notice.

Just then, a tall, well-built man was introduced by Kayla to Sophia. That definitely got my attention, especially when the two of them were left alone to talk.

Andrew, a family friend of the Bakers. We'd met a few times and exchanged polite nods. I watched as he engaged Sophia in conversation, his body language all too familiar, all too close. It made me frown and clench my fists.

Sophia's smile was tight, and the way she glanced around the room, as if searching for an escape, told me she didn't really want to be talking to him.

I began weaving my way through the crowd, my pulse quickening with each step. Just as I got close enough to hear their conversation, her voice reached my ears, and it stopped me cold.

"Yes, I'd love to go out with you," she said, her voice clear.

My stomach dropped. I was rooted to the spot, every muscle tensing as Andrew's gaze shifted and landed on me. He gave me a friendly grin.

He turned back to Sophia who quickly pulled him toward the buffet table without as much as a glance in my direction.

For a while, I simply watched them, waiting for a chance to speak to Sophia alone. And when Andrew was approached by a friend, it was the perfect time for me. I didn't hesitate.

What was she thinking, agreeing to a date with him? I needed to understand, needed to talk to her, but before I could reach her, a familiar voice called my name.

"Elijah!"

I turned to see Julia walking up to me. Her breath tickled my ear as she leaned in, her voice barely a whisper. "Elijah, I just overheard Serena saying she drugged the wine that Sophia Just drank."

For a moment, the world seemed to stop. I turned to Julia, my mind struggling to process her words." What?" I asked, hoping I had misunderstood.

"Please, Elijah," Julia's eyes were wide with urgency. You have to help her."

I looked over at Serena, who was standing a few feet away, her gaze fixed on Sophia. An unsettling smile played on her lips. It was cold and calculated, filled with a malice that sent a shiver down my spine.

My mind flashed back to Connor's investigation, the pieces of the puzzle suddenly falling into place.

Craig and Serena set up Sophia, and their elaborate plan was to destroy her. And now, Serena's using another pawn Andrew.

Anger bubbled up inside me, a burning rage that threatened to consume me. But I didn't want to cause a scene.

Not long after, I noticed Andrew pull Sophia away from the table. They had barely touched their food. A sinking feeling settled in my gut as I watched them.

Something about the way she moved, unsteady and disoriented, set off alarm bells. I quickly followed them at a distance, my heart pounding with every step.

They headed upstairs, and I quickened my pace, trying to stay out of sight. I reached the top of the stairs just as Andrew was leading Sophia into a guest room.

He glanced over his shoulder and was about to close the door when I shoved it open, barging in with all the force my anger could muster.

"What the hell are you doing?" I demanded, my voice a growl. "Who put you up to this?"

Andrew's eyes widened for a moment before he muttered something unintelligible and hurried away, not daring to look back. I itched to chase him down and beat the answers out of him, but I couldn't leave Sophia like this.

I turned to her. She was sprawled awkwardly on the bed, her movements slow and uncoordinated. Her eyes struggled to focus, though she seemed to be breathing okay.

"Sophia," I said softly, sitting beside her and gently brushing her hair out of her face. "How are you feeling?"

She looked up at me. "Elijah?" Her voice was barely a whisper.

"Yes, it's me," I whispered, taking her hand instinctively and rubbing it gently.

She gave me a faint, gentle smile. "I feel dizzy, but what you're doing... that feels sooo good..."

Slowly, she sidled up to me. "Is it hot?" she asked, looking a bit confused. Then she began to pull up the hem of her dress, revealing her long, flawless legs. "It's so hot," she whispered.

Seeing her exposed skin sent me reeling. Electric waves began shooting all over my body, making me burn up inside rapidly.

To my surprise, she took my hand and began pressing it to her face and neck, guiding it downward to her chest. I gulped, unsure of what to do. Serena must have given her some party drug that's making her have uncontrollable sexual urges, I thought in alarm.

She then led my hand toward her thighs, and began moving it up and down. "Keep doing it," she whispered. "Feels so damn good."

I consciously caressed her legs, following her lead. It was definitely arousing and tempting. I could feel my hormones raging inside me.

"Lie down, Elijah," she instructed. I followed and lay there, feeling her body's warmth seeping into mine.

She began making her fingers dance across my ear and my cheek, then my neck as we looked into each other's eyes.

God, she's so beautiful, I thought. I've missed her so much.

In that instance, as I gazed into her eyes, with our lips inches away from each other, I couldn't resist any longer. I leaned closer and pressed my lips against hers. She responded with much fervor, and our kiss grew passionate at once. We were both ravenous for one another, our kiss deepening, our tongues meeting in a sensual dance, our hands exploring each other's bodies.

But a warning bell was going off in my head. And eventually, I pulled away. I couldn't go through with it, knowing that she was drugged.

"Sophia, wait," I said. "This isn't you, alright? There was something in your drink..."

She gave me a hazy smile. "This is still me, and I want you badly."

Oh, my. I've been waiting to hear that from her for so long. I thought we'd never be this intimate again. But I knew it was wrong. This wasn't the same as having her consent. "Sophia, I really want this too, but it's not right. I can't do this to you."

She wasn't even listening to me. She began taking off her dress, though she was struggling with it.

"Don't," I said, placing a hand over her arm to stop her.

But she wasn't in her right mind. She just kept on caressing herself using her own hands as well as mine, making us both touch her all over. She began to wriggle on the bed, and soft moans escaped her throat. Eventually, she placed my hand beneath her skirt, throwing me a pleading look.

"Please, Elijah..."

It was the substance in her body that was making her body hot and desperate to be pleased. And somehow I knew that we had to get it done with, to relieve her and perhaps remove that feeling of restlessness.

Goddammit, I really want to sleep with you, Sophia. But I can't. Not when you're like this.

And so she ended up easing herself, while I kissed her on the lips – softly and gently. It was torture for me, but it was over quickly.

"Thank you," Sophia whispered before closing her eyes and falling asleep.

I didn't even realize I'd already fallen asleep when the sun streaming through the windows made me open my eyes. It was the morning of the following day, and I found myself lying down on the couch instead of the bed. Good.

But upon sitting up and checking the bed, I realized that Sophia wasn't there anymore.