

A Favor 161

Chapter 161

“Would you really dare? I’ll be home in an hour, so keep those hands still and have a little patience. I promise I’ll make the wait worth every second. You can take my clothes off whenever you want and wherever you want, babe. Let me finish here so I can get home and do things my way with you. It’s hard to focus now that you’ve got me thinking about you like this. Walking around with an erection is a little tricky, but I’ll do what I can, because the sooner I finish, the sooner I can make you mine again—for the first time as your husband. I love you. See you soon. And remember, don’t touch yourself until I get there,” he wrote.

“I’ll do my best, but I can’t promise anything, love. Don’t take too long, okay? I’ll be waiting, and I’ll be ready. I love you too,” I replied.

I set my phone aside, a rush of anticipation washing over me as I started getting ready. Dinner could wait. That would be the last thing on either of our minds when he walked through the door. I took a quick shower, determined to keep my hands to myself, just like he’d asked.

After I dried off, I put a little extra effort into my hair and makeup, then slipped into beautiful lingerie. I tied a silk robe over it, making sure it was secured—he’d have to work a little to get to what was underneath. I got everything ready in the kitchen so dinner would be easy to put in the oven later, when we were actually hungry. Once that was done, I poured two glasses of champagne, sat on the couch, and waited—my heart racing with excitement for Davidson to finally come home.

I couldn’t stand waiting another minute. I needed that impossibly handsome man back home already. The moment I heard the front door open, excitement surged through me, all that anticipation building inside. I wanted him. I needed him more than I could put into words, and I was determined to make tonight unforgettable.

“Babe, where are you?” he called, his voice a little rough.

“In the living room... waiting for you, love,” I answered, letting every bit of desire slip into my voice.

He rushed in, his tie already loosened and his jacket unbuttoned, his eyes locked on me.

“You’re all mine... now,” he growled, crossing the room until he stopped right in front of me.

Somehow, in that moment, he looked even more irresistible than ever.

Davidson’s POV:

“Now you’re all mine,” I growled, walking toward her without another word.

I grabbed her and pulled her hard against me, my mouth crashing onto hers in a hungry kiss. My hands slid beneath her robe, pushing it off her shoulders until it pooled in a whisper of silk at her feet. She stood there in that sheer slip and the lingerie beneath it, and the sight stole the air from my lungs.

“We’re getting a little impatient, aren’t we?” she laughed, her eyes glittering with mischief.

“Oh, you have no idea how much I’ve missed this side of you,” I said, my voice rough with want.

We fell into another heated kiss. She reached for my shirt, fumbling with the buttons, but her hands trembled too much with anticipation.

“Forget it. I’ll buy you a new one,” she murmured, low and teasing, then tugged it open in one sharp pull, sending the buttons scattering.

And she’d called me impatient.

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I didn’t care. She looked even more irresistible standing there, giving me that look only she knew how to give. I slid a hand between us, lifted the hem of her slip, and drew it up and off, letting it fall to the floor.

With only her panties left, my own need strained hard against my pants. She went for my belt, unfastening it, popping the button, and lowering the zipper in one smooth movement before pushing my pants down to my ankles. I kicked off my shoes and stepped out of them without hesitation, tossing everything aside.

“Baby, I’ve missed you so much... and all of this,” she breathed, her lips finding mine with a need that matched my own.

Her hands swept over my nearly bare skin, exploring every inch. I traced my fingers down her back, over her hips, then gripped her thighs and lifted her easily. She wrapped her legs around my waist, holding on

tight as we sank into another deep, breathless kiss. She pressed against me, and I groaned into her mouth as I carried her toward our bedroom.

I laid her down on the bed and settled my weight over her. Our mouths met again, my tongue sliding against hers, desperate and starving. My hand slipped between us, finding the waistband of her panties, and I touched her gently at first, feeling her reaction immediately.

“God, baby...” I groaned, realizing just how ready she was.

“I’ve been aching since those messages,” she pleaded, cheeks flushed, eyes dark with desire. “Please... take care of me.”

“Oh, I’m going to take my time with you tonight,” I murmured, my voice low as I kissed her again. “I’m not letting you go.”

She whimpered, her hips shifting beneath me, asking for more. I listened to every sound she made, every breath that turned unsteady, every tremble that ran through her body. It had been so long. Too long.

“Davidson... I’m close,” she cried, fingers twisting in the sheets. “Please—don’t stop.”

“I’m not stopping,” I promised, kissing her, holding her there with steady hands and softer words. I stayed with her until the tension in her finally broke, until she shuddered and collapsed back against the mattress, breathless and glowing.

I smiled, brushing her hair back from her damp forehead. "I knew you needed that, baby. I just didn't realize how much."

"It's been two months, Davidson," she laughed, her voice still shaking. "Two months of torture."

"I know, sweetheart," I murmured, kissing her temple. "We'll make up for all the time we lost."

She reached for me again, her hand sliding up my neck to pull my mouth back to hers. Her touch was urgent, loving, familiar—like coming home. I kissed her deeply, then moved lower, worshipping the warmth of her skin as I drew her panties off and tossed them aside.

She was bare beneath me—soft, glowing, perfect—and I took a moment just to look at her. Every curve, every inch, felt like mine to adore.

"God, you're incredible," I whispered, my gaze roaming over her. "I can't resist any part of you. I love you."

"I love you too," she breathed. "Now... please. I need you."

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I groaned at the feel of her hand on me, at the way she looked at me like I was the only thing in the world. I shifted between her legs, guiding myself closer, pausing only long enough to meet her eyes.

“Tell me,” I murmured, brushing my mouth over hers. “Are you sure?”

“Yes,” she whispered, breath hitching. “Please, Davidson.”

I kissed her—fierce and devout—then finally gave us what we’d both been waiting for. The moment we came together again hit us like a wave after weeks of restraint. She cried out, clinging to me, and I held her tighter, moving slowly at first, savoring every second, every breath, every sound.

“Yes... love... yes,” she gasped, trembling beneath me.

“God, I missed being with you like this,” I groaned, kissing her jaw, her cheek, her mouth. “I missed you.”

“Harder,” she pleaded, pulling me closer, her legs locking around my hips. “Please... more.”

I gave her what she wanted, building the rhythm between us, letting the world disappear until there was only her—only us—our bodies moving together, our hearts pounding in the same frantic time.

“Davidson... don’t stop,” she cried, arching beneath me. “It feels so good—don’t stop.”

I couldn’t have stopped if I tried.

At some point she pushed at my chest, urging me onto my back, and then she took control with a hungry, determined confidence that made my breath catch. She moved over me, her hands on my shoulders, her hair spilling down as she found the pace that drove us both insane.

“Yes,” I rasped, gripping her hips. “Like that. Don’t stop, baby. Keep going.”

“Yes, Davidson,” she moaned, her voice breaking as she lost herself in it—lost herself in me.

When her release finally tore through her, she shuddered above me, breathless and trembling, and the sight undid me completely. I wrapped my arms around her, holding her as I followed her over the edge, my body going tight as pleasure crashed through me in wave after wave.

“Winona,” I gasped, lost in her, lost in us.

When it was over, we slowed together, catching our breath, clinging to each other with sweaty skin and tangled limbs. I leaned forward and pressed my forehead to hers, my hands cupping her face like she was something precious.

“That was incredible,” she whispered, fingers sliding through my hair. “I missed being with you like this.”

“It really was,” I murmured, brushing my thumb over her cheek. “I missed you too. I love you.”

"I love you," she said softly, and her smile made everything feel right.

Reluctantly, I pulled back and gathered her into my arms, holding her close. She fit perfectly against me. For a moment, it felt like nothing in the world could be better.

Then she suddenly stilled and sat up, her expression changing.

"Davidson... we forgot protection," she said, alarm creeping into her voice. "I can still get pregnant, even if my period hasn't come back yet. It's possible."

Panic hit me when I realized. We'd been so consumed by each other that everything else had vanished.

"Damn it," I said, sitting up quickly beside her. "I'm sorry, baby. I didn't think about it at all."

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She turned to me, her eyes searching mine. I expected her to panic, but she only looked calm—gentle.

"It's okay," she said with a soft smile. "The chance is small. Not impossible, but small. And if it happens, it happens."

"Would it bother you if you got pregnant again so soon?" I asked, studying her face.

“Honestly?” she said quietly. “Probably not. If I did, Sofia would be almost a year old when the new baby arrived. It would be a lot, sure, but I don’t think I’d mind. Would you?”

I took a moment, thinking, then felt a smile spread across my face.

“I wouldn’t mind either,” I admitted. “They’d be close in age, which could be good. It would be hard, but we’d manage. We always do. Let’s wait and see. If it happens, it’ll be wonderful. And if it doesn’t... maybe we start trying again in a few months.”

“I like that idea,” she said, smiling at me. “I want a big family. I love Sofia so much. She’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me—right after you. I wouldn’t mind adding a couple more little ones to our family.”

“Me too,” I said, pulling her in for a kiss, feeling content and hopeful about everything ahead. “Three sounds perfect.”

She gave a soft, satisfied sound against my mouth, then climbed back onto my lap with a playful laugh, her voice light and teasing.

“So this is your way of saying you want another round?” I chuckled.

“Yes,” she declared, grinning wide. “We have two months to make up for.”

“Oh, we will,” I promised, my hands settling on her waist.

I already knew exactly how the rest of our night would go—right here, tangled together, reclaiming every minute we’d lost. And honestly, I wouldn’t have wanted it any other way.

Winona’s POV:

A few weeks had passed since Davidson and I started making love again. We’d gone back to using protection, just to be careful. But in the end, it turned out it didn’t make much difference.

I had just left the doctor’s office and was on my way to Davidson’s, ready to share the news with him.

“Well, Sofia, I can’t wait to see Daddy’s face when he gets this surprise,” I whispered as we rode up in the elevator. Sofia looked up at me and babbled, her tiny smile brightening my whole day.

She’d only started smiling a few weeks ago, and nothing in the world melted my heart more. I leaned down and tickled her soft little belly.

“You’re the sweetest thing. Yes, you are,” I murmured, smiling as she let out a little giggle.

Every day she looked more and more like Davidson. She had his eyes and that same mischievous spark. I reached out to stroke her dark hair and smiled, completely in love with my little girl.

She lay in her stroller, babbling and kicking her rattle, content. I kissed her forehead before straightening up. When the elevator doors opened, I pushed the stroller out and headed down the hallway toward Davidson's office.

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It took forever to get there. It felt like everyone in the building stopped to say hello—especially to Sofia, who soaked up the attention, smiling at every new face she saw.

"Is Davidson free?" I asked Chloe, his assistant, who'd taken my old position.

"Yes, he's in his office. He just finished a meeting, and I'm sure he'll be happy to see both of you. He's been a little stressed today," Chloe said with an understanding smile.

"Thank you," I replied, returning it.

I knocked softly on Davidson's office door.

"Come in," he called, and even through the door, I could hear the tension in his voice.

I opened it, and the second Davidson realized it was me, he crossed the room in a few quick strides. He pulled me inside, shut the door, and drew me into his arms, kissing me hard on the lips.

"I'm so glad to see you both," he said. His excitement was clear, even through the stress.

"I know, baby. Chloe mentioned you seemed a little overwhelmed. Is everything okay?" I asked, searching his face.

"Yeah. It's just this new contract we're trying to land. They're making everything difficult, and I'm starting to lose my patience," he admitted, dragging a hand through his hair.

I hated seeing him like that. Lately, the weight of work seemed to press on him even more than usual.

"You'll get it, baby. Who could resist your charm?" I teased, winking at him.

He let out a laugh, then leaned down to kiss my forehead before his attention shifted to Sofia.

"Hi, my princess," he murmured softly.

Sofia babbled immediately, her eyes lighting up the moment she heard his voice. She was already such a daddy's girl. I couldn't help smiling as I watched them, my hand drifting absently to my stomach.

“Daddy missed you. He really did. Daddy needs a few hugs,” he said, bending down and lifting Sofia into his arms. He held her close, cuddling her to his chest.

Just being with us always seemed to make his worst days better.

He sank into his chair, still holding Sofia, and looked at me with a softer smile. He patted his knee, urging me closer.

I perched on the edge of his desk beside him. He reached out and rested his hand gently on my knee.

“So, how was your day? What have you two been up to?” he asked, looking at me with genuine curiosity.

“We played together this morning, then we had our class this afternoon. After that, I stopped by the doctor’s office,” I said.

The moment I mentioned the doctor, his expression shifted. He didn’t know why I’d gone, and I saw the worry flare in his eyes.

“Is everything okay? Do you feel alright, baby?” he asked, his voice suddenly full of concern.

"I'm fine, love. I promise," I reassured him with a soft laugh.

"Then why did you go to the doctor? And why are you laughing?" he asked, his face confused.

I glanced down and saw Sofia had already fallen asleep in Davidson's arms.

"Let me put her back in the stroller, and then we'll talk," I said.

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He pouted, but nodded. Carefully, he placed Sofia back in her stroller and tucked the blanket over her. Then he turned back to me, sat down again, and pulled me onto his lap. I wrapped my arms around his neck, settling against him while his hand slid around my waist, holding me close.

"Alright. Now you have to tell me what's going on. My mind is jumping to every catastrophic scenario," he admitted, worry etched into his features.

I knew I couldn't let him spiral any longer. It was time.

"I went to take a pregnancy test," I said with a smile.

"Wait—seriously?" His voice lifted with that familiar sign he was getting excited.

“Yes,” I answered, laughing.

“And?” he demanded. “Come on, don’t make me wait. Are you pregnant? Are we really having another baby?”

“Yes,” I said, my voice full of emotion. “We’re having another baby, my love.”

“Oh my God,” he breathed, eyes wide as he placed both hands gently over my stomach. “Are you serious? You’re really pregnant again?”

“Yes. Turns out that first night we were together again was enough for us to make another baby,” I teased, happiness bubbling up inside me.

“What can I say, baby? I’ve got strong swimmers,” he laughed, and I couldn’t help laughing with him.

I rolled my eyes and shook my head at his comment. Only he could say something like that and make it sound completely natural.

“Another baby... wow. That’s crazy,” he said, grinning. “But it’s the best kind of crazy.”

"I know. I can't wait. Although the doctor didn't look very thrilled," I said, laughing as I remembered her reaction.

She'd looked pretty stunned when she realized I was already pregnant again. But once I explained everything Davidson and I had talked about, she relaxed and congratulated us.

"I hope you told her you couldn't help it. You've got a husband who can't keep his hands off you," he said, smiling with that smug confidence of his.

"Oh, I think she figured that out without me needing to say it," I joked, laughing.

"Then... you're really happy?" I asked quietly, studying his face.

"Of course I am," he said, cradling my face in his hands. "I can't wait for our little family to grow."

He pulled me in and kissed me with everything he had, then wrapped his arms around me, hugging me tight against his chest.

I melted into him, my heart overflowing. I never thought I'd get pregnant again so soon, but honestly, I was okay with it. The kids would be close in age. I knew it would be a challenge, but it would be worth every moment. Becoming a mother was the best thing that had ever happened to me.

"I guess I'd better start working on my stamina again if this pregnancy makes you as needy as the last one," he said with a laugh.

I smiled and gave him a playful tap on the chest.

"As if you have anything to complain about. We made love more times than I can count, and you handled it just fine. Besides, baby, you're already strong enough," I teased.

He laughed and kissed me again.

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"I love you, Mrs. Briggs," he murmured, his voice thick with feeling. "You've given me everything I ever dreamed of."

"I love you too," I said softly. "It makes me so happy to know I can give you what you've always wanted. You, Sofia, and this little one growing in here—there's nothing that could make me happier than being your wife and being the mother of our children." My hand drifted to my stomach.

I pressed my forehead to his, smiling through the emotion swelling in my chest.

"You gave me the whole world, Winona," he whispered.

Those words made me cry. He was always sweet, but something about that moment felt different. What he'd just said meant more to me than anything else.

Truthfully, I never imagined the man I'd marry—the man I'd love with my whole heart, the person I'd build a family with—would be the same man who'd been my boss for two years. Back then, I never looked at him that way. But love always has its own plan. Somehow, everything in our lives—every turn, every struggle—had brought us here. Maybe it was always meant to happen this way, and we just needed time to see it.

"You're my whole world," I whispered, stroking his cheek gently. "You and our babies."

"And I always will be, baby," he replied with a hopeful smile. "I can't wait to see where life takes us."

I kissed him again, then curled into his chest and let him hold me. In that moment, I felt overwhelmed by how much love I carried. At last, life was giving me everything I'd ever wanted—and I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Davidson's POV:

Nine months later.

"He looks like you, my love," I told Winona as she cradled our baby in her arms.

His name was Lorenzo Davidson Briggs—our beautiful boy, born just an hour ago, weighing four kilograms. Healthy and perfect.

“He does look like you, doesn’t he? He’s beautiful,” she said, smiling down at our son as she fed him.

“I have to admit, sweetheart, we really do make gorgeous babies.” I winked, and she laughed.

Lorenzo’s birth had been much faster than Sofia’s. Winona had only been in labor for ten hours this time. Everything about his arrival seemed easier, at least compared to when she had Sofia. That made sense—Sofia had been our first. This pregnancy had been smoother too.

There wasn’t much morning sickness, and her mood stayed steady, which I was grateful for—especially with Sofia still so little. No matter what path we took, I knew we would have ended up here.

Sofia was growing quickly, her personality shining through more every day. She was turning into a little mischief-maker, just like her mother. She was doing wonderfully—talking constantly and even beginning to walk. Sometimes she wobbled, but she managed. She had a healthy appetite and, honestly, she was perfect.

“Will you bring me our girl, love? I want her to meet her little brother,” Winona said, beaming up at me.

I nodded, kissed her forehead, and turned to my son.

“Daddy will be right back,” I murmured, brushing my fingers over his tiny cheek.

Sofia was waiting in the next room. Winona’s parents had brought her to the hospital after I called to tell them Lorenzo had arrived. We’d told Sofia she was going to have a baby brother, but she was still so young. We knew she couldn’t fully understand it.

I figured she’d noticed there would be another baby at home. We hoped she would take it well, especially since she was used to having all of our attention to herself.

We would all have to adjust.

“Sofia,” I called as I stepped into the waiting area where everyone had gathered.

They greeted me with warm hugs and congratulations before letting Sofia run straight to me.

“Daddy!” she squealed, lifting her arms up.

I scooped her into my arms, and she cuddled close, looking up at me.

“Mama?” she asked.

“Mama’s in there, sweetheart, with your little brother,” I said with a smile.

She stared at me, wrinkling her nose in confusion, and I couldn’t help laughing. She was too adorable.

“I’m going to take Sofia in to meet Lorenzo and see Winona. You can all come in after,” I said, smiling gratefully. “Thank you for watching her and for being here with us.”

I returned to the room, and Sofia spotted Winona immediately. Her gaze shifted to her baby brother, and she pulled back a little, unsure why her mama was holding another baby.

“Hi, sweetheart. Mama missed you. Come here, my angel,” Winona said, smiling at her.

Sofia seemed to relax at that.

“Mama,” she said excitedly, still in my arms.

I carried her to the side of the bed where Winona held Lorenzo. I let Sofia climb up beside her mother. The moment she settled, Winona wrapped her free arm around her.

“Hi, my sweet girl,” Winona murmured, kissing Sofia’s forehead.

I knew Winona hated being away from Sofia for too long. She'd only allowed it this once. She always worried when Sofia was somewhere else, even when she knew our daughter was safe.

"Mama," Sofia said again, reaching out. She touched Lorenzo carefully, then looked up at Winona with wide, curious eyes.

"Sweetheart, this is your baby brother. This is Lorenzo," Winona murmured with a smile.

"Lorenzo," Sofia managed, unable to say the whole name, but we both understood. Winona's face lit up as soon as she heard it. In that moment, she knew Sofia understood who Lorenzo was.

I sat at the edge of the bed and leaned back, watching the three of them together.

Sofia reached out and traced Lorenzo's tiny hand with her finger, then did the same with his face, gentle and careful. A soft little smile played on her lips as she did it.

"Daddy, Lorenzo," she said, turning to me with excitement in her eyes.

"Yes, sweetheart. That's right. Do you like him?" I asked.

Sofia nodded, then turned her attention right back to Lorenzo.

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She sat close to Winona, touching his tiny hands, legs, and cheeks with careful curiosity. Before long, Lorenzo drifted off to sleep in Winona's arms. Winona looked at me with a beautiful smile, her eyes bright with happiness and love.

"I think they'll be okay," she said softly.

"I think you're right, my love. I love you, and I'm so proud of you. You're an incredible mother and an incredible wife." I smiled, brushing my hand through her hair before kissing her forehead.

"I love you too. Would you like to hold your son?" she asked.

I nodded eagerly, then carefully took Lorenzo from her arms. I held him against my chest and swayed a little when he stirred the moment I lifted him.

Sofia pressed closer to Winona, wrapping her arms around her mother and planting a kiss on the top of her head.

"Mama loves you," Winona whispered with a smile as Sofia cuddled even closer.

Winona looked up at me, and I cradled Lorenzo gently, murmuring to him as he rested in my arms.

“You’re going to break a few hearts, my boy,” I chuckled.

“Yes, just like his father,” Winona said with a soft laugh.

“What can I say? The men in the Briggs family have good genes,” I replied with a wink.

“I just hope he’s not as cocky as you,” she said, raising an eyebrow.

“You love my arrogance. Don’t even try to deny it,” I teased, grinning.

She rolled her eyes and shook her head, then patted the space beside her. I laughed and sat down. She rested her head on my shoulder and laced her fingers through mine. Sofia did the same.

I leaned down and kissed Winona’s forehead, then kissed Sofia’s.

“My two favorite girls. I love you both so much,” I murmured.

Then I added, looking down at my son, “And I love you too, my big boy.”

Winona snuggled into me and pressed a soft kiss to my neck.

“And we all love you, sweetheart. Thank you for always taking care of us, for protecting us, and for loving us,” she whispered.

“And I plan to spend the rest of my life doing exactly that. I’ll never be able to truly show you how much I love you. Winona... I love you for always being here. I love you for taking care of me. I love you for loving me. I love you for becoming my wife and the mother of my children. You made my life mean something, Winona. I hope you know that,” I said, my voice catching.

She kissed me and gently stroked my cheek.

“You and my babies made me feel complete. I love you, Davidson, and I always will,” she whispered, settling against my side.

I sat there smiling, wondering how I’d ever gotten so lucky.

Sophia’s POV:

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A deep sigh slipped past my lips as I sank back in my chair and checked the clock for what felt like the thousandth time. Nearly forty-five minutes had passed since I sat down, and still, not even the faintest sign of the person I was waiting for had walked through the café doors. The man who was supposed to be my fiancé—and, in three weeks, my husband—was nowhere to be found.

Daniel Kelley, the elusive CEO of Kelley International Corporation, had done nothing more than send a single message yesterday to arrange this meeting.

He said he wanted to see me in person before our engagement went public next week. I agreed, even canceling my first internship appointment just for the chance to meet him face-to-face.

Maybe it sounded strange for a couple to plan a wedding without ever meeting, but the truth was, this whole thing was a façade. Ours would be a marriage in name only—a simple business transaction with no romance involved. We only had to keep up appearances for a year. After that, we would each go our separate ways.

I set a limit for myself. I would wait five more minutes, and if he didn't show, I'd leave.

"He can have his engagement party without ever meeting me for all I care," I muttered under my breath as I scanned the busy tables, trying not to look as irritated as I felt.

Not wanting to sit there stewing in my anger, I put my earbuds in and scrolled through my playlist until I found the dance tracks I'd downloaded the night before. As the music filled my ears, I let my mind drift into new choreography.

I was so absorbed I barely noticed when someone stopped in front of me. When I looked up and saw a tall man in a dark suit, I pulled out my earbuds. He stood there, looking directly at me.

His eyes were the first thing I noticed—cold and distant, revealing nothing. I’d never seen anyone so unreadable. It was like staring at a wall, impossible to guess what he was thinking or feeling.

“Sophia,” he said.

His voice froze me in place. There was a chill to it that sent a shiver down my spine, yet I couldn’t look away. Something in his tone held me still. Hearing him say my name sparked a strange current through me.

“Yes, that’s me. Are you Mr. Kelley?” I asked, straightening slightly and meeting his gaze.

He didn’t answer. Instead, he calmly pulled out the chair beside me, sat down, and kept his eyes locked on mine. The way he looked at me was unsettling—almost disturbing—but I kept my breathing steady and refused to break eye contact.

“You are Mr. Kelley, right?” I pressed, but just like before, he offered no response.

I was halfway to wondering if he was deaf or simply ignoring me when he finally spoke.

“Tell me, Sophia. How much money did my mother promise you to accept this arrangement?”

The question caught me completely off guard. I hadn’t expected him to be that blunt, to skip even the smallest hint of polite conversation or courtesy. No greeting. No introduction. Straight to the point.

“What? Would you mind repeating that?” I asked, needing to be sure I’d heard him correctly.