

A Favor 181

Chapter 181

We sat inside a quiet restaurant, waiting for our meals to arrive.

“Let’s talk about the engagement party, and then the wedding. What theme do you want for the party?”

“Hmm... whatever you choose, Mrs. Kelley. I trust your taste,” I said with another smile.

“No, dear. The wedding belongs to you. I want you to make the decisions. The theme, the details... everything.”

I let out a breath when she said I had to make the decisions. It felt like a heavy weight on my shoulders.

“Hmm... we can... we can keep it simple. Maybe a private party, Mrs. Kelley?”

“Private? What do you mean by that? You don’t want a big party? Not even a big wedding celebration?”

“I’m not comfortable with large parties or big events. And I want it private because I don’t want Félix finding out anything about me. I don’t want him to know where I am or where I live. Your son isn’t an ordinary man, Mrs. Kelley. Paparazzi and reporters follow him everywhere, and I don’t want them following me too.”

She leaned across the table, took my hands, and smiled. “I understand, Sophia. If that’s what you want, we’ll keep things discreet. No paparazzi. No reporters. Just a small team of photographers and videographers to document the event.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Kelley.” I gave her a grateful smile, trying to calm my nerves.

“Now, about the contract. You will marry my son, and my husband and I will help you find Layla. We’ll also make sure Félix receives the punishment he deserves. I promise you, Sophia.”

“Thank you. There’s... one more thing I want to ask, Mrs. Kelley.”

“Of course. Tell me.”

“Can we keep this entire agreement between us? I don’t want anyone to know why I’m marrying your son.”

“And my husband?” she asked.

I cleared my throat. “It will be your son, Mrs. Kelley. Not mine.”

“Oh. I didn’t realize that’s what you meant.”

“I don’t want him to know my reasons. This marriage is only a contract. When a year passes—or when the investment goes through and I finally have enough to fight Félix—we’ll separate and file for divorce.”

“If that’s how you want to handle it, then I understand.”

“Hmm... what exactly would I have to do as your son’s wife?”

“Well, you’ll appear as his loving wife at business meetings or parties where he needs a partner. But don’t worry. You won’t have to pretend at home. You’ll still have your own life even while you’re married to him. The only rule is that neither of you can date or see anyone else during the marriage.”

I nodded slowly.

“And what do you think will happen after the wedding?” I hesitated. “Making love?”

I bit my lower lip.

“Since you’re both adults, that part will depend entirely on the two of you. You might enjoy your marriage—who knows?”

My eyes widened slightly, but she only smiled at my reaction.

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“You know, I like you, Sophia. And I mean it. In fact, I think you’re a good match for my son.”

“Mrs. Kelley—”

“It’s true, dear. And I hope this marriage of convenience becomes something lasting one day.”

She shrugged, and I couldn’t help laughing at her last comment.

Something lasting?

“That’s impossible, ma’am. Your son is a little rude and arrogant,” I said, not hiding my honest thoughts about him.

She looked surprised for a moment, then burst into laughter. “You forgot something, dear. He’s cold too.”

She laughed again, delighted. “That’s why I like you, Sophia. You say what you think. If something pleases you, you say it. If something bothers you, you point it out immediately.”

“Because honesty is the best policy, Mrs. Kelley.”

“You won my heart with that, dear. But I want you to know this too. Even though Daniel can be distant and a little arrogant, he’s a true gentleman. And I’m not saying that just because he’s my son. Be patient with him. You may see a different side of him.”

I gave her a gentle smile and let out a slow breath of relief.

Daniel’s POV:

“What? Your mother went ahead and picked you a girlfriend? That’s insane. Another arranged marriage in your family, huh?”

I lifted my beer with an irritated grunt and took a slow drink. Andrew sat beside me, amused, like this was entertainment instead of my life.

“You know why I agreed. I don’t have to explain it again. We need that investment, and we need it fast.”

He clicked his tongue and shook his head. “I’ll never understand why those European investors care so much about a businessman’s marital status. Do they think you can’t trust a single guy? What kind of logic is that? You’re more than capable of doing the job.”

"I know. But in their eyes, a married man carries more weight. They see him as stable and responsible, so they prefer doing business with married people."

"So you're really going through with this arrangement?"

"I'm not faking anything, Andrew. Marriage is serious. And those men would spot a fraud from miles away. They built their careers by noticing every detail."

"Alright, alright. But at least tell me this—have you met the girl yet?"

"Yes. I met her."

"And? What happened? Is she cute? Does she have that runway walk like your ex? Come on, man. Give me something."

"I met her last week. To be honest, she didn't seem like anything special. She wasn't ugly, but she looked like the kind of person you pass on the street and don't give a second glance. And she seemed like the type who'd jump at anything if money was involved."

I set the bottle down on the bar harder than I meant to.

“Whoa. Hold on. Don’t you think you’re judging her too fast? You don’t know her. And come on—you know your mother. She wouldn’t pick someone for you without a reason. Something must’ve stood out to her.”

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“I don’t care what stood out to her. Whatever it was, the fact is, Sophia accepted without hesitation. And no matter what she tells people, I’m sure she’s here for the money.”

“I don’t believe that. Not all women jump for money the way you think.”

“Then what are you suggesting? That I start looking for another woman?”

I wished I still had time to find someone else, but I had to get married as soon as possible. Accepting her was the only option I had left.

“You can’t fully blame someone who’s desperate, Daniel.”

I frowned and glanced at him from the corner of my eye. “What are you trying to say?”

“I’m saying you can’t attack the girl for accepting before you even know what motivated her. Maybe she needs money for her father’s cancer treatment. Or maybe she’s helping a relative who needs heart surgery. Or maybe she’s the one who’s sick and trying to save herself. You never know.”

I smacked his arm, more irritated than anything else. "What are you talking about? You want me to be a widower immediately?"

I didn't know why, but the idea made something twist in my gut. No one wanted to hear that.

"I'm just giving you possibilities. What if she's pregnant?"

"What the hell, Andrew?" I narrowed my eyes at him. "If she were pregnant, my mother would've told me. And I wouldn't have chosen her either."

"Okay, okay. Calm down." He laughed. "Anyway, maybe the smartest thing is to accept the girl your mother picked. Mothers always know more than we do."

I didn't answer. I just lifted the bottle again and took another slow drink.

"So what's the plan after the ceremony?"

"What do you mean, what's the plan?"

"You know. The mating part." He shrugged.

I let out a short laugh. “Man, I didn’t find her attractive. I couldn’t imagine feeling anything for her.”

“Wow.” Andrew threw his head back and laughed. “Man, don’t talk like the story ends there. What if she ends up falling in love with you during this whole arrangement?”

“The marriage isn’t fake.”

“Alright, alright. But it’s almost the same. You two aren’t in love. You’re not even dating. You’re just playing a role. So tell me—what happens if she falls for you?”

“She shouldn’t. And I’ll make that clear the next time we see each other. As soon as those investors sign the deal with KIC, I’ll file for divorce.”

“Ah... and what’s her name?”

“Her name is Sophia.”

“Mmm. Pretty name.”

“What’s pretty about her name?”

“God, you’re uncultured. It’s Greek, man. It means wisdom and skill. It sounds elegant. Intelligent. Feminine.”

“And where did you learn that?”

“Google.”

I grunted and shook my head.

Later, when I got into my car, my mind drifted to my sister. It was strange, thinking about how life had led me down the same path she once walked—caught in the same mess, the same pressure.

“Hello, Dani?” Her voice came through the phone, bright with emotion.

I sighed as soon as I heard her. I missed her more than I let myself admit.

“Hey, little sister.”

“Are you drunk?”

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I chuckled under my breath. She could always tell. "I had a little to drink, but I'm not drunk."

"Oh my God. Yes, you are totally sober. That's exactly what a drunk person sounds like. Is something wrong? Are you okay?"

"Why are you asking such a stupid question? Of course I'm fine."

"Ah, Dani, don't lie to me. I know you too well. You wouldn't call me at midnight if everything was fine. Did something happen? Was it Mom? Dad?"

"No, no. Stop thinking the worst."

"Then why are you calling me?"

"So I can't call my favorite sister whenever I feel like it? I missed you."

"Oh, cut the crap, Dani. It's midnight. And stop acting like you have a bunch of siblings to choose from. You only have me, so stop the drama and spit it out."

I inhaled deeply. The words were hard to form.

"I'm getting married."

"What?" She shouted so loudly I flinched.

"It's a long story," I said with a tired laugh.

"Then summarize it!"

There it was. Still the same stubborn sister who never let anything slide.

"I'll tell you everything. Just... not right now. It's late, and honestly, I didn't think you'd answer."

She didn't respond. The silence stretched long enough for my body to go rigid.

"Hey. I'm talking to you."

"Uh... Dani, I'll call you back another time. Oh my God...!"

"Rian, what's going on? What happened?"

Her scream cut through the phone before I could finish. A man's voice followed, and my chest tightened.

"Rian! Answer me! Where are you?"

The call ended.

"What the hell is wrong with her?" I muttered, tossing my phone onto the passenger seat. My hands shook as I grabbed my keys and started the engine.

Twenty minutes later, my phone rang. Alex's name lit up on the screen.

"Goddamn it, Alex—what the hell—"

"Hey... Dani. Hi. It's me," my sister interrupted.

"Rian? Thank God. Is it you?" Relief rushed through me so fast my knees felt weak.

"Yes, yes, it's me, Dani. I'm fine."

“What happened? I heard you scream. Tell me what that was. Rian, I need to know if you’re hurt.”

“Calm down, Dani. I’m fine. Nothing happened.”

“Nothing happened? Arriana Angela, don’t you dare dismiss me like that.”

“Wow. You’re using my full name?”

She always hated when I used it. That was exactly why I did whenever she tried to hide something from me.

“I’m fine, Dani. I just called to tell you I’m safe. That’s it. I’ll explain later.”

“Promise me, Rian.”

“I promise.”

Then something occurred to me. I frowned at the phone. “Wait. Why are you calling me from Alex’s number? Where’s your phone? And where are you? Are you with him right now?”

She went quiet, and my pulse spiked.

“Rian, answer me. Where are you and Alex?”

“Hey, man.”

I went tense the moment I heard Alex’s voice.

“Alex? Tell me where you are. And why is my sister using your phone?”

“What’s wrong with her using my phone? She’s my wife.”

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“That’s not what I’m asking! Alex, if anything happens to Rian, I swear I’ll—”

“Relax, Daniel. She’s fine. I’m with her. You don’t need to panic.”

“Wait. What do you mean she’s fine? Tell me what actually happened.”

“She slipped on a small rock. Lost her balance and fell hard enough that her phone flew across the road.”

“Alright. Then explain the sirens I’m hearing.”

“They’re from the next street over. The police have a checkpoint there.”

“Mmm. Then tell me this—what’s going on between you and my sister? You talked about her like she’s your real wife.” I smiled.

“She is my wife.”

“Alex, yes, on paper she is. But the way you’re acting doesn’t sound like a marriage of convenience.”

He let out a heavy sigh. “Yeah. I know. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize to me. You didn’t marry me. Those words are for her.”

“I know. I’ll fix it.”

“Alex, listen to me. She matters to you. I’ve seen it from day one. Don’t wait until she’s gone for good.”

“I won’t let that happen this time,” he said, and I heard the conviction in his tone.

“Good. I’ll be watching both of you. Anyway... thank you. Tell her goodnight for me.”

“I will. Take care.”

Sophia’s POV:

Everyone had gathered in a circle, and I told them they had time for one last run-through before we finished for the day. I pressed play on the speaker and watched them take their places.

“Yes! Thank you, Miss Sophia!” they shouted in unison, patting each other on the back.

I smiled at their enthusiasm. “Are you ready for next week’s competition?”

“Yes, Miss Sophia. We’re really excited.”

“Good. Good luck, everyone.”

It was my last class of the day, and they'd finished their full routine for next week's modern dance competition. Next month, after the wedding, Craig and I would probably spend a few days preparing for the international competition.

I stepped onto the dance floor and took my position, but Craig's voice cut through the music.

"Sophia, you have a call."

I turned and saw him standing in my office doorway, my phone in his hand.

"And who is it?" I asked, raising my voice so he could hear me over the music.

"Mrs. Kelley."

"Who is it?" I asked aloud because the music was still playing in the studio.

"Mrs. Kelley," he replied.

I nodded and looked back at the students. "Everyone, keep practicing. Professor Craig will guide you for a while," I instructed before hurrying over to him.

“Thanks. Can you watch them for a few minutes, please?” I asked as he handed me my phone.

“Of course.”

I stepped into my office and answered the call. “Good afternoon, Mrs. Kelley.”

“Hello, Sophia. Good afternoon. Were you busy?”

“Mm... no, ma’am. How can I help you?”

“Do you have plans tonight, or are you available? I hope you’re free.”

I smiled. “Yes, I’m free tonight.”

“Excellent. Then may I invite you to dinner? It will be a simple family dinner.”

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“Oh.” I bit my lip because I hadn’t been expecting the invitation. “Please, dear. I want to introduce you to my husband and talk about the engagement preparations.”

“All right, Mrs. Kelley.”

“Then you’ll come?” she asked, her tone hopeful.

I let out a slow breath and replied, “Yes, I’ll come.”

“Wonderful, thank you. My driver will pick you up tonight at—”

“No, Mrs. Kelley, it’s fine. There’s no need for that. I’ll take my own car.”

“Are you sure, dear?”

“Yes, ma’am. Could you give me the address?”

“Of course. I’ll send it as soon as we hang up. Thank you, Sophia. See you later.”

“You’re welcome. See you later, Mrs. Kelley.”

"I'm looking forward to tonight. Take care."

"I'm looking forward to it, too. You take care as well."

I ended the call and sighed deeply. The thought settled in my mind as I set my phone down. That meant I would see him again.

"Oh my God!" I turned and found Craig leaning against the doorframe.

"Family dinner," I said, even though he hadn't asked anything yet.

"Mmm. Are you going?" he asked curiously.

"Do I have any other choice?"

"Excellent. Good luck, girl. You're about to meet your husband," he joked.

"We're not married yet, Craig, so he's not my husband."

"Yeah, but soon he will be," he replied with a mischievous laugh before leaving and closing the door.

I kept blinking as a luxurious three-story villa came into view.

I was stunned.

“Sophia.”

I turned and saw Mrs. Kelley standing by the mansion’s glass doors. I swallowed and took a deep breath before walking to her.

“Good evening, Mrs. Kelley. Thank you for the invitation.” She hugged me as soon as I reached her, and I hadn’t expected such a warm welcome.

“You look so beautiful, dear. I’m sure my son’s eyes will pop out of their sockets when he sees you.” I offered an awkward smile.

“Did you have any trouble finding the address?”

“Not really, Mrs. Kelley. I just followed the map on my phone.”

“Oh, thank goodness you young people know how to use those modern gadgets. Come in, dear. My husband is eager to meet you.”

She guided me inside, and the moment I crossed the threshold, my eyes swept over a living room large enough to echo. Everything looked warm and polished. Soft beige tones covered the sofa and armchairs. A thick rug matched them, and the wooden furniture scattered around the room gave the space a gentle, homey feel. It was elegant without feeling cold.

“Honey, here is your future daughter-in-law,” Mrs. Kelley announced brightly.

A man in his fifties stepped forward with the confidence of someone who had built the walls around him. He was Mr. Gregory Kelley, the patriarch of the family.

“Well, well. What a lovely young lady. You were right, dear. She has such a kind face and carries herself well,” he murmured as he approached us.

“See? I told you. Sophia, this is Greg, my husband. And, dear, this is Sophia, who will soon be part of the family.”

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“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Kelley.” I offered my hand, but he pulled me into a warm hug, just like his wife had.

“No need for formalities, Sophie. You can call me Dad.”

"I agree with him, dear. You can call me Mom now, Sophie."

I managed a hesitant smile and glanced at Mrs. Kelley's kind expression behind him. She had already given me a nickname before the evening even began.

"I've heard a lot about you, Sophie. And you can rest assured, my wife and I plan to help you find someone who can speak for you in that case against Félix De Luca."

"Thank you, sir. I truly mean it. I feel better knowing you and Mrs. Kelley are willing to help me," I said with a warm smile, because I really was grateful.

"Oh, don't think twice about it, dear," Mrs. Kelley replied as she came closer and took my hands. "We're family now. Family takes care of each other."

"She's right, Sophie. And, by the way, I also heard what you thought of my son at first."

My eyes widened before I could stop myself, and Mr. Kelley laughed at my reaction.

"Why don't we continue this in the dining room?"

"Of course. Sophia will enjoy everything I cooked for her," Mrs. Kelley replied as she led us toward the dining room.

"Good idea, dear. Did you call our son?" he asked.

"Yes. He said he was on his way."

"Hmph. Daniel manages to arrive on time when it's business, but he's late every time we have a family dinner," Mr. Kelley muttered as we headed into the bright, beautiful dining room.

My stomach twisted the moment I heard her son's name, and I suddenly needed an excuse to step away.

"Mrs. Kelley, may I use the bathroom, please?"

"Of course, dear," she said, calling an employee to guide me down the hallway.

I stepped into the bathroom and let out a slow breath when the door closed behind me. The soft lighting and warm colors made the space feel safe, and right then, it was the only place that had managed to calm my nerves since I arrived.

I moved closer to the mirror and studied myself.

There was no turning back now. I had come seeking justice, and I planned to see it through to the end. I exhaled and reminded myself why I had agreed to come in the first place.

Daniel's POV:

"Man, aren't you excited to meet your fiancée? If I were you, I'd already be a mess," Andrew said as we got out of the car. He shot me a teasing wink as we walked toward the entrance of my parents' house.

"Why should I be excited? It's just dinner. My mother wanted to introduce me to this Sophia. That's all."

"Well, I'm excited. I want to see what she's like."

"Relax. You'll meet her soon," I replied, giving him a light pat on the back.

I didn't see my parents in the living room, so I headed straight to the dining room with Andrew beside me.

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"Finally, your son arrives," my father said when he saw me.

“Good evening, Dad. Good evening, Mom,” I said, kissing her cheek. “I brought Andrew with me. We’re planning to go to a gathering after dinner.” I stepped aside so he could greet them, though my eyes were already searching the room for the woman everyone was talking about.

“Hi, Sonia. Hi, Greg. Thanks for inviting me,” Andrew said.

“Hello, Andrew,” Dad said, patting him on the shoulder.

“Do you really have another meeting tonight, Daniel?” my mother asked, and I already knew she disapproved.

“Yes. Sorry, Mom. I’ll make it up to you next time,” I said with a slight smile, but she only huffed and rolled her eyes.

“This dinner isn’t for me. You planned it for your fiancée, Daniel.”

“Mom, I know,” I started, but Andrew suddenly let out a sharp gasp.

“Wait. Look at that.”

I turned in the same direction and froze.

A woman was approaching the dining room with a slow, steady grace that made the entire room fall silent. Her features were soft and radiant, and her long floral dress flowed around her figure as if it had been made just for her. She didn't seem real.

"My God... did an angel just walk into the house?" I whispered as Andrew elbowed me in the arm.

Dad chuckled under his breath, and when I looked at him, he seemed far too amused by how stunned I was.

"Sophia," my mother called, gesturing warmly for the woman to join us.

I couldn't help myself. I looked at her again. And again.

"So this is Sophia?" Andrew asked, eyes wide, as if he'd never seen a woman before.

"Yes, this is Sophia, Daniel's future wife," my mother said.

I heard her voice, but it faded into the background. The woman kept walking toward us, and everything inside me tightened. Was I losing my mind? How could anyone look so unreal?

"So now you think I look like an angel, Mr. Kelley?" she asked with a playful smile.

I startled, and my parents exchanged a conspiratorial look.

How did she know what I'd said?

Andrew leaned in and whispered, "You said it out loud, genius."

I straightened in a rush, hoping no one would notice how nervous I felt.

"Nice to meet you, Sophia. I'm Andrew." He didn't even wait for an invitation. He circled the table and took her hands as if he owned the moment.

"Hello, Andrew. It's nice to meet you, too," she replied with an easy smile.

"Has anyone ever told you how beautiful you are? No... breathtaking is the more appropriate word."

My fingers curled around the back of my chair. The urge to pull him away hit me when he lifted her hand and brushed his lips against it. If we hadn't been in my parents' dining room, I would've dragged him out by the collar.

"Thank you, Andrew. You're not bad yourself."

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“Careful with that smile, Sophie. You’re going to send me to the ER,” Andrew warned, pressing a hand to his chest and staggering back as if he’d been struck. He huffed like he could barely stay upright. She laughed at his theatrics, and my parents laughed along as if the joke were actually funny.

I cleared my throat loudly enough for everyone to notice me. All three looked my way, but I kept my eyes on Andrew. “All right, you’ve met her. Congratulations. Now get back here so we can eat. We still have work tonight, in case you forgot,” I said, dripping with sarcasm.

“Relax, man. I didn’t know you were the jealous type,” he teased, and the table burst into laughter again.

I narrowed my eyes at him, wondering why I still considered him my friend.

“Daniel, sit beside your fiancée,” my father said, cutting through the moment like a snapped thread.

“No problem, sir. I’ll keep Mrs. Kelley company instead,” Andrew replied.

I arched a brow when Sophia slid into the seat beside my mother with calm confidence. It almost looked like she’d been dying to sit there. The thought irritated me more than it should have.

“All right, let’s begin. Daniel, Andrew, sit,” my father said as he pulled out a chair for my mother.

I settled into the seat across from her, and Andrew took the one directly across from Sophia.

Sophia's POV:

All through dinner, I felt a steady gaze on me. I didn't need to check who it was. I told myself to ignore it, but every time I lifted my fork or spoke to his parents, I could feel him watching. And no matter how hard I tried to pretend it didn't bother me, his stare sank under my skin.

"Where are you from, Sophie?" Mr. Kelley asked warmly. I turned to him with a bright smile. "I grew up in Italy, sir."

"Oh, call me Dad, Sophie."

Daniel's spoon slipped from his hand and clattered against his plate. His reaction tightened the air around us.

"Are you fully Italian?" Andrew asked next.

"No. I'm half American and half Italian."

“Hmm. No wonder. That mix makes you look like someone sent from heaven,” he added with a grin.

I let out a small laugh, though I noticed Daniel shooting him a look sharp enough to cut steel.

“Now, about the engagement,” Mrs. Kelley cut in. “Son, Sophie suggested keeping the party more private. What do you think?”

“What do you mean by more private?” Daniel asked, his eyes settling directly on me.

“Private as in no journalists and no public announcements. We can hire a few photographers to document everything. And when the wedding comes, we can invite only family and close friends.”

“And why would you want a private wedding? You don’t want everyone to know? You don’t want the attention that comes with marrying a billionaire?”

“Daniel Kelley!” his parents cut in at the same time, their voices sharp enough to silence the room.

I already knew what he meant. I held his gaze and offered a calm smile. His words stung, but I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of seeing me flinch.

“What was that supposed to be?” he asked with a shrug, his mouth curved into a smug smile that made his question sound anything but innocent.

“Enough with the useless comments. That’s not how you speak to your fiancée,” his mother said, her voice edged with disapproval.

“If you don’t want to contribute, then don’t. But this conversation will continue whether you like it or not,” Mrs. Kelley said, not softening her tone.

Daniel leveled a hard look at me, sharp enough to tighten the air again. I refused to look away. Instead, I lifted a brow at him. Andrew nearly choked trying not to laugh.

Mrs. Kelley turned to me with a warm spark in her eyes. “Sophia, dear, what kind of wedding theme were you thinking of?”

Something inside me steadied when I caught the irritation still lingering on Daniel’s face. His mood almost pushed me forward, and I answered with a bright, fearless smile. “I’ve always loved white mixed with purple, Mrs. Kelley.”

“Oh, call me Mom, dear.”

Her gentle insistence made me laugh under my breath. She wanted me to call her that, so I obeyed.

“Mom, I think white and purple would look beautiful together.”

“Thank you, dear. It’s a lovely choice. I know an excellent planner who organized my daughter’s wedding. He did a wonderful job.”

“You have a daughter? I didn’t know,” I said, blinking in surprise.

“Oh, yes, dear. I must have mentioned her earlier. We have two children. Daniel was the first, and our youngest, Rian, got married about four years ago.”

Rian. The name chimed in my memory like a small bell. I used to have a friend in college with that name, and the coincidence caught my attention.

The rest of dinner passed with quiet conversation about the engagement and the kind of simple ceremony we wanted. Daniel barely spoke. He stayed silent the entire time, listening but never joining in.

“Thank you for joining us tonight, dear.”

When we finally headed toward the entrance, Mrs. Kelley wrapped me in a warm hug. Daniel and Andrew were nearby as I said my goodbyes.

“Let Daniel take you home, Sophie.”

“Oh no, thank you, Dad. I brought my car, so I can go home alone. And your son still has work tonight, so I don’t want to hold him up.”

I knew Daniel was right behind me, so I made sure my voice stayed clear and loud.

“She’s right, Dad. Andrew and I need to go out anyway. I’m sure Miss Sophia knows how to get home on her own, doesn’t she?” He drew out the last words as if he wanted the whole room to hear them.

“Of course I do. I drove here. I won’t have any trouble getting back.”

He looked like he had another remark ready—something sharper—but Mrs. Kelley stepped forward before he could say it.

“Drive carefully, dear. We want you to get home without any trouble. Tomorrow I’ll contact the planner and put you in touch with him. You can start choosing everything you want for the celebration.”