

A Favor 221

Chapter 221

He looked from me to the Mini Cooper and scratched his head.

“Ma’am, we won’t be using your car. We’ll be using that black BMW.”

“Wait. What are you talking about?”

“Those were your husband’s instructions, ma’am. I’m just doing what he asked.” Ricky offered an awkward, stiff smile.

“So that’s what this is. This is all coming from him?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“All right, then you need to listen very carefully.” I spoke slowly, making sure every word landed. “You’re going to give your boss this message: I don’t need a personal driver, and I don’t want his car. Do you understand me?” I raised an eyebrow and waited for him to absorb it.

“But, ma’am—”

“Thank you, Ricky. I hope you have a good day,” I interrupted before he could finish. I patted his shoulder and turned back to my Mini Cooper.

What was he thinking? Last night, he stood in front of me and made it perfectly clear how little our marriage meant. He said we were strangers under the same roof and that I could live however I wanted because he didn’t care. Then morning came, and suddenly he wanted me to carry his credit card. Now he expected me to ride around in his BMW with a private driver at my side.

No way. That was never going to happen.

After my shower, I put on the most comfortable clothes I owned. I chose white cotton shorts and a loose purple blouse that swayed with every breath. I set my alarm for seven because I wanted to make breakfast. Not for my husband. I planned to cook for myself—and for Nanay Emily and Tatay Berto.

When I walked into the kitchen, I expected the quiet bustle of the older couple, but I didn’t see anyone. Instead, my husband was sitting at the table in his usual work clothes. A newspaper lay across his lap, and a cup of coffee sat in front of him.

Seeing him there, I arched an eyebrow. We’d only been married a week, and the last time he’d crossed my path was in the hallway on our wedding night.

I moved toward the kitchen as if he weren’t there. I hummed a slow romantic tune while I opened the fridge and decided what to cook.

“I think I’m in the mood for a cheese-and-bacon omelet this morning,” I murmured as I gathered what I needed. I kept moving along the counter, pretending I hadn’t noticed his presence at all.

"If you take me where you go, I want to learn the things you know. Now that you made me believe, I want you to take me, because I want to see the things you see. You know that, whatever you do, I'll follow you. Oh..."

I was slicing the cheese when I realized he'd stood up and walked over to the counter. Even then, I kept doing what I was doing, as if nothing had changed—until his scent came close enough to set my nerves on edge.

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We weren't friends, and I didn't even know him.

He stopped right in front of me, and I could tell he hesitated for a moment before speaking. "Why didn't you take the card?"

I'd been expecting that question since last week. I let out a long sigh as I looked at him.

"We're not friends and we barely know each other, so why would I accept your card? I can pay for my own things. I don't have as much money as you, but I earn enough to live my life."

"If you still don't want it, then I'll open a checking account for you and transfer money to you every month," he said, completely impassive.

“You don’t have to do any of that. I already told you I won’t ask you for anything. I’m just doing what we agreed. I don’t need your money, I don’t need a private driver, and I don’t need your car. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I want to eat.” I stepped away and sprinkled the cheese into the eggs.

“Please, Sophia, can you stop being so stubborn?” His voice rose behind me, and I held my breath. “Just take the card and let Ricky drive you!”

“And why would I do that?”

“People know you’re my wife, and I’m not giving anyone a reason to talk about me. I want you to get rid of your car and start using the BMW in the garage.”

“What do you mean by that?” My eyes widened the instant I heard him say I should get rid of my car.

“It’s new, and Ricky will drive you from now on, whether you like the idea or not.”

“No. You can’t just decide this. I never told you you could control my choices. And what happened to the promise you made on our wedding night? You said we wouldn’t interfere in each other’s personal lives.” I crossed my arms tightly over my chest.

“I’m not interfering in your personal life. I’m simply doing what’s expected of me as your husband.”

A dry laugh slipped out before I could stop it, because the word “husband” sounded so wrong coming from his mouth.

“I’m sorry—did I hear you right? Are you suddenly proud to be my husband? Let me remind you of something, my dear husband. This marriage isn’t real. We both know it was a transaction. You don’t have to pretend you’re trying to take responsibility for me.”

“Why shouldn’t I? Isn’t this what you agreed to when you said yes? You wanted the money and everything that comes with it. You knew you were marrying a billionaire. So why are you playing innocent now and rejecting what I’m offering you?”

Bitterness dripped from his voice, and it left me stunned for a moment.

He was judging me again, and he wasn’t even trying to hide it.

“Or is it the BMW you don’t like? Do you want a different car? Maybe another sports car. A purple one, like the one you drive now.”

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My throat tightened, and I went silent.

“Then I’ll take that silence as a yes. By tomorrow, expect a new Maserati. And I’ll start sending money to your account, so when this arrangement ends, at least you’ll have everything you’ve dreamed of.”

I drew a long breath, trying to steady myself as his words burned through me. He'd already started to walk away when I finally forced myself to speak.

"Tell me something, dear. Do you really plan to buy me a new car tomorrow?" I asked in the sweetest, most tempting voice I could find, just as he turned his back to me.

He turned to face me, his brow deeply furrowed, and I greeted him with the warmest smile I could manage. His lips curved into a malicious smile in return.

"There you are. Now you're showing your true colors, my dear," he replied, venom thick in his voice as he narrowed his eyes at me. I refused to back down.

"This is me," I said with a sly, mocking smile. "I'll accept everything you offer. Just don't blame me if you find it all reduced to ashes afterward."

His entire expression changed in an instant, shock cracking his earlier confidence.

"Are you joking?"

"Go on. Test me, sweetheart." I kept the same sugary smile on my face as I turned back to the stove.

He didn't say another word. I only heard his footsteps leaving the kitchen. And once I was sure he'd finally gone, I let out the breath I'd been holding since I walked in.

"Anak, are you okay?"

I pressed my palms to my eyes and let out a long sigh the moment I recognized Nanay Emily's voice behind me.

"I'm fine," I said as I turned to her with a small smile. "Good morning, Nanay." I hugged her and kissed her cheek.

"Good morning. I noticed your husband left earlier looking furious, and he didn't seem happy at all. Did something happen between you two?"

I nodded. "He insisted I start using his credit card and his car, and I told him I didn't want any of it."

"Maybe he's just looking out for you, anak."

A weak, bitter smile tugged at my lips as I shook my head. "I doubt it. If he really cared, he wouldn't throw insults at me every time he opens his mouth, Nanay."

"Do you want me to talk to him?"

“No, please don’t. I don’t want him to think I’m trying to win anyone’s pity. This arrangement will be over in a year, and once it ends, I’ll be out of his life forever. He’ll never have to see me again.”

“Sophia...”

“I made breakfast for us, Nanay. I made cheese-and-bacon omelets and French toast. I hope it tastes good.”

I steered the conversation away as quickly as I could, and she must have noticed because she didn’t bring it up again.

“Oh my goodness, anak! Thank you. You didn’t have to do all this.”

“It’s okay. I actually missed cooking.”

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She answered with a gentle smile. And even with that warm, motherly expression, I could tell she had a hundred questions waiting just behind her eyes. I appreciated her even more for choosing not to press me—for letting my thoughts stay at peace.

Sophia’s Point of View:

“So tell me—how are you both feeling tonight? Tomorrow is the big day, and I want to know if you’re truly ready to step on that stage,” I asked Rian and Gavin the moment they finished practice.

“I can’t wait for tomorrow!”

Rian’s eyes rolled to the ceiling in pure irritation, and I didn’t miss it.

“Did you just roll your eyes at me, Mrs. Smith?” I bit my lip to keep from laughing. Those two could start arguing at any moment.

“I’ve hated looking at your face lately, and I don’t even understand why,” she shot back, and that finally made me laugh out loud.

“Wow... so the mysterious ‘G’ turned you into this monster? You’re breaking my heart,” he replied with an exaggerated grimace.

We’d agreed to call her possible pregnancy simply “G” until she knew for sure—mostly to keep things light and avoid unnecessary pressure.

“Oh, please. I can’t help it. Right now, everything about you irritates me. The sound of your laugh could be a frog croaking.”

“Ouch. That’s brutal. Do I really sound like a frog?” he asked, looking wounded.

I just shook my head at the two of them. They could turn nothing into a full-blown argument without even trying.

“Anyway, Belle—how are things with Dani? How was the first night of being married? Did you finally do it?” Rian asked, shifting her attention to me.

“No! Of course not!” I replied, keeping my eyes anywhere but her face.

“But you’re married. Even if it’s an arranged marriage, you’re still legally bound,” she added, giving me a sly little smile.

“Ha, ha! Rian, your brother wouldn’t lay a finger on me in this life or the next. Not here, not in hell, not even in that fantasy world you keep imagining!”

We kept trading comments about the idea of making love until Gavin jumped in with one of his ridiculous remarks.

“Wow, Rian! And that’s coming from the woman whose husband actually touched her on her first night!” he teased, wearing that smug grin.

“This has nothing to do with my story, Gavin!” she snapped, narrowing her eyes at him.

“How is it different? You both got married for a contract. Oh, wait.” He paused and rubbed his chin.
“That’s it. You’ve been married to Alex for five years, while Sophia’s only been married for one.”

“Ha, ha. Was that supposed to be funny?”

We burst into laughter at his offended expression.

“For God’s sake, Rian. You seriously need to see a doctor. I swear that mysterious ‘G’ is making you bipolar.”

“I hate you! And forget it! You’ll never be my baby’s godparent!” she yelled, crossing her arms like a stubborn child.

“Correction. Godmother.”

“Whatever!” she snapped, rolling her eyes.

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“Anyway, let’s stop this ridiculous fight and go back to what we were talking about.” They both turned their attention to me. “Rian, your brother can’t stand me. Every time we run into each other, he throws judgments and insults at me like it’s his favorite hobby.”

“He doesn’t hate you, Belle,” she insisted, but I couldn’t help laughing as I shook my head.

“Rian, please stop trying to set us up like you’re Cupid. Your brother and I don’t get along. We clash in every possible way, and we were never meant to fit together. And you know why I married him.”

“I know. But can I ask you something?”

I gave her a small nod. “Go ahead.”

“Do you hate him, too?”

A slight frown formed on my forehead. “Are you asking if I hate your brother?” She nodded, waiting.

“No, Rian. I don’t hate him. I just can’t stand the way he acts around me. He never smiles, and he can’t speak to me without frowning or throwing some kind of insult.”

“Belle, if you truly understood him, you’d see he isn’t cold or arrogant. He’s actually one of the sweetest men you could ever meet.”

I opened my mouth to respond, but Gavin cut in before I could.

“Of course he’s sweet with you. You’re his sister. Obviously!”

Rian whipped her head toward Gavin so fast it was a miracle she didn’t pull a muscle.

“Oh my God, Gavin! Can you close your mouth? Or better yet, go to the bathroom and wash your face. You’re shining like you bathed in cooking oil!”

“What?” He touched his forehead as if it might actually be dripping.

“Yeah. You’re greasy.”

“Oh my God! Why didn’t you tell me sooner?” He ran toward the bathroom like his life depended on it.

“You totally lied to him,” I said once he disappeared around the corner.

“Don’t waste your compassion. He’s annoying,” she replied with a shrug. “But honestly, you and he share a few qualities.”

“Who? Gavin?”

“No! My brother, idiot.”

“Huh? And what do we have in common, exactly?”

“For starters, you’re both incredibly stubborn.” She laughed when I squinted at her. “And you both have that strong, commanding personality. Also, I noticed something else. You and he love the same cartoon.”

“SpongeBob?” I asked, caught off guard.

“Yes. He still watches it every day.”

“But how can he watch it when he’s buried in work at the office?”

“He has a phone, Belle. He watches episodes online.”

“Ah... so he’s secretly a child.” I couldn’t help smiling as I pictured him watching SpongeBob at his desk.

“Anyway, there’s something I’ve been dying to ask. Why do you love purple so much? It’s everywhere. The wall in your office is purple, your engagement dress was purple, your whole wedding theme was purple, and your car is practically glowing. Everything is purple.”

A small laugh slipped out before I could stop it.

“Because purple has always been my favorite color. To me, it symbolizes creativity, wisdom, dignity, peace, and the kind of independence I’ve always wanted.”

“Wow! I’ve never heard that.”

“Yeah. And my name, Sophia, means wisdom and intelligence. The color associated with it is purple, which makes me love it even more.”

“Really?”

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I nodded without hesitation.

“And what about the name Daniel?”

“Rian.” I shot her a warning look.

“What? I’m just asking what his name means.”

“Fine.” I rolled my eyes. “Daniel means ‘God is my judge.’”

“And his representative color?”

“White and yellow.”

“Wow. Sounds like someone already looked that up.”

“Did you notice? That’s why I can’t help wondering why you bothered to ask.”

She only let out a soft laugh and didn’t answer.

Daniel’s Point of View:

“You seriously told her to get rid of her car? That’s terrible. What if that thing means something to her?”

I'd just finished telling him everything that happened. Andrew sank into the three-seater sofa across from me.

"And you pressured her to take your credit card? Why? I thought you weren't supposed to care at all," he asked.

"Yes, I did. I just don't want anyone thinking I'm a useless husband who can't give his wife a good life."

"Anyone? Only a handful of people know you're married."

"I know. But I don't want those people thinking I'm not taking care of my wife. And honestly, I don't trust the condition of the car she drives."

"Mmm... so you don't trust her car," he murmured, nodding, though he kept looking anywhere but at me. "Or is this really about proving that between the two of you, you're the one with the power?"

"I have every right to be in charge. I'm the man of that house. And until the European investors finally sign with KI Corporation, I need to keep her out of danger. Keeping her safe is part of my responsibility, Andrew. You know that."

"Of course. You're supposed to protect your wife in every possible way," he said with a knowing smile. "But it seems getting her to follow your decisions isn't as easy as you expected."

"She's even more stubborn than my sister. But I won't give her room to argue. She's going to use the new car I'm buying her, whether she approves or not."

"Ahhh, fascinating. But tell me something. Don't you think she's beautiful?"

"Let's get back to work, Andrew." My expression darkened at the question.

"Oh, come on. Don't kill the vibe. Just answer me."

I shot him a glare.

"Yes. She's beautiful. Satisfied?"

"Good. Now, can I come by your house tomorrow? I don't have work."

"What exactly are you plotting?"

"Nothing. I just want to have lunch with you and see Nanay Emily. I miss her."

“Are you sure it’s Nanay Emily you want to visit? Or are you using her as an excuse to see my wife?” I narrowed my eyes at him, and he only let out a friendly laugh.

“Don’t tell me you’re jealous, Daniel.”

“What are you talking about? I’m not jealous.”

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“Okay, then explain why you don’t want me in your house. And if I really did want to see her, shouldn’t that be fine? I thought you said you didn’t care. Or are you falling in love with her now?”

“Can you stop talking nonsense? I’m not in love with her. And if you’re that eager, fine—visit us every day. Stay as long as you want and stare at her until you’re sick of it!”

My hand clenched into a fist beneath the desk.

“Ahhh... if you only knew how much I’d enjoy seeing her every day. But I won’t stay at your house. I don’t want her to think I’m desperate for her attention.” He straightened and stood up.

“You can go back to work now,” I muttered, turning my attention back to the computer screen.

“Okay. Have a good day, sir.”

Once he left the room, I dragged my fingers through my hair, frustration burning inside me.

Sophia’s Point of View

After showering, I was drying my hair when a soft knock sounded in the hallway.

“You can come in, Nanay Emily.”

She pushed the door open gently and walked over to where I stood.

“Good morning, Anak,” she greeted with a warm smile.

“Good morning, Nanay,” I replied, returning her smile.

“Your friend is waiting for you in the living room. His name is Craig.”

Oh, Craig was here! Hearing that immediately lifted my mood.

“Thank you, Nanay. I figured he’d come today since we planned to rehearse for our upcoming competition in the United States.”

“Wow. Does your husband know about this?”

“No, and I have no intention of telling him because I doubt he’d care.”

“I’m sure he’d be proud to know his wife will be performing in the United States.”

“I doubt it, Nanay.”

I started brushing my hair.

“By the way, have you seen him around?”

“Today is Sunday, and I have no idea if he plans to stay home. Honestly, it might be easier if he doesn’t.”

“No, he left early. He mentioned they had a meeting at La Mirada.”

Mmm. I nodded. "That's good."

"Why? Were you thinking of talking to him about something?"

"No. It's just that Craig and I want to use the pool for our rehearsal."

"Anak, you can use the pool whenever you want. This house is yours too. You don't need his approval."

"Thank you, Nanay."

"Now tell me what you want to eat. Would you like pancakes with chocolate syrup?"

"Yes, Nanay. Thank you so much."

"You're welcome. I'll go make them now."

When she left and the door clicked shut behind her, I got up from the bed and searched for something comfortable to wear. I put on black cotton shorts and a soft gray t-shirt, then let my hair fall over my shoulders without bothering to tie it up. After one last glance in the mirror, I left the room and walked toward the living room.

Craig was lounging on the sofa, but before I could say anything, I saw my cat rolling on the carpet and rubbing her face against his pants.

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“Oh my God! You brought my Cuchita?” I shouted as I hurried toward them, not realizing Nanay Emily had stopped in her tracks behind me.

“How are you, Cuchita? I missed you so much!”

I scooped her into my arms, and she tucked her head under my chin like she always did.

“For God’s sake, woman. Did you really have to shout her name like that?” Craig asked, shaking his head as if he’d given up on me.

“Why shouldn’t I? I missed Cuchita so much!” I replied, planting a kiss on top of her head.

“What did you say her name is?”

Nanay Emily’s amused gaze settled on us as she approached, holding a tray full of pancakes.

“She named her cat Cuchita, Nanay Emily. For God’s sake, can you believe it? She gave a beautiful Persian cat that ridiculous name!”

Emily burst out laughing at his words.

“You need to relax! Look at her, she loves it, don’t you, Cuchita?”

I scratched the cat’s neck, and she rewarded me with a soft meow.

“See? She likes it!”

Nanay Emily’s laughter erupted even louder this time.

“Oh, come on. Did she ever get a say in her own name?”

I couldn’t help rolling my eyes, hugging my cat tightly. “I missed you, Cuchita. Did you miss me too?”

“Eat, Sophia. I’ll go get the juice from the fridge,” Nanay Emily said, shaking her head gently.

“Thank you, Nanay,” Craig and I responded together.

“You’re welcome, Anak.”

As soon as she disappeared into the kitchen, Craig nudged my arm.

“Hey, what does Anak mean?” he asked, already reaching for his pancake.

Sliding onto the bench beside him, I placed Cuchita on my lap.

“Anak means child. In my case, she uses it to mean daughter.”

“Is it a Filipino word?”

“Yes. That’s how Filipino parents address their children.”

“So, does she also call her husband Anak?”

“Yes, but in that case, it means son.”

Mmm. He seemed to think about that for a moment, then looked at me with a mischievous smile.

“Why? What’s that look supposed to mean?” I asked, trying to read his expression.

“Nothing. Just thought of something.”

“And what’s that?”

A little gleam appeared in his eyes as he leaned closer.

“If Daniel and Sophia have already spent the night together, do you think they might have a baby?”

I grimaced at Craig’s ridiculous question, about to give him a piece of my mind, when Nanay Emily’s laugh rang out behind us.

“Of course, Craig! That’s how it works.”

The two of them burst out laughing, high-fiving as she set a tray down on the coffee table.

Honestly, if Nanay hadn’t been present, I might have threatened to turn Craig into cat food for Cuchita.

“See, Nanay agrees with me!”

Craig grinned, waving his hand toward me.

“Maybe so, but now I’m thinking about cutting your salary this month. Any thoughts on that?”

Their laughter died down, and I gave them a sickeningly sweet smile.

“Oh, come on, Sophia. You know I just like to joke around.”

He scratched the back of his neck, still wearing a sheepish grin.

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“It didn’t sound like a joke,” I said, shrugging indifferently.

“But you are joking, right?”

“Not this time.”

I shook my head, playing along.

“I love how close you two are.”

Nanay Emily handed each of us a glass of orange juice, her expression tender.

“Thank you, Nanay,” I replied, accepting my drink.

“At this point, we’re practically sisters, Nanay.”

“We’re like siblings,” I murmured, raising an eyebrow at Craig.

“Wait, I’m a girl too! Don’t forget that,” he shot back with a quick smile, raising his eyebrows.

“Maybe in your dreams.”

Nanay Emily and I shared a knowing laugh while Craig threw me a dramatic look, exaggerating for effect.

“I love it when you call me Señorita. I wish I could pretend I didn’t need ya. But every touch is ooh-la-la-la. It’s true la-la-la.”

“Ohh, I should be running. Ohh, you keep me coming for ya.”

It was the song “Señorita” by Shawn Mendes and Camila Cabello.

“Wait. Was that a little preview of what you’re planning to perform in the United States next week?”

“Mom? Rian?”

I turned and saw my sister and my mother-in-law approaching us, both clapping with wide smiles.

“What brings you here?”

“Actually, I wanted to invite you to lunch. I even texted Craig this morning, and he told me you’d decided to close the studio today so you could focus on training for your competition in the United States.”

“Yes, Mom, we still have some steps to polish. And if you’re thinking about lunch, I can make something for you.”

“Oh no, darling, that won’t be necessary. You don’t have to worry about that at all. We’ve already got lunch sorted. Nanay Emily is in the kitchen preparing everything right now.”

“You’re joking, right? Daniel didn’t even show up.”

“I know he wasn’t here, and that’s okay. He’s not the reason we came.”

Her smile softened as she turned toward her daughter.

“We just wanted to spend time with you,” she said, giving me a kiss on the cheek. “And honestly, we caught a bit of your performance earlier. Every move you made looked incredibly confident and, well, a little sexy.”

“Thank you. That means a lot.”

“What about me?” Craig asked, putting on an exaggerated pout.

“You’re impressive too, Craig.”

“Ah, thank you, Mrs. Kelley. I know I’m pretty good,” he replied with so much pride that both women burst out laughing.

“You know, I’ve been thinking about going with you when you head to the United States next week.”

“Wait, really, Mrs. Kelley?”

“Absolutely. I’ve always been your biggest fan.”

“Thank you, Mom,” I replied, hugging her again.

“No need to thank me, darling. Now, can we see the full routine from start to finish?”

“Of course,” Craig and I responded at the same time.

Before we could get into position, Nanay Emily hurried over with a pitcher of juice and sat down beside Rian.

“Ready to start?” Craig asked, looking at me.

I nodded quickly, and he tapped the screen to start the music.

Chapter 230

Daniel’s Point of View

“Do you hear that?” Andrew said as soon as we walked into the house.

“What are you talking about?” I asked, blinking in confusion.

“Just listen for a second. There’s music playing. You can hear it if you focus.”

I stopped halfway and concentrated on the sounds of the house. Sure enough, a soft beat pulsed from somewhere outside.

“Sounds like it’s coming from the back door,” he said, already heading that way and leaving me standing in the entryway.

Once we passed through the kitchen, the sound grew clearer until it became a full rhythm we could easily recognize.

“Wait. Is that Sophia?”

His eyes went wide the moment he opened the door leading to the pool area.

I stepped out behind him, and the scene waiting for me froze me in place. My wife was dancing with her friend while my mom and my sister cheered them on from their seats.

“Come on. We have to see what they’re doing.”

He practically ran toward them, forcing me to follow whether I wanted to or not.

My gaze stayed fixed on her as I crossed the patio. She wore cotton shorts and a gray t-shirt, and her bare feet glided over the tiles without a care. Her hair had come loose and looked wild, but she didn’t bother fixing it. She just kept moving to the rhythm of the music.

Sophia’s Point of View

“Uh, when your lips undress me, hooked on your tongue. Uh, love, your kiss is deadly, don’t stop.”

“I love it when you call me Señorita. I wish I could pretend I didn’t need ya. But every touch is ooh-la-la-la. It’s true, la-la-la. Ooh, I should be running. Ooh, you know I love it when you call me Señorita. I wish it wasn’t so damn hard to leave ya. But every touch is ooh-la-la-la. It’s true, la-la-la. Ooh, I should be running. Ooh, you keep me coming for ya.”

“Wait! I had no idea you could dance like that, Sophia!” Andrew said, bursting with energy as soon as we stopped.

Everyone applauded along with him. Everyone except the man who hadn't taken his eyes off me since the music started: my husband.

They had approached while we were dancing, but Craig and I pretended not to notice them so we could finish the routine.

"Thank you, Andrew," I replied, flashing a smile as I took the white towel Craig handed me.

"Didn't you have a meeting at La Mirada, son?" his mother asked.

I resisted the urge to turn in Daniel's direction.

"Yes, we were on our way, but everything got canceled at the last minute. Mr. Cheng had a family emergency."

"I see. And what are you planning to do with the rest of your day now that the meeting was canceled?"

"Probably go over last month's sales report. Why do you ask?"

"We just wanted to share lunch with you and your wife, that's all," she replied, giving me a quick glance before Daniel could respond.

