

A Favor 301

Chapter 301

“Mom, she’s my wife.” I let out a short laugh. “Even if I kept it secret, people would notice eventually. She’ll be at my side at all the major events anyway.”

“That’s different, Daniel. At those events, people might speculate, but the entire world wouldn’t immediately know she’s your wife.”

“I honestly don’t understand, Mom. Why does it bother you that I made it official? Why shouldn’t I let everyone know she’s my wife?”

She sighed and leaned back in her seat.

“Because you and I both know this marriage won’t last forever.”

Her words hit hard, making my body tense.

“You think I’m not aware of that, Mom?” I shot back, though something in her tone hurt more than I expected.

“Daniel, by making your marriage public, you put her in the spotlight.”

A crease formed between my brows. "I already assigned her two bodyguards. If that isn't enough, I can double her security."

"That's not what I mean."

"Then what? What, does she have some dark secret? Is she running from someone dangerous? Or did she really marry me just so she could disappear—"

She stopped me with a sharp smack on my hand.

"Enough. I'm not playing." Her gaze was unbreakable. "Her story isn't mine to tell, but there's one thing I need from you."

She reached across the table, taking both my hands in hers.

"I know how you feel. You're not in love with her. But listen to me. Sophia is a good person. Don't judge her decisions until you understand the road she's walked. People have reasons for everything they do."

She offered me a gentle smile before standing and pulling me into a brief hug.

“Talk to her, Daniel. Ask her about her life. When you know her story, you’ll finally understand why she needed you.”

With a reassuring pat on my shoulder, she headed for the door.

Ask her about her story? As if she would ever be honest with me about her life. We barely spoke as it was, and certainly not now.

Daniel’s POV:

“Boss, there’s a meeting scheduled for four o’clock this afternoon at the Downtown mall. It’s with a representative from Asian Industries Corporation,” Andrew said as he walked into my office.

“At the Downtown mall? Did we choose the location, or was that their decision?” I asked, raising a brow.

“No, boss. They contacted us yesterday, and they chose the location themselves.”

“Then why did you agree to hold it at a mall?”

“I assumed that since they’re one of KI Corporation’s top clients, we should accommodate their request.” Andrew offered an awkward smile and rubbed the back of his neck. “And honestly, boss, it’s just for today. It’s rare we get a break from the routine, so I thought we could enjoy the mall for once.”

I laughed. "So you set the meeting there for business... and for fun?"

He shrugged, still smiling.

"Why not? We could even go to the bar afterward, like the old days. It feels like forever since we've done that—probably because you've been completely absorbed with Sophia since you got married."

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I shook my head, a smile tugging at my lips. "If there's anything to blame, it's this new project and the partnership with Mr. Giovanni. I've barely had time for anything else."

"Have we ever had a quiet stretch? Come on, Andrew. We've always been up to our necks in work, but that never stopped you from dragging me out for a drink."

"That was different, and you know it!"

"In what way was it different, exactly?"

Andrew laughed. "You don't even have to answer. It's obvious. These days, you've got Sophia on your mind. Any free second you get, you probably spend thinking about her."

“Who said she’s on my mind?” I shot back, tossing a crumpled paper ball at him. “Believe me, Sophia isn’t worth losing sleep over.”

“Sure,” he said, smiling as he stood. “But you should work on hiding how defensive you sound.” The mischief in his eyes was unmistakable.

“All right, that’s enough. Get back to work, will you?” I glared at him.

“Whatever you say, boss.”

A faint, knowing smile formed on my lips as a plan began to take shape.

“Oh, and Andrew, don’t forget to prepare the presentation with Asian Industries this afternoon.”

“What?” He blinked, stunned. “Weren’t you supposed to handle the project presentation?”

“That was the plan, but I’ve decided it’s your turn. It’s time you stepped up.”

“What? You can’t be serious...”

“That’s enough, Andrew. My decision is final. You can argue with yourself on the way back to your office.” I lifted a brow.

I had to hold back a laugh as he scratched his head, confusion written all over his face, and shuffled out of my office.

Sophia’s POV:

“Are you absolutely sure you want to come with me to the supermarket, my child?” Nanay Emily asked.

I gave her a reassuring smile, nodding for what felt like the fourth time that morning.

“Aren’t you supposed to be busy today?”

“Not at all, Nanay Emily. I don’t have a dance class on my schedule, so I can go with you.”

We walked out to my car, but just as I reached for the handle, one of my bodyguards stepped forward, blocking my path.

“Miss Sophia, we won’t be using your car today,” he said with an uncomfortable expression.

“Excuse me? Why not?”

“Orders from Mr. Kelley. Starting today, you are not to drive your own car.”

For the love of God...

Before I could start protesting, Nanay Emily gently squeezed my arm.

“Listen to him, Anak. Besides, with two more bodyguards now, we wouldn’t all fit in your car anyway.”

My eyes widened in disbelief.

“Wait—two more?” I looked over my shoulder and saw two unfamiliar men lingering just behind Nanay Emily.

“Hm? Didn’t your husband mention the new additions to your security team?”

“He didn’t mention any of this, Nanay Emily.”

Everyone exchanged awkward looks while I tried to make sense of what was happening.

“He’s probably just thinking about your safety, my child. After all, now that the media knows who you are, people will recognize you wherever you go.”

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I let out a slow sigh, biting my lower lip, and didn’t bother arguing. She was right. I just wasn’t used to being someone who needed that level of protection.

Honestly, having bodyguards wasn’t the problem. It was the idea of being watched constantly—never having a moment alone—that unsettled me.

While I was lost in my thoughts, Ben pulled the cover off one of the cars parked in front of us.

My jaw dropped.

“This is your new car, Mrs. Kelley.”

I blinked once, twice, then a third time, half expecting the scene to disappear. But it didn’t. A matte purple Rolls-Royce Cullinan SUV gleamed in the driveway.

“Wow. You really do love purple, don’t you?” Nanay Emily said warmly behind me.

“Mr. Kelley went straight to the manufacturer to ask for a custom color. When they agreed, he made sure you got it in purple.”

All eyes shifted to Ben.

“And how do you know all that?” I turned to him, still stunned.

“I was with him throughout the whole process.” Ben only shrugged, looking completely unfazed.

“That’s actually very thoughtful of him,” Nanay Emily said, nudging me. I tried not to roll my eyes and offered her a weak smile instead.

Before I could recover from the shock, Ben opened the car door. Nanay Emily and I fell silent, both of us staring.

Inside, the seats and panels were a striking combination of white, matte blue, and even more purple.

“Oh my goodness! That’s what you call love,” Nanay Emily exclaimed.

I looked at her the moment she said that last word.

“Love?” I frowned at her.

She giggled and patted my shoulder. “Only someone who’s truly in love would go to these lengths, my child.”

Despite myself, I couldn’t help laughing, shaking my head in disbelief.

“That doesn’t happen in real life, Nanay Emily,” I managed, finally collecting myself.

“In dreams and in love, Sophia, nothing is impossible. When someone matters to you, you surprise yourself with what you can do for them.”

Ben chimed in, snapping his fingers. “Exactly!”

I shot him a look and let out an exasperated groan.

They shared a conspiratorial glance, but I decided not to add anything. Instead, I opened the back door and climbed in. While they kept chatting, my thoughts drifted, trying to decipher Daniel’s intentions. I didn’t want to bring it up, because he would probably mock me for overthinking.

Soon, we made our way through the supermarket aisles with four bodyguards silently trailing our every move. After loading the groceries into the car, I invited Nanay Emily to eat with me at my favorite Italian restaurant in the Downtown mall.

That day, it seemed fate had something planned, because the moment we reached the restaurant entrance, I saw her—deep in conversation with a man who looked about my age.

It was too late to turn around, because she saw me too. Her face lit up as soon as she recognized me, but I quickly looked away, pretending I hadn't noticed her.

"Nanay Emily, can we pick somewhere else to eat? I don't want to stay here anymore," I whispered, squeezing her hand to stop her.

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She paused, frowning in confusion.

"But isn't this your favorite place?"

"It is, but they don't have spaghetti bolognese today. I want that, and I think one of the places upstairs might have it."

"If you say so," she nodded slowly, concern etched into her face. "But, my child, you're being very cold. Are you sure everything's all right?"

A curse flashed through my mind as I realized she was already walking toward us.

“Come on, Nanay Emily,” I insisted, but we both froze when my name rang out behind us.

“Ysabelle.”

My chest tightened. I bit my lip, eyes closed as I heard her call me again. “Belle, honey.”

I let out a long sigh and finally looked up, catching the severe expression Nanay Emily wore as her gaze moved from me to the woman standing in front of us.

“You again?” I asked, turning to her, my voice flat.

“Honey, please. Can we talk?” She stepped closer, her tone soft and pleading.

Ben and the other bodyguards shifted to block her, but I shook my head. They stayed close, silent, while Nanay Emily remained at my side, watching the scene unfold.

“Just listen to me for a moment,” she begged, desperation clear in her eyes.

“What could you possibly explain to me? I already told you—I don’t know who you are!”

“Ysabelle, please, honey...”

“Don’t call me honey. I already told you I’m not your daughter.”

“But I am your mother, Belle. I’m your mother.”

That word stung like salt in an open wound. I clenched my jaw, barely holding myself together.

“Mother?” I repeated, my voice sharp. “Don’t use that word with me. You have no idea what it really means!”

I tried to swallow the pain burning in my throat, but when I saw her tears, my own vision blurred.

“I’m sorry, Belle. Please... I’m begging you to forgive me.”

“You’re sorry? You think that’s enough? You think I’ll just let it go?”

I could barely see through my tears, so I didn't notice the man standing nearby, watching the entire scene. His face was a storm of emotions as he took in my pain and the desperate woman pleading in front of me.

Daniel's POV:

"Hey, isn't that Sophia?"

I shot Andrew a skeptical look when he nodded toward someone behind us. It hadn't even been an hour since our meeting with the representative from Asian Industries had ended.

"Knock it off, Andrew," I muttered, frowning as I reached for my phone, refusing to indulge him.

"I'm not kidding, man! I swear it's her—she's with Nanay Emily."

"If you're messing with me, I swear—" I warned, stubbornly refusing to look back.

He only smiled, unfazed. "Say whatever you want, but you should turn around before you threaten me."

Reluctantly, I let out a sigh and followed his gaze—only to freeze.

It really was her.

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Sophia, hand in hand with Nanay Emily, was walking away from the restaurant entrance. What shocked me most was the woman in her fifties trailing after them, looking desperate. Andrew and I exchanged a confused glance before we sprang to our feet and headed toward the restaurant.

That was when I heard the woman calling Sophia by her middle name.

But what truly stunned me was Sophia's reaction when she turned around, her voice loud and raw.

"Ysabelle, please, my daughter..."

Daughter? Why would she call Sophia that? My confusion deepened, and I couldn't look away, curiosity burning as I watched the tense scene unfold.

"Don't call me that. I'm not your daughter!"

"But I'm your mother, Belle. Please, let's talk..." The woman reached out, trembling.

I stood rooted to the spot, struggling to believe what I was hearing.

Andrew let out a low whistle beside me, clearly shocked too.

“Mother?” Sophia’s eyes blazed as she stared at the woman. “Don’t ever use that word with me again. You have no idea what it means to be a real mother.”

Her words were sharp, packed with fury.

“I’m sorry, Belle. I know I hurt you, but please—I’m begging you to forgive me.”

“You want me to pity you and forgive you?” Sophia wiped her tears and let out a laugh that held the same bitter edge I’d seen before.

Seeing her cry stirred something deep in my chest, and I hated myself for not understanding why she was like this. I almost stepped forward—because a part of me wanted to pull her into my arms and tell her she’d get through it. But I forced myself to stay back when I noticed Andrew watching me.

“What?” I asked, unable to read his expression.

“It’s nothing.” He shrugged, focusing again on what was happening in front of us.

“Please, let me talk to you,” the woman pleaded.

"I don't want to hear anything else from you."

"I missed you every day. I love you, my daughter."

"Don't say that!" Sophia shouted, pointing at the woman. "Don't tell me you love me—that's a lie. You walked away from me. You promised you would come back, and I believed you. I waited for you almost every day, but you never came back. Tell me what kind of mother abandons her own daughter like that."

"Belle, I'm sorry. Let me tell you what happened." The woman tried to reach for her again, but Sophia took a step back, pulling away.

"You don't know anything about what I faced after you disappeared. I cried myself to sleep every night because I couldn't stop wondering what I did wrong. Why did you leave me behind?"

Nanay Emily stepped forward slowly and placed a gentle hand on Sophia's shoulder.

"You don't have the right to ask for forgiveness, because even if I said I forgive you, it wouldn't fix anything. Those years are gone forever." Sophia's voice trembled as she wiped away the last of her tears.

I clenched my fists and tried to steady my breathing. If I'd allowed myself, I would've gone to her right then—just to let her know she wasn't alone.

Sophia shook her head and let out a bitter laugh.

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“You want to know something? Everyone always says a mother is someone who stays by your side no matter what. They act like a mother is the one person who never leaves you. What a joke. If that were true, why were you the first to disappear from my life? When I was sick, when I needed someone to lean on, when things got so bad I could barely stand it... where were you?”

“She almost did what?” Andrew leaned in, frowning.

That question echoed in my mind as Sophia’s words faded. She refused to say more.

“I don’t need you anymore. I learned to survive on my own, and honestly, I’m better off that way.”

When Sophia headed toward the mall exit with Nanay Emily close behind, I slipped aside so they wouldn’t see me.

Andrew leaned in and nudged me. “Why are you hiding?”

“Just shut up,” I snapped as I brushed past him.

At Jack's Bar, at 8:30 p.m., Andrew lifted his beer and shook his head. "Honestly, I can't imagine what Sophia must've gone through as a kid after her mother left."

The speakers blasted music, but Sophia's voice drowned out everything. Her pain echoed in my head, and I couldn't stop picturing her tear-streaked face.

Andrew set his bottle down and continued. "If my mother did that to me, I don't think I could let it go either."

A memory surfaced—my mother's advice the last time we spoke.

"If you really want to understand her, Daniel, ask her about her past. Only then will you see why she did what she did. Only then will you understand why you had to marry her."

Andrew looked up when I pushed my chair back and reached for my wallet. "Where are you going now?"

"That's it for me tonight," I said, tossing a few bills on the table.

He checked his watch and frowned. "Already? It's not even nine. Can't you stay for one more round?"

“Yes, I get it. But just because I’m leaving doesn’t mean you have to.” I made it clear I wasn’t dragging him with me.

“Seriously? You’re ditching me here?”

I clicked my tongue and waved him off. “Stay as long as you want. I couldn’t care less. I just have to go.”

Without another word, I turned my back and headed for the door, not bothering to look back even if he was glaring after me.

It was already ten when I finally got home. The first thing I saw after opening the door was Sophia curled up on the couch. She was lying with her head in Emily’s lap while Emily gently stroked her back.

“Nanay Emily...” I called, but she cut me off immediately.

“Shh.”

That was when I realized Sophia was fast asleep. I stood there for a second, unsure what to say, until Nanay gave me a kind, sad smile. I only shook my head, still unsettled by everything I’d witnessed.

“She fell asleep a little while ago. She was exhausted. The poor thing cried the whole way home,” Nanay whispered softly.

Tear tracks still marked Sophia's cheeks. I thought about telling Nanay Emily I'd seen them earlier at the mall, but I kept it to myself and acted as if I didn't know anything.

"Would you mind taking her to her room?"

I nodded and carefully lifted Sophia into my arms.

"Thank you, Anak."

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Nanay led me upstairs and held the door as I carried Sophia inside and laid her down gently on the bed.

"Nothing hurts a child more than being abandoned by their own mother," she murmured as she pulled the blanket over Sophia.

I said nothing, just watched as Nanay tucked her in.

"But we shouldn't rush to blame her mother. There are things we still don't know. Maybe she had her reasons."

With a quiet sigh, Nanay looked down at Sophia.

“Everything she said to her mother tonight came from deep pain. That pain she’s carried for so long won’t disappear overnight.”

She looked at me with understanding.

“But from where I stand, your wife is stronger than most. Daniel, you’re lucky to have her in your life.”

With those words, she stepped closer to me.

“Is it all right if I go now?”

“Of course,” I replied with a sigh, sliding my hands into my pockets.

She gave my shoulder a reassuring pat before leaving the room.

I stayed by Sophia’s bed for a moment. Watching her sleep, I was struck by how delicate she looked. This side of her was so different from the woman I thought I knew.

The question that always haunted me resurfaced: What made her agree to marry me in the first place? Was it her mother's influence? Or was she trying to settle some old score?

Sophia's POV:

Finding Daniel in the kitchen the next morning caught me off guard. The clock already read nine, and yet he still hadn't left for work.

With his back to me, he moved around the stove, and the sweet aroma of something delicious drifted through the air.

After setting my guitar down, I walked over to make coffee, pretending not to notice him.

"Do you want some pancakes?"

I froze for a second, unsure if he was talking to me. I decided not to answer and kept focusing on the coffeemaker.

A moment later, I heard his voice again.

"I made chocolate pancakes. There's maple syrup too."

I glanced around the kitchen and realized there was no one else. When I finally looked up, I found him watching me, waiting for an answer.

“They go perfectly with coffee, you know.”

My expression must have given away my confusion. Honestly, I couldn’t believe he was talking to me. After taking off his apron, he placed a plate piled with pancakes right in front of me.

“Oh, and Mom wants us to come this Sunday. It’s their twenty-eighth anniversary.”

“Okay,” I replied, nodding as I grabbed another plate. He kept his gaze on me, but I did my best to act like I didn’t notice.

“So, have you taken your new car for a spin yet?”

That question caught me off guard, and I paused before answering.

“We used it yesterday,” I said with a quiet sigh. “Ben mentioned you went through the trouble of customizing the color and the interior.”

“I did.”

“But why go through all that trouble?”

“You once told me it was your favorite color.”

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“Still, you didn’t have to do it. It’s not like I asked for anything special. It’s a custom car, for God’s sake!”

“You don’t have to do anything. Just accept it. It’s just a car.”

His answer left me speechless. I watched him for a moment, wondering if he could really be the same Daniel I’d known these past months.

“Are you going to stare at me all morning, sweetheart?”

His smile held a warmth that made my heart stumble. I stammered and looked away as I stirred my coffee.

“No, of course not.”

“Be ready by six tonight. We’re going out.”

“Where are we going?” His mysterious attitude left me even more confused.

“We have to attend an event.”

“What do you mean?” I blinked, still trying to follow.

“One of my coworkers invited us to his son’s birthday party.”

That made me laugh. “You, going to a kid’s party? That’s something I never expected.”

“Well, sometimes I can make an exception.”

The whole conversation left me incredulous. For once, Daniel wasn’t barking orders or raising his voice. He wasn’t nitpicking or telling me what I’d done wrong. We were just... talking.

I barely recognized him.

That afternoon, at Sophia’s Dance Studio, I heard someone calling out to me.

“Girl, you’ve got a delivery!”

Craig’s shrill voice rang out as he peeked through the door, barely able to contain his excitement.

I kept my focus on the computer, hardly reacting.

“What kind of delivery?”

“Ta-da!”

With dramatic flair, he walked in and lifted a bouquet of red roses.

“Wait—flowers?” Surprise left me momentarily speechless. I had no idea who would send something like that.

“That’s right. Gorgeous, aren’t they?”

“Are you sure they’re for me?”

“Unless there’s another Sophia Ysabelle hiding in here, I’d say they’re all yours.”

“Who would send me flowers out of nowhere?”

“No idea. The card doesn’t have a name, just a pair of initials.” Craig shrugged as he set the bouquet on my desk.

I took the small card and read it quickly. He was right. Only “T. M.” was written beneath a playful note: “Life is short, smile while you still have teeth.”

A laugh slipped out as I read it, but the humor faded when my eyes returned to the two initials.

“T. M.? Who is that supposed to be?” I muttered, more to myself than anyone.

“Touch Mobile!”

His answer made me whip my head around, brows raised in disbelief. He only shrugged, still trying to keep a straight face.

“Hey, I’m just guessing. Someone has to solve the mystery, right?”

“Touch Mobile. Ha, ha, ha. You’re ridiculous.”

For a minute, our laughter filled the empty studio.

“But seriously, who would send me flowers out of nowhere?”

“Maybe you have a secret admirer.”

“A secret admirer? What do you take me for, a high school girl?”

“Oh, please, they’re just flowers! You know, you should feel lucky someone thought to send you flowers. I’ve spent my whole life waiting to receive even one bouquet, and here I am—still waiting, still dreaming.” He made a show of wiping away imaginary tears.

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“You’re ridiculous. If you like them so much, keep them,” I said, rolling my eyes at his performance.

“Really?” His face lit up at the idea.

“Really. Take them home if you want. They’re yours now.”

“Thank you!”

I only nodded as he ran out the door with the flowers in his arms, practically glowing.

Daniel slipped his hand into mine as we got out of the car, our fingers interlacing as we headed for the entrance.

“How old is the birthday boy turning?” I asked as we approached the door.

“Sixteen,” Daniel replied, holding my gaze for a moment.

Suddenly, he released my hand and rested his palm gently on the small of my back, sending a small jolt through me.

“Keep smiling, love. You never know if there are paparazzi lurking inside,” he whispered near my ear, pulling me closer.

I was about to respond when someone called his name from behind.

“Daniel!”

“Robert, it’s good to see you. How are you?”

Daniel removed his hand from my back and stepped forward to give the older man a quick hug.

“How’s business? I heard your company topped the charts in California this year. Congratulations!”

“Thanks, Robert.” Daniel shook his friend’s hand warmly.

Robert glanced at me, curiosity on his face. “And who is this lovely lady? Your girlfriend?”

With a gentle tug, Daniel wrapped an arm around my waist, drawing me closer. Out of nowhere, he pressed a soft kiss to my forehead.

“This is my wife, Mrs. Sophia Kelley,” Daniel said, his voice brimming with pride. He winked at me playfully as he introduced me.

“Are you serious? You’re not joking, right?” Robert’s jaw dropped.

“Not this time, Robert. We’re really married.” Daniel laughed, lifting my hand to show our wedding rings.

“Incredible! How come I never got an invitation to your wedding?”

“That’s another story. But don’t worry—I promise you’ll get an invitation to the next one.”

That caught me off guard, and I stared at him.

A second wedding? What the hell did he mean by that?

“You’re a lucky man, Daniel. She’s a real beauty.” Robert chuckled and gave him a firm pat on the shoulder.

“Sophia, I’m Robert Peterson, the proud grandfather of the birthday boy.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you.” I offered Robert a warm smile and extended my hand to greet him.

“The pleasure is mine. I’m Sophia Kelley—the remarkable woman who managed to conquer this stubborn man.”

Robert leaned in as if to kiss my cheek, but before he could, Daniel’s hand gently blocked him. Robert and I both turned to Daniel, surprised.

“Sorry, Robert. But nobody kisses my wife except me.”

“Since when did you get so territorial, Daniel?”

“I’m serious. I get pretty possessive when it comes to what’s mine.”

The moment he wrapped his arms around me and pulled me against his chest so Robert could see, I almost lost my breath.

Chapter 310

He tried to make it sound like a harmless joke, but something in Daniel had changed lately. First, there was the car—not just any car, but one made exactly to my taste. Then he started cooking for me, a scene I never thought I’d witness. He’d also become much gentler, speaking softly and never losing his temper. And now he was dropping hints about a second wedding.

Honestly, I half expected him to pull out another surprise at any moment.

“Ready to go in?”

“Yes... sure. Let’s go.” I let out a quiet sigh as his hand settled warmly on my back again.

Inside, Daniel moved through the venue, introducing me to every businessman he knew. Each time he introduced me as his wife, people looked at me twice, surprised. What truly puzzled me, however, was how many businesspeople were there. It was supposed to be a birthday party for a sixteen-year-old.

I reached for Daniel's sleeve when we got to our table. "I thought this was a kid's party," I whispered. "From the looks of it, his parents invited more CEOs than classmates."

He pulled his chair closer, draping an arm over the back of mine, anchoring me at his side in front of everyone.

"They want their son to mingle with industry leaders while he's still impressionable. I guess they think the sooner he gets used to these people, the easier it'll be for him to fit into the family business later."

I couldn't help laughing and shaking my head.

"Wow. You have to be kidding me. He's just a kid. Wouldn't it make more sense for his parents to let him enjoy his teenage years and support whatever dream he has, no matter what it is?"

"It's their decision, not ours." Daniel only shrugged.

I was about to answer when someone called his name from behind. I was so lost in my own thoughts about the boy that I barely noticed the tenderness in Daniel's voice.

“I will never do that to my own children. No matter what, I’ll support them and let them pursue whatever future they want,” I murmured, almost without realizing it. The words slipped out as my eyes fell on his shoulder, more like a confession to myself than a declaration.

“That won’t happen to our children. I promise you.”

I snapped my head up, startled. “Wait—what?”

He only smiled, lips curving into a mysterious grin, and slowly shook his head. I stared at him as he said nothing more.

“Excuse me, sir, ma’am.”

Daniel and I looked up at the young man who had approached our table.

“I’m JV, the event photographer. Would you mind if I took a photo of you two?”

“Of course,” Daniel answered, nodding before I could respond.

“Thank you! Please look at the camera. Great. On three—one, two, three... smile!”

“Thank you very much.”

“Could you send us a copy of the photo?”

“Of course. I’ll bring you a printed copy in about fifteen minutes.”

As soon as the photographer was far enough away not to hear us, I leaned toward Daniel, unable to resist my curiosity.

“Why did you want a copy of our photo?”

He shrugged casually. “I just want to keep a memento.”

I raised a brow, puzzled. “A memento?”

“Because this is our—”

“Daniel!” a woman called, cutting him off before he could finish.