

A Favor 331

Chapter 331

“Wait.” His eyes widened, and he shot to his feet. “Who said anything about complaining? I’m devoted to the cause! I live for this job. Truly, I could fill your day with the most absurd reasons to miss meetings. You want fresh coffee every morning? I’m your guy!”

My smile deepened.

“You? Didn’t you just say you were tired of running after me?”

“Never. I’m fully committed. I’ll handle your appointments—leave everything to me,” he promised as he headed for the door.

“And where do you think you’re going now?”

“To my office, boss. Someone has to keep this place running.”

I couldn’t help laughing as he left and closed the door behind him.

Daniel’s POV:

“Mr. Kelley, a man named Nonato Alejandro is waiting outside. He introduced himself as your private investigator and wants to speak with you.”

“Let him in, Denise.”

After taking a deep breath, I watched the detective Andrew had helped me hire step into the office a moment later.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Kelley.”

“Good afternoon to you as well, Mr. Alejandro. Please, have a seat.”

He sat across from my desk, and I didn’t waste time.

“How is the investigation going? Did you find anything about my wife’s past?”

“Yes, sir. Before marrying you, she was Sophia Yzabelle Anderson Del Mundo. She was born in Bolonia, Italy, and completed her studies there through high school. She finished university here in California.”

“University here in California?”

He confirmed with a nod.

“Sophia is the only child of Janette and Romano Del Mundo. Her parents owned a modest sausage shop in Bologna. They separated when she was ten, and her mother left that same year.”

“So it’s true her mother abandoned her when she was still a child.”

“Do you know why her parents separated? And what is her connection to Félix De Luca?”

“I suspect the separation was due to financial difficulties.”

He placed a brown envelope in front of me.

Inside were several photographs showing Romano Del Mundo shaking hands with Nickolas De Luca during the signing of a contract. According to the document prepared by Nickolas, he agreed to lend Romano enough money to keep his business from sinking. In return, Romano’s daughter was expected to marry Nickolas’s only son—who turned out to be Félix.

“What is this supposed to mean? Was he her ex-boyfriend?”

“To be precise, he was her fiancé, Mr. Kelley.”

I gripped the photos tighter. Heat rose in my chest as I fought to rein in my temper.

“So he really was her ex-fiancé.”

“Then tell me why the wedding never happened. Why did she leave Italy? And why did she suddenly decide to study in California?”

“At the moment, Mr. Kelley, I still don’t have answers for why the engagement was broken or why she left Italy. I’ll try speaking with her former neighbors. Someone may remember what happened back then.”

He hesitated, then added, “I also suggest investigating Bryan Delgado. He’s close to your wife. I don’t know how long they’ve known each other, so I can’t say whether he knows anything about her past.”

“Wait. Are we talking about Bryan Delgado, the owner of the Agencia de Detectives Delgado?”

“Yes, sir. That’s him.”

“Sir, it may be difficult to tail that man.”

I leveled him with a hard look. "What do you mean by that?"

"He's trained to notice when someone is watching him, since it's his field of expertise. He knows every trick there is."

"I don't care who that man is!" I snapped, slamming both palms on the desk. "I need you to follow my instructions. I don't care if he runs the biggest detective agency in the world. Just do what I'm asking, understood?"

"Yes, Mr. Kelley."

"I need you to assemble a team to watch his every move. Payment won't be an issue. I already sent half of what we agreed on. Check your account."

"Understood, sir. As for her mother, Janette Del Mundo, she now lives in Seattle with her teenage son. He's sixteen."

"So Sophia has a younger brother?"

He nodded slowly.

"Her mother spends her days volunteering at the Fundación Calamity de Seattle. The last place she traveled to was Amador City. It's the same city your wife visited not long ago."

“You mean the two of them crossed paths there?”

“I can’t say for certain, sir. It’s possible, but I don’t have confirmation.”

After he left, I stared at the photographs scattered across my desk.

Why did she break the engagement? Did she run from him? What made her leave Italy?

Sophia’s POV:

“Good morning, Nanay Emily.”

I wrapped my arms around her waist as she cooked breakfast, the smell of eggs filling the kitchen.

“Good morning, dear. Did you sleep well?” she asked, smiling over her shoulder as she patted my hands.

I hesitated, biting my lip. “I slept well, Nanay.”

Days had passed, each one marked by the same series of nightmares. Félix haunted my dreams, and the memory of him wouldn't let me rest. I tossed and turned every night, and the exhaustion drove me to see a doctor, who ended up giving me something to help me sleep.

Standing at the counter, I was lost in my thoughts and didn't notice Daniel until I felt him behind me.

"Do you want me to make your favorite coffee this morning?" Nanay Emily offered, turning off the stove.

"Thanks, Nanay Emily, but I'll take care of it," I replied.

When I turned, I saw Daniel approaching.

"Sit here."

"Huh?" Confusion crossed my face as he gently took my hand and led me to a stool by the counter.

"What happened under your eyes?" His thumb brushed my cheek, and when I tried to pull away, he kept watching me. "Tell me where those dark circles came from. Are you still having those nightmares?"

I parted my lips, but the words stuck in my throat.

“You don’t have to answer. I can tell just by looking at you.” He moved around the counter, determination in his eyes. “Starting tonight, you’ll be staying in my room. You need rest, and I won’t take no for an answer.”

“Wait, what did you just say?”

Chapter 333

Before either of us could say anything else, a clatter sounded from the other side of the kitchen. We turned to find Nanay Emily smiling as she bent to pick up a fallen spoon.

“Oh, don’t mind me. Just keep talking.”

Daniel stood with his back to me, silent for a moment, as if the conversation were already over.

Did he really say I should sleep in his room?

He turned toward me and set a cup of coffee on the counter. “You heard me the first time. I’m not repeating myself.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“Do I look like I’m joking?”

There wasn’t a trace of doubt in his stare, and I swallowed hard, suddenly nervous.

“What reason would I have to do that? Why would I suddenly decide to sleep in your room?” My voice sharpened as my frustration rose.

“I’m just saying you should sleep there. Is it really such a big deal?”

“Having my own space isn’t a crime. Why would I give it up just to share it with you?”

The very idea of sleeping in his room made me want to laugh. I would rather endure another nightmare than agree to that.

“If you’re close, I can wake you up if you have more nightmares.”

I let out a sarcastic laugh as I shook my head. “Absolutely not,” I said, grabbing the coffee and turning my back on him.

“Sophia!”

“No. No!” I kept moving, leaving the kitchen and heading into the living room.

“Sophia, come back here and listen to me!” he shouted, his voice echoing through the mansion.

Stopping short, I turned and glared at him. “I’m not moving into your room, and I already told you that. Remember, Mr. Kelley, pretending to be your wife was only part of our agreement—for everyone else’s sake, not inside this house!”

“To hell with that so-called agreement.” He stepped closer, eyes narrowing. “You keep insisting there’s nothing wrong with you staying in my room. So what’s the real problem? Are you afraid something will happen if we’re both in there?”

The moment the words left his mouth, my jaw dropped. Heat rushed up my neck as he smiled, clearly enjoying himself.

“Or maybe it’s you you’re worried about. What if you’re the one who can’t handle being that close to me?”

“You have to be kidding.”

“Don’t worry, sweetheart. I won’t object.” He winked. “If you end up wanting something to happen, I’ll be right here.”

“Not in your dreams, Mr. Kelley! And for the record, you’re the one who always reminds me not to break our agreement. Now you’re saying it doesn’t matter?” I practically spelled out the last word. “You know what? Do whatever you want, but I’m not setting foot in your room. That’s my final word.”

Just as I started up the stairs, his voice stopped me.

“Fine. Then I’ll have Nanay Emily pack up everything from your room and move it into mine. I’ll even make sure your old room is locked.”

“Go ahead. There are still two empty rooms in this house, and I’ll just sleep in one of those.”

Chapter 334

A wicked laugh slipped out of him as he came closer. “You think I’ll leave those doors open? I’ll lock them all. Let’s see where you try to sleep then.”

“You can’t be serious!” I snapped.

“Fine. If that’s how you want to play, I’ll sleep right here on the living room couch!”

“Fine, but don’t be surprised if you wake up and find yourself in my bed.” He shrugged, casual, and something about it only fueled my irritation.

“Why are you so determined to do this, Mr. Kelley?” Jaw clenched, I glared at him. “Seriously—what’s the real reason you’re suddenly forcing me to sleep in your room? Is it really just the nightmares, or is there something else?”

“I already told you the reason, Sophia.”

“That’s not good enough! You’re not telling me everything. Be honest.” The words slipped out before I could stop them, and I stared at him, horrified. “Are you secretly expecting something more?”

He let out a laugh, and that was when I realized I’d said it out loud.

In the kitchen, the others exchanged looks, quietly watching our argument. To them, Daniel’s relaxed, teasing tone seemed like a sign that maybe—just maybe—things were getting better between us.

“Can you blame me? I’m still a man, Sophia. Men have thoughts, you know.”

“So you admit it? You’re having those kinds of thoughts about me? I thought I wasn’t your type!”

“Sure, I said you’re not my usual type. That doesn’t mean I can’t use my imagination. All sorts of things can come to mind.”

“For God’s sake! Seriously, you’re unbearable! You really want me to sleep in your room? You’re a pervert!” I could only stare at him in disbelief.

“Hey, I’m just joking. I won’t lay a finger on you if that’s what you’re worried about. You’re safe with me—unless,” he added, voice lowering, “you’re the one who can’t keep your hands to yourself. Then, well... I can’t make any promises, can I?”

“Unbelievable! Daniel Kelley, you’re completely insane!”

My voice echoed down the hall as I ran up the stairs, leaving him grinning at the bottom.

When I reached the landing, his voice caught up with me. He was coming after me, persistent as always.

“Oh, come on, sweetheart—don’t criticize me before you’ve tried me! Haven’t you ever thought about having a baby with me?”

“Ugh, disgusting! Will you stop it already?” I spun around, glaring at him, my coffee still in hand. “How do you expect me to sleep in your room after hearing all that nonsense?”

“Relax. I’m just joking.”

“Well, you can joke all you want, but I will never agree to stay in your room—not in a million years!” I snapped.

I slammed the door before he could say another word.

“Sophia, come on! Open the door!”

He started knocking, refusing to give up, but I dropped into the terrace chair, feeling the cool breeze and my own stubborn satisfaction.

“Knock until you’re tired, Daniel. I’ll be out here, so do whatever you want.”

Sophia’s POV:

“Sophia, someone’s here to see you.”

Chapter 335

Craig’s voice carried from the reception, but I barely glanced his way. I was too focused on guiding my class through the next sequence.

“I have a visitor?” I frowned. I didn’t remember making plans with anyone today.

“You do. Are you coming out, or should I let them in?”

“Who wants to see me?” I asked, keeping my hips moving to the beat as I led the students through the choreography. With so many dancers filling the studio, I couldn’t see past their reflections in the mirror.

“If you turn around, you’ll find out.”

When I turned toward the back of the room, my eyes landed on my husband’s face. The shock of seeing him there froze me for a second, and my next step sent me tumbling to the floor.

“Ouch!” A sharp jolt shot up my back, and I swallowed a cry.

“Sophia! Are you hurt?” Craig hurried over, worry etched all over his face, but before he could reach me, a pair of strong arms slid beneath my shoulders and lifted me up. The warmth of his hands sent a shiver straight down my spine.

Without a word, he knelt beside me, carefully checking my legs for any sign of injury. His focus made it hard to find my voice.

“Are you hurt?” His voice was soft, threaded with concern as he looked up at my face.

A strange warmth washed through me, and I managed to nod, hoping he wouldn’t notice how shaken I was by the way his touch lingered.

Someone cleared their throat behind us, snapping me back to myself. Looking over his shoulder, I saw Rian and Alex smiling—Rian cradling little Jona, with Dino tugging Alex by the hand.

“We didn’t want you to think we’d miss the fun,” Rian said lightly, her tone teasing.

“Hi, Aunt Belle!”

“Hi, Dino,” I replied with a warm smile, choosing to ignore Daniel and focus on everyone else.

I greeted each of them before taking Jona into my arms.

“Hello, beautiful. How have you been?” I whispered, pressing a gentle kiss to her forehead. Jona rewarded me with a bright smile, snuggling closer until her head rested against my chest. The sweetness went straight to my heart. “You’re so sweet.”

A hand settled on my shoulder, and the scent of his cologne told me immediately who it was.

“She really is a treasure, sweetheart.”

I looked up, only to find his attention fixed completely on me. “You know, we could have a baby. Or maybe even fill the house with an entire soccer team.”

“Daniel Kelley!” I cut him off, shooting him a glare, but he only laughed, making Rian and Alex flinch at the sudden sound.

“Sweetheart, are we invisible, or do they not realize we’re here?” Rian murmured to her husband, shaking her head with a small laugh.

Alex slipped an arm around her shoulders and chuckled. “Looks like we’re interrupting their little universe.”

I carried Jona into my office and motioned for everyone to follow. “Come on. Let’s get settled in here.”

Chapter 336

“Wow, Belle! Since when are you obsessed with flowers?” Rian’s eyes widened the moment she walked in and saw them all.

“Should we expect you to open a flower shop soon, or are you redecorating the studio?”

Craig and I shared a smile at her playful teasing. “Actually, none of these arrangements are mine. Your sister’s secret admirer sent them, and the only clue we have is that the sender signed with the initials T.M.”

Both Rian and Alex looked stunned. “T.M.?”

Daniel's gaze locked on me, his face turning into a mask. "So now you're receiving flowers from a secret admirer?"

Rian arched a brow. "Since when is that a problem, Daniel? She has a right to have a little excitement in her life."

"Because we have a deal, Rian. While she's my wife, she's off-limits to anyone else—including admirers." His tone went cold as his eyes settled on me.

"Relax, Mr. Kelley. I'm not encouraging anyone. If someone is determined to send me flowers every day, it's not my fault—especially when I have no idea who's sending them."

"Really, Sophia? Maybe you can fool everyone else, but not me. You could've returned those flowers to whoever sent them."

"Then enlighten me. How am I supposed to do that when I don't even know who the person is?"

"So that's it? If you wanted to, you could refuse the deliveries. But the fact is, you keep letting them pile up."

"Actually, Daniel, she isn't the one signing for the deliveries. I am. I convinced her that having flowers in her office would brighten the place up. Don't worry—she's only kept the cards. The flowers? They're all mine."

He smiled and leaned in, pretending to kiss the petals of a deep red rose.

Rian shook her head, smiling. "There's nothing wrong with accepting flowers, brother. Belle is young, single, and she has every right to enjoy a few gifts. It would only be a problem if her marriage were real."

"Go change. Now." Daniel ignored her and turned to me.

I blinked at him. "Why do I have to change?"

"Because we're taking the kids out. Come on—you deserve a break!" Rian chimed in.

Daniel's eyes dropped to my outfit and he muttered, "Unless you want to go out in that black top and those gray leggings..."

"And why would that be a problem? If I really wanted to, I could go out with you in a bikini. Wouldn't that get everyone's attention?"

His jaw tightened and his eyes narrowed, clearly growing more irritated with every word.

“Go ahead. Try it, sweetheart. But don’t blame me if I drag you back and wrap you in something that covers you from head to toe.”

Everyone turned to stare at him, startled by the sudden edge in his voice. A mischievous thought slipped into my mind. I closed the distance between us, cupped his face in both hands, and spoke in the sweetest tone I could manage. “Relax, sweetheart. You don’t have to worry. I’m yours, remember?”

Then I gave his cheek a soft, playful tap before stepping away.

Chapter 337

He looked too stunned to respond while the others failed—miserably—to hold back their laughter.

A while later, after leaving the restaurant, Daniel brought me to a boutique. The sales staff looked up as we walked in, curious about our sudden entrance.

“Why are we here, Daniel?” I lowered my voice and shot him a questioning look.

His hand settled at the small of my back as he smiled. “We’re choosing some new dresses for you. That’s why.”

“You really don’t have to do this. I already have enough dresses...” The rest of my protest died when he silenced me with a kiss, leaving me breathless and slightly stunned in the middle of the boutique.

He smiled, that playful glint in his eyes. “You know, I could kiss those lips of yours every time you talk back.”

I let out a dramatic sigh and gave him an exaggerated look.

Slipping away, I wandered through the boutique in silence, searching for something bold enough to make him regret bringing me here—maybe something too bright, or just something he’d hate.

A moment later, I looked up and saw him motioning to two sales associates.

“Could you help my wife try these on?” he asked, tipping his head toward the imposing pile of dresses he’d loaded into the cart.

My jaw nearly dropped. “You seriously want me to try on every single one of these dresses?”

He nodded, determined. “I picked them out for you. And we’ll take everything that fits you perfectly.”

“But... Mr. Kelley...” I stammered, correcting myself just in time. “I mean, sweetheart, you know my closet is already full. I really don’t need more clothes.” I hesitated, glancing at the associates, who were watching us with barely restrained smiles.

“It’s fine, sweetheart. You know how much I adore you.”

Internally, I rolled my eyes at his show. Charming.

“I just want to see you smile, love. I’ll do anything for that.”

I bit my tongue to keep from rolling my eyes again and resisted the urge to throw a sarcastic remark back at him.

So now he wants credit for driving me insane? I thought, nerves prickling. Still, I forced my voice into something sweet. “Sure, sweetheart. I know you’d do anything for me.”

A persistent suspicion lingered: was he enjoying this little performance?

Turning to the associate on my left, I offered a polite smile. “Would you mind helping me in the fitting room?” I asked.

Before she could answer, Daniel’s voice cut through the air. “I love you, sweetheart.”

The words caught me off guard and nearly made me cough. Still, I kept my composure, smiling stiffly at the woman before looking back at my so-called husband.

"I love you too," I managed, my cheeks burning as heat crept up my neck.

Turning away to hide my embarrassment, I tried to make a quick escape—until his next demand stopped me cold.

"Then where's my kiss, sweetheart?"

He was right behind me, and his voice sounded entirely too smug.

Chapter 338

My mind reeled. A kiss? Was he serious? I looked at the associate, needing confirmation that I'd heard him correctly. Had he really just asked me for a kiss?

She nodded, her smile widening. "Yes, ma'am, he did."

"Come on. If you love me, prove it with a kiss." He smiled, waiting for my reaction.

I turned back, squared my shoulders, and met his gaze.

"You want a kiss, sweetheart?" My voice barely rose above a whisper as I cradled his face between my hands. Leaning in, I spoke softly into his ear. "Then you'd better get used to kissing your own reflection."

His playful confidence wavered when his hazel eyes darkened.

“No.”

Not again with the rejection. I almost sighed. In the end, what did he want from me? My patience frayed as he rejected yet another dress.

Dress number seven—a green, off-the-shoulder one—never stood a chance.

He looked at me and his eyes flicked to the neckline. “No. It shows too much skin.”

The eighth was royal blue, with thin straps and a slit on one side that climbed dangerously high.

“That one isn’t much better. Too exposed.”

Unbelievable, Daniel Kelley, I thought, clenching my fists as I disappeared into the fitting room again. My patience was hanging by a thread, but when I saw the last dress on the hanger, a wicked idea struck.

You wanted something bold—so I went all in for the ninth outfit: a long crimson gown with delicate straps, a plunging neckline, and two front slits that left nothing to the imagination. The open back was the cherry on top.

That dress was basically a checklist of everything he couldn't stand. Too daring. Too revealing. The kind of dress that sent a very clear message.

He barely noticed when I stepped out—he was absorbed in a phone call, completely unaware of the scene unfolding.

Walking up to him, I let my tone drip with sickly sweetness. "Hi, handsome," I called, turning on the charm.

His head snapped up, and he nearly forgot how to breathe.

I turned slowly, giving him a full view, just to see his reaction.

"Be honest. Do you like it?"

"Mmm... absolutely not. No way," he blurted.

I had to work hard to hide my amusement. "Come on, love. Don't you think I look spectacular?" I asked, fluttering my lashes and feigning innocence.

He stared at me and replied firmly, "Sophia, that one is not happening."

"But I thought you said you'd do anything to make me happy. Isn't that what love means?" My tone was playful and dramatic all at once.

People nearby couldn't help but watch us, each reacting in their own way.

He sprang up from the sofa and grabbed my arm before I could react.

Leaning in, his voice dropped to a harsh whisper. "Take that dress off. Right now."

Defiance sparked in my eyes. "Actually, I love how it looks on me," I shot back.

"Sophia, for the love of God! Are you going to put something else on, or do I need to follow you into the fitting room and make sure you do?"

Chapter 339

Meeting his stare, I clenched my hands into fists. "Fine. Whatever you say."

Time seemed to drag as I tried on nearly every outfit in the store. At last, the sofa welcomed me again. He finally nodded his approval at a stack that included five evening gowns, five coats, four different skirts, and several pairs of shoes he personally selected.

When it was time to pay, he silenced any protest with a warning: if I tried to insist, he'd plant a kiss on me right there in front of everyone. So I let him handle the transaction without a word.

"Thank you, sir." Once the purchase was complete, he slipped the card back into his pocket and gave the cashier a polite nod. He didn't have to say a word before his bodyguards swooped in and picked up the mountain of shopping bags waiting on the counter.

"You're welcome, sir."

With a bright smile, I winked at the associates. "Thanks for all your help, girls."

He tugged me toward the exit, taking my hand. "We're leaving," he said, leaving no room for debate.

Still smiling, I offered to grab the remaining bags. "How about I help with these?" I suggested, but he only shot me a look that said everything. I shrugged, dropped it, and stayed quiet.

A sly smile curved on my lips as I remembered my little plan from earlier. The memory surfaced clearly...

"Do you know all the dresses my husband said no to?" I asked softly, catching one of the associates during the fitting session.

“Yes, ma’am. I remember all of them.”

“Perfect. I want you to wrap them up. Those are actually my favorites.”

“Seriously, ma’am?” she blurted, looking close to panicked, but I couldn’t help laughing at her expression.

Leaning in conspiratorially, I slipped two hundred dollars into her palm and whispered, “Let this stay between us, okay?” I pressed a finger to my lips and gave her a playful wink.

For a moment, she only stared at me, stunned. Then a grin spread across her face, and she nodded.

Sophia’s POV:

Buzzing with excitement, I was eager to get home and change. Craig and I had planned to go to the movies with some friends that night.

My enthusiasm vanished the moment I struggled to open the door to my room.

No matter how many times I twisted the handle, it wouldn’t budge. I was sure I’d left it unlocked before I left.

“Nanay Emily, do we have a spare key for my room?” I asked, frustration driving me into the kitchen.

“Of course, but what happened? Why do you need the spare?” she asked, pausing as she untied her apron.

“My door is locked, and honestly, I don’t know how that happened. I need to shower and get ready for girls’ night.”

“Oh, Anak, I was going to tell you this morning—we already moved all your things into your husband’s room.”

My eyes widened in disbelief. Was she serious?

Chapter 340

“I’m sorry, Nanay Emily—could you repeat that, please?” I asked, trying to process what she’d said.

“We moved everything. Your things are in your husband’s room now.”

What?

I stared at her, then let out a startled laugh—half amused, half furious.

Unbelievable. He really moved all my things so I'd have no choice but to sleep in his room.

Hadn't we already talked about this?

I pressed a hand to my forehead and groaned, feeling my frustration spike.

Now what? Did I really have to share a room with him? Who in their right mind came up with ideas like this? Honestly, Daniel Kelley, keep this up and you'll be lucky if you don't end up in pieces!

"Oh, Anak, you're probably wondering about the spare key," she added, pausing just long enough to make me nervous. "He put it in his safe—in his room."

You've got to be kidding me. He actually locked the spare keys in a safe just to keep me out of my own room? How far would this man go? My jaw nearly hit the floor.

"Can you believe that? It's ridiculous and almost clever at the same time."

"Everything is neatly arranged—your shoes and even your guitar. It's all in his closet," she said with a gentle smile.

“Well, what else can I do? It’s not like I have a choice,” I snapped, and we both knew I was cornered. “Oh, and by the way, please tell my dear, authoritarian husband that I won’t be home tonight. I’m staying over with my friends.”

Running my hands through my hair in exasperation, I started toward the door, but before I could leave, she called my name.

“Sophia.”

She crossed the room and took my hands in hers.

“Your husband has a good heart, Anak. I watched him grow up long before you came. He has bad days, and he can test anyone’s patience, but I promise you, he’s a good man.” She stepped closer and brushed a few loose strands of hair from my face.

Taking a slow breath, I wrapped my hands around hers. “I understand, Nanay Emily. Everyone here keeps telling me how kind he is, and I don’t doubt your words at all. But I don’t know how to open up to him. We’re complete opposites, and it feels like we can’t go a single day without arguing.”

“Still, you can try, Anak. That’s all I’m asking. I know he hurt you with his words when your marriage began, but I’ve seen him change since the moment you stepped into this house. You brought a change into his life, even if he hasn’t admitted it.”

I wished I could tell her those changes didn't affect me. I wished I could say I didn't notice the way he softened, or how careful he became around me. I stayed quiet, not ready to share feelings I couldn't even name. I didn't want to get used to any of it. Deep down, I was afraid that one day everything would return to how it was before the wedding.