

A Favor 341

Chapter 341

"I need to go, Nanay Emily."

I offered her a small smile before turning toward what was apparently my room now.

A quiet sigh slipped out as I stepped inside. The entire space was flooded in white, gray, and black.

Wow. Those colors suited him far too well. Gray for the emotion he never showed. Black for that severe, unyielding presence he carried everywhere.

As I moved toward his nightstand, I noticed a framed family photo beside the lamp. Another picture showed him in a softball uniform, standing proudly beside Alex and a handful of friends.

The closet caught my attention. It was easily twice the size of mine. Curiosity made me open a drawer, and when I pulled it out, I nearly stopped breathing. It was filled with rows of flavored condoms.

Stunned, I picked up one of the boxes. "Strawberry?" I murmured, reading the label.

"Seriously, why would anyone need this many?" I added before putting them back and closing the drawer. I hadn't even known there were so many different kinds.

On the bright side, the rest of his closet looked like something out of a magazine. Every shirt and suit was impeccably organized by color, even the ties and matching accessories.

“Impressive, Mr. Kelley.”

At last, I found my own things neatly put away. I slipped into a fitted black dress that hit just above my knees, grabbed a red jacket for a pop of color, and pulled on my favorite stilettos.

The moment I stepped into his bathroom, his scent wrapped around me. The soap, his cologne—everything clung to the air.

Unease settled in when reality hit. Sharing a room was one thing, but a closet, a bathroom, and... wait. My eyes widened. And the bed, too? Oh, no. Absolutely not. If he thought he could pull this, he could have the couch. I'd sleep comfortably tonight.

“Are you kidding? He really moved all your things into his room?”

My friends' reactions made me roll my eyes. After the movie, we'd gone straight to the bar to unwind.

“And you just let him? So you two are playing house now or what?”

“Please. That’s not how this works. There’s no way I’m sharing a bed with him. He’ll be lucky if I let him get near the sheets. Tonight, he’s sleeping on the couch.”

“Poor guy. I almost feel sorry for him.”

A couple of hours passed. We lost track of time, dancing and singing in the middle of the floor. Suddenly, Ben tapped my shoulder, holding up his phone so I could see the name glowing on the screen. The moment I saw it was Daniel, I shook my head and turned away, pretending I hadn’t seen.

But Ben was persistent. A few minutes later, he came back, looking desperate.

“Sophia, come on, please. He’s threatening to fire me if you don’t answer. I’m begging you. I don’t want to lose my job.”

“Fine. Give it to me.”

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I slipped into the bathroom, taking Ben’s phone, grateful for a moment of quiet away from the thundering music and the packed bar.

“Sophia, where the hell are you?”

His voice made me flinch, so I pulled the phone away from my ear, rolling my eyes as his irritation crackled through the line.

“Why do you care so much where I am tonight?”

“Are you seriously at a bar right now?”

With a sigh, I leaned against the tiled wall. “Yes, you guessed it. I’m with my friends. Now that you’ve satisfied your curiosity, can I give Ben his phone back and go back to having fun?”

“Absolutely not! Your night is over! Go home. Now!”

I couldn’t help laughing, feeling the effect of a couple of drinks while his demands grew more frantic.

“Wait—are you actually giving me orders now? Since when did you become my boss, dear husband?”

“For the love of God, Sophia, are you drunk?”

For a moment, I considered telling him to mind his own business and leave me alone, but I decided to have a little fun instead.

“What do you think people do in a bar—sleep until morning?” I shot back, expecting him to laugh with me.

When all I got was silence, I realized the joke was mine alone.

“Just so you know, I’m not coming home tonight, so you’d better stop calling me. Goodbye, sweetheart.”

I ended the call before he could protest.

“Sophia—”

Come on, Sophia. Relax. At least you think you’re funny.

I frowned and stuck my tongue out at my reflection in the mirror. That smug smile faded quickly when his name lit up my screen again.

Oh my God.

With a sigh, I answered at last. “What is it now?”

“Sophia Kelley, if you’re not back in the next few minutes, I’ll come to that bar, drag you out myself, and make sure you don’t leave our bed for a week.”

His threat was meant to scare me, but I only laughed. Nothing he said could rattle me tonight.

“Oh no. Whatever will I do? My heart is racing, sweetheart.”

“Just wait. I’ll be there in twenty minutes.”

“Perfect. I’ll be right here. I can’t wait,” I replied, and hung up before he could say another word. Good luck trying to make me leave.

I checked my reflection one last time before heading back out. When I opened the door, Ben was there, waiting, worry etched all over his face.

“Here’s your phone, Ben,” I said, handing it back.

“Mrs. Sophia—”

“No, Ben,” I cut in, shaking my head with a mocking smile. I knew exactly what he was going to say.

“But, ma’am—”

“You can leave if you want, but I’m staying.” I brushed past him and headed straight back to our booth.

The music was so loud that whatever he muttered behind me was swallowed by the bass, but I saw him scratch his head in exasperation.

“Oh God, why did I have to end up dealing with these bosses? What did I do to deserve this?” Ben grumbled, following me with a defeated sigh.

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“Where did you disappear to?” Craig asked as soon as I slid into the booth beside him.

“I just needed to use the restroom,” I replied with a quick smile.

“Daniel called me while you were in there.”

“Seriously? What did he want this time?”

“He demanded that you go home,” he said with a shrug, as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

Craig's eyes widened, clearly amused. "Let me guess—you put him in his place?"

"He expects me to drop everything and go home."

Craig nearly spat out his drink laughing. "Well, well! Looks like your man is really getting into character, huh?"

I rolled my eyes, ignored his teasing, and finished what was left in my glass.

After we took a few photos, we went back to the dance floor. The music was so loud I could feel it in my bones, and with every beat, Daniel's words drifted farther from my mind. The alcohol and adrenaline did their job. I was there to have fun.

I lost myself in the moment, swaying to the rhythm and spinning with my friends, until—out of nowhere—two strong arms lifted me and hauled me over a broad shoulder. I yelped in shock, but the familiar scent of his cologne gave him away immediately.

"Oh my God!" I heard Craig shout, and his surprise echoed in the gasps and stares of everyone around us.

"We're leaving. Now," Daniel said.

He held me tight as he carried me toward the door. "Put me down right now, Daniel Kelley!" I twisted and glared at him, barely holding back a growl.

"Not happening. You didn't listen before, so now I'm going to make sure you do."

"I told you I don't want to go home! I already told you!" I protested, but he acted like he couldn't hear me.

"Bring the car. We're leaving," he ordered his driver.

"Yes, sir."

Every pair of eyes in the parking lot seemed to follow us, and my stomach flipped as he strode forward with me still slung over his shoulder.

"Daniel Kelley, put me down right now! People are staring!"

"I don't give a damn who's staring. Let them look."

"Well, I do! So put me down and let me go back inside!" I shouted, clutching his shirt as a wave of dizziness hit me.

“You’re not setting foot in that club again tonight.”

The sharp click of a car door opening made me twist in disbelief.

“And who do you think you are, telling me what I can and can’t do? It’s my life, you—”

“Don’t mess with me, Sophia.”

“Ah!” I cried when he practically tossed me into the back seat. I glared at him, breathless. “Why did you do that? What is wrong with you?”

“Erwin, drive.”

“No! I’m not going anywhere with you!” I screamed, yanking at the door handle, only to find it locked. “You pig! You miserable bastard!”

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“Stop fighting me, Sophia. No matter what trick you try, you’re not going back in there. And if you do, I swear I’ll have that place shut down the moment you walk through the door.”

A long, frustrated sigh slipped from my lips. He sounded like he meant it. Too much like he meant it.

“You can’t do this. You can’t control my life like this!” I snapped, my voice trembling with fury.

“Go ahead. Test me, Sophia. But don’t come crying when you get there and find it closed.”

“Why are you acting like this? It’s my life—you have no right to do this!”

My hand froze on the locked door, but my gaze stayed fixed on him, sharp and accusing.

“Oh, yeah? Let me remind you of something, Sophia Kelley. The moment you married me, I earned every right to вмеш—every right to intervene in your life.”

“Maybe you need a reminder, Mr. Kelley. Our deal was simple. We’d pretend in public, and we wouldn’t interfere in each other’s business in private.”

“Well, forget that agreement. I’m rewriting the rules.”

My jaw dropped, surprise stealing my ability to think.

“You can’t just decide that!”

“I already did, my love.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“Because I’m your husband.”

“No, Daniel. You’re not my husband. We’re just—”

“I’m your husband, Sophia. We said our vows, and there isn’t a single contract involved—just promises between us. That means I decide how things are going to be.”

“You’re absolutely infuriating, you know that? Only you twist things to suit yourself.” I glared at him, fists clenched so tightly my nails dug into my skin.

As much as I hated to admit it, he was right. There wasn’t a single piece of paper binding that agreement.

“Good. I’m glad you finally see things my way, sweetheart.”

After that, the words stuck in my throat. Instead, I slumped back against the seat in silence, letting my anger churn. I clenched my fists and stared out the window, craving anything other than this helplessness.

We didn't exchange a single word for the rest of the ride. At some point, exhaustion swallowed me, and I closed my eyes. I kept telling myself I'd wake up before we arrived, but the motion of the car pulled me under, into a deep sleep I couldn't fight.

Somewhere in the haze of dreams, his voice drifted in and out of my mind—right before I felt someone's arms lift me from the seat. I didn't know if I was still dreaming or half-awake. The conversation sounded muffled, but I felt the steady beat of a heart against my cheek.

"Hey, what's wrong with your wife, Anak? Didn't she say she wasn't coming home tonight?"

That gentle voice could only belong to Nanay Emily.

"I had to go get her, Nanay. She drank too much tonight."

How could he say that? I wasn't drunk.

"Why was she drinking? Is she okay?"

"Don't worry. She's fine."

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The next thing I knew, I was stretched out on a huge, cozy bed. Something warm and heavy rested over my stomach, and a big, fluffy stuffed animal was tucked against my side. It had to be a teddy bear. The softness was irresistible, so I hugged it tighter and sank into its comfort.

Why hadn't I thought of buying one of these before? If I'd known how soothing it was to cuddle a giant teddy bear, I would've filled my room with them years ago.

A low sound slipped from my lips as I nuzzled closer, pressing my face against what I thought was its neck.

"Shh."

I frowned, confused. Did the bear just talk?

"Are you... actually talking?" I murmured, still caught between sleep and foggy thoughts.

Was I still dreaming? Or had the alcohol affected me more than I thought?

"Yes, I'm talking to you, sweetheart."

“Wow. Now you’re even calling me sweetheart,” I mumbled, inching closer.

“This has to be a dream. Since when can teddy bears talk?”

He gave a quiet chuckle, and I felt the soft rumble against my cheek.

“Go back to sleep, Sophia. It’s still midnight.”

I let out a sleepy hum and curled into him more, breathing in the warm scent at his neck. A smile tugged at my lips when I recognized it.

“You smell amazing, teddy bear. Did you steal my husband’s cologne?”

For a moment, there was only silence... then his voice came again, soft and low.

“Yes. I put on your husband’s cologne tonight.”

A small laugh escaped me.

“What’s so funny?” the teddy bear asked, sounding almost offended.

“Oh, nothing. It’s just... I don’t think he likes anyone touching his things. He’s weird like that,” I murmured, still smiling.

“I don’t think he’d mind. Though he might get jealous if he knew you were hugging someone else while you sleep.”

“But you’re not even human. You’re just a teddy bear. Cute, but still—a stuffed toy.”

“Yes, but I’m a man. A teddy bear man.”

“You’re still a stuffed toy. And anyway, he’s asleep. He won’t care.”

Another vibration rolled through his chest, like a low laugh. Then I felt soft lips press to my forehead, and his arms tightened around me.

“Did you just kiss me?” I whispered, bewildered at how a stuffed toy could do that.

“Yes. I kissed you. Now go back to sleep, Sophia.”

“Do you even know my name?”

“Of course I do. Don’t be silly.”

I wanted to ask a hundred ridiculous, dreamy questions, but he pulled me closer, wrapping me in a cocoon of warmth.

“Good night, my love,” he whispered, kissing the top of my head again.

“Good night... teddy bear.”

I don’t know how long our strange little conversation lasted, but I carried pieces of it into sleep—the strength of the arms holding me, the comforting warmth of his body, the heat of his breath against my skin, and the steady rhythm of his heart like a quiet song that pulled me deeper and deeper under.

Sunlight filtered into the room, waking me gently. Something warm and heavy rested around my waist, and a sleepy smile curved my lips as memories of my strange dream floated back.

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That smile vanished the moment I realized I was no longer dreaming—and his arm was still firmly wrapped around me.

“Don’t move,” he whispered, his voice half-asleep and weak.

Was that Daniel’s voice?

I forced my eyes open and, to my shock, found him stretched out beside me, his arm holding me close, possessive and unyielding—no teddy bear in sight.

“What the hell, Daniel?” I yelled, jerking away and staring at him wide-eyed.

He only grunted, burrowing deeper under the covers, refusing to move an inch. When I tried to pry his hand off me, my fingers brushed his skin and I recoiled.

He was burning up.

Instinct took over. I pressed my palm to his forehead and felt heat far beyond normal.

“Daniel, you’re on fire!” I blurted, the shock snapping me fully awake as I sprang out of bed.

He kept his eyes closed, but the corners of his mouth curled into a sly, almost smug smile.

“I know, sweetheart. I know.”

I clenched my teeth, glaring at him. Even now, he was impossible.

“Seriously? Are you always going to be a headache, even with a fever?”

“You didn’t seem to mind last night, sweetheart.”

“What are you talking about? Wait—what?”

Before I could finish, he caught my wrist and tugged me back onto the bed. His arm found my waist again, pulling me against him.

“Daniel! Seriously, what are you doing?” I demanded, struggling to break free, but his grip was iron. No matter how hard I tried, he wouldn’t let go.

“Just a little longer,” he murmured, pulling me closer until my head rested against his chest.

“Daniel, you’re burning up.”

A weak laugh rumbled in his throat. "You keep telling me that, sweetheart. I got the message. But it sounds a lot better coming from you."

"That's not the point! You're sick, and you need to take something for the fever."

"I don't want medicine. I just want you here with me. So stay still."

"But, Daniel—"

He cut me off with a soft, shaky groan. His body suddenly trembled as chills ran through him.

"Oh my God," I whispered, feeling him shiver again.

My arms wrapped around his waist instinctively, pulling him closer in a desperate attempt to warm him.

"Stay still. You have to take some medicine, Daniel," I insisted, trying to sit up, but he clung to me, refusing to loosen his hold. No matter how I tried, I couldn't get free.

A frustrated sigh escaped me when I realized there was no escaping his grip, so I stayed beside him, waiting for his breathing to slow and his body to relax.

I couldn't remember what happened last night. I vaguely remembered arguing with him in the car, but beyond that, everything blurred. I had no idea how I ended up in his bed—let alone waking up in his arms.

Once I was sure he'd fallen asleep again, I carefully slipped free and pulled the blanket up over his shoulders. He still needed to eat and take his medicine, so I quietly left the room and headed to the kitchen.

Chapter 347

Nanay Emily and Tatay Berto were already busy at the counter, and their faces lit up with welcoming smiles the moment they saw me.

"Good morning, Anak," they said over each other as they stood side by side.

"Good morning," I replied, offering a small, awkward smile.

"How did you sleep, Anak? You and your husband...?" Tatay Berto started, only to be interrupted by Nanay Emily's elbow.

I ignored their strange looks and let the comment slide.

"We're preparing everything for lunch. Would you like—"

“Lunch?” I cut in, startled. “Wait, what time is it?”

They glanced at each other, then at their watches, and answered in unison.

“It’s already eleven-thirty in the morning, Anak. Why do you ask?”

“Wait—eleven-thirty? You mean I slept through breakfast?”

“Don’t worry about that. You needed rest after last night. It’s fine.” Tatay Berto’s grin widened.

I looked between them, still baffled by their knowing smiles. “Uh, Nanay, do we still have chicken in the refrigerator? I want to make soup.”

“Chicken soup? For what?” they blurted at the same time.

“I need to cook something for Daniel. He’s sick,” I explained, keeping my voice steady as they exchanged another round of looks. “He woke up with a fever this morning.”

“What happened? Is he okay?” Nanay Emily’s expression softened.

"I'm not sure. He was shivering beside me when I woke up. Should I call a doctor?"

She squeezed my shoulder gently, reassuring me, and shook her head. "Just keep an eye on his temperature and put a cold compress on his forehead. That's all he needs right now."

"Are you sure? Maybe I should call a doctor just in case."

"It's not necessary, Anak. A little fever won't hurt him," Tatay Berto chuckled, brushing off my concern. "Come on. Let's see how he's doing."

A low groan drifted from the bedroom, snapping my attention toward the hallway. I jumped up and hurried over, worry prickling my skin.

"Daniel," I called softly, pressing a fresh, cold towel to his forehead.

Earlier, Nanay Emily had helped me change him into dry clothes since he'd soaked the sheets with sweat. I kept checking his temperature, swapping towels, making sure he was as comfortable as possible.

"You need to wake up and take your medicine," I said, taking his hand, but he drifted off again.

With a sigh, I grabbed the thermometer and checked him once more. At least his fever had dropped a couple of degrees. Maybe the medicine I'd forced him to take earlier was finally working.

I turned toward the couch, and just as I was about to sit, his phone started vibrating on the nightstand. With no other choice, I answered it.

“Hello?”

“Daniel, where the hell are you? Your meeting starts in half an hour!”

“Andrew, it’s Sophia,” I replied, biting my lip.

“Sophia? What’s going on?”

“Yes, it’s me. Daniel can’t come to work today. He has a fever.”

“I had no idea. How is he?”

“He’s not completely fine yet, but at least his fever dropped a little.”

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“That’s a relief. Do you mind if I stop by later to see how he’s doing?”

“Sure, you can come. And about that meeting—can you handle everything for him today?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll take care of it.”

I ended the call and set the phone back on the nightstand, then turned my attention to Daniel.

A faint frown marked his forehead even in sleep, and I couldn’t help smiling.

“Hmph. Even in your dreams, you’re frowning,” I whispered, reaching out to smooth the lines between his brows.

With a small smile, I traced my finger lightly across his forehead, thinking aloud.

“Sometimes I wonder if my life would be easier if you stayed asleep. Then I wouldn’t have to listen to your bossy outbursts or deal with you when you try to control everything.”

My hand drifted from his forehead to the tip of his nose, and for a moment, I couldn’t help myself. I leaned closer, studying every detail of his face.

He really was handsome—strong brows, a sharp nose, lips that looked impossibly soft, and those deep brown eyes that always seemed to pull me in...

Wait.

Were those eyes actually looking back at me?

I blinked several times, hoping I was wrong.

But no. He was wide awake, staring straight at me.

A sharp yelp escaped me. I jerked back, lost my balance, and landed on the floor.

"You're awake! Seriously?" I blurted, rubbing at the sting of my fall, too stunned to care.

"I've been awake for a while, sweetheart," he said with a rough but genuine laugh, pushing himself up slowly.

Part of me wanted to wipe that smug smile off his face, but I swallowed the urge and hurried to help him sit back against the headboard.

“Why didn’t you say anything? Were you just going to lie there watching me all morning?” I grumbled, adjusting his pillow.

A mischievous chuckle slipped out of him. “Why would I ruin a nice moment? You looked like you were enjoying me.” He added a shameless wink that made me want to roll my eyes. “So, did you memorize my whole face already?”

I shot him a murderous look, hands on my hips. “Honestly, Daniel Kelley—can’t you stop acting like an idiot?”

His laugh filled the room, warm and deep, making my pulse jump in spite of myself.

Trying to ignore the flutter in my stomach, I changed the subject. “Are you hungry, or do you plan to live off compliments?”

“I’m starving.”

“Good. Stay put and don’t move. I’ll bring you chicken soup,” I said, and without waiting for another word, I hurried out the door.

The moment it closed behind me, I let out a long, shaky sigh.

Sophia’s Point of View:

“What are you doing?” I blurted, startled when I walked in and found him halfway to the bathroom door. I set the bowl down quickly and rushed to him.

“Why didn’t you wait for me? You’re supposed to be resting!” I scolded, grabbing his arm to steady him.

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“Relax, sweetheart. I’m perfectly capable of walking on my own,” he said, flashing that infuriating smile of his.

“Nobody cares about your pride. Where are you going? At least let me help you.”

His teasing grin turned into a quiet chuckle. “Well, since you’re offering, I won’t refuse.”

He draped his arm over my shoulders and pushed the bathroom door open wider. “Come on. Let’s go in.”

My eyes widened as I realized what he was implying. I froze, staring at him.

“What? I thought you were going to help me.”

“Just tell me—where exactly are you going?”

“To the bathroom, obviously.”

“To the bathroom?”

“I have to pee. I’d love for you to help me. I can’t unzip and, well, hold my—”

“Oh my God, Daniel Kelley! You are beyond shameless!” I practically shouted, yanking my hand away when it finally sank in. “Hold your... seriously?”

He just laughed and reached for my hand again, but I pulled out of his reach, glaring at him.

“You’re the one who offered to help me, aren’t you?”

“Not like that! Helping you walk is not the same as helping you pee!” My cheeks burned as I stomped away from the doorway.

“But if you don’t help me, how am I supposed to unzip?”

“Stop being ridiculous!” I huffed, still horrified. “You only have a fever, Daniel, not a broken spine!”

His laughter followed me, and I refused to look back.

Five minutes later, he shuffled out of the bathroom, looking even paler. Instinct overrode my irritation. I hurried to his side and held him steady as he swayed.

“Are you okay?” I asked softly, guiding him back to the bed.

“I’m just a little dizzy.”

“You need food in your system, not just stubbornness,” I replied, taking the soup and frowning at how exhausted he looked.

He leaned back against the headboard, eyes squeezed shut, rubbing his temples.

“When was the last time you actually ate?” I asked, gently looping my hand around his arm.

“Yesterday afternoon,” he murmured, not bothering to open his eyes.

“You mean you haven’t eaten since yesterday’s lunch?” I asked, stunned.

He nodded slowly.

“And last night? Why didn’t you eat at least something?”

A tired sigh left his lips before he finally looked at me.

“If you really want to know, I spent the night trying to convince my stubborn wife to come home. She said she’d rather stay out drinking, so I had to go pull her out of the bar myself.”

My heart lurched when he smiled, the memory softening his features.

“She was really drunk. I spent the night taking care of her and completely forgot to eat.”

A wave of guilt washed over me. Was I really that bad last night? I remembered feeling exhausted, not drunk, but doubt crept in anyway.

“Eat while it’s still hot,” I murmured as I placed the tray on his lap, setting the bowl of soup in front of him without meeting his eyes.

“Would you mind feeding me?”

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His request caught me off guard, but after remembering that he was sick largely because of me, I only nodded and picked up the spoon.

I blew on the broth, making sure it was the perfect temperature, then brought it gently to his lips. “It’s not too hot. Go ahead,” I said quietly, waiting for him to take a sip.

When his mouth closed around the spoon, a strange flutter tightened in my stomach. His eyes stayed on mine as he swallowed, and something about that moment sent a chill straight to my chest. I forced myself to look away and focused on feeding him instead of the tension quietly building between us.

“That was delicious. I don’t remember ever tasting anything like that from Nanay Emily’s kitchen.” He finished the soup and leaned back, visibly satisfied.

I handed him a glass of water and tried not to smile too much. “She didn’t make it. I did.”

His eyebrows lifted in surprise. “You cooked that for me?”

I nodded, amused by how genuinely stunned he looked, as if the idea of me in a kitchen was impossible.

“Yes. I cooked for the version of you with a fever, not the one who tortures me daily,” I replied, rolling my eyes.

Instead of teasing me, he just watched me, his gaze thoughtful.

“It’s just... I never imagined you knew your way around a kitchen.”

“There you go, doubting me again.” Of course he would say something like that. I couldn’t help the smug smile that tugged at my lips.

“You should get some more rest. Andrew called earlier and said he’d stop by later to see you.”

I was halfway to standing up when he reached out and took my hand.

“Thank you.”

For a moment, I went still. Was Daniel Kelley actually showing gratitude? That was new.

“It’s nothing,” I said, brushing it off. “I just need to wash these dishes.”

“You’re not going to work, are you?”

“No. I’m just going to the kitchen,” I said, gesturing at the tray.

He nodded, then hesitated. “Could you come back when you’re done?”

I frowned. “And what exactly do you want me to do when I come back?”

“Could you sing for me?”

I blinked, wondering if I’d heard him wrong. Was Daniel Kelley really asking me to make music for him?

“Do you want me to bring my guitar?”

“I’m starting to think your fever is worse than I thought, Daniel Kelley.”

He looked at me, clearly confused by my comment.

“Are you the man I married?” I met his eyes, refusing to look away. “He never says thank you, never apologizes, and he definitely never asks for anything. He just gives orders and expects everyone to follow.”

He didn’t answer. My words seemed to catch him completely off guard, and for a moment, he only watched me in silence.

“I’ll be back in a bit after I wash these dishes.”

Before I could reach the sink, Nanay Emily’s gentle voice made me pause. She stood by the counter, worry written all over her face.