

A Favor To My Boss

Chapter 41:

I rolled my eyes and, ignoring him, started walking along the boardwalk, laughing as I went. Davidson didn't take long to catch up. He slid an arm around my shoulders and pulled me closer. I looked up at him and smiled without trying to hide it. His arm stayed there, and honestly, I didn't mind—as long as he didn't try anything bold, like kissing me again. I wasn't ready for that.

We walked until we spotted a small café on the boardwalk, the ocean glittering behind it.

“Good morning! How are you two?” a woman greeted us the moment we stepped inside, her smile bright enough to light up the place.

“We're good, thanks. Could we get a table for two?” Davidson asked, returning her smile.

“Of course, right this way,” she said, motioning for us to follow.

It was obvious she liked him—her eyes barely left his face. Honestly, I had the feeling Davidson was more than used to that kind of attention.

He hardly seemed to notice, which threw me. She was beautiful—the exact type I would’ve expected to catch his eye.

“What can I get you to drink?” the waitress asked, flashing another smile as she handed us menus. Her attention stayed on Davidson far more than on me.

“Could I get a latte and an iced peach tea, please?” I said, offering her a friendly smile.

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“Of course. And for you, sir?” she asked, brushing her fingers over a lock of her hair.

“I’ll have a coffee and a glass of water with lemon. Could you bring us the food menu too, sweetheart?” He gave her a quick smile.

I noticed the way her cheeks flushed when he called her that. I couldn’t help laughing quietly. Davidson had that effect on women everywhere, and I wasn’t immune either.

“Yes. I mean... of course. Right away,” she said, stumbling over her words.

Davidson seemed oblivious. As soon as she was out of earshot, I couldn’t stop myself from laughing. He looked at me, eyebrows lifting.

“Seriously, you didn’t notice? She was practically throwing herself at you,” I said, still laughing.

“Yeah, I noticed, but I didn’t come here to pick someone up.” He gave me a half-smile.

“Since when do you pass up the chance to flirt with a pretty girl? Isn’t that your favorite move lately?” I teased.

“Ouch. But honestly, you’re not wrong. Still, today’s different. I’m here with you, so the rest of the world can wait,” he said.

His words made me smile, and something warm stirred in my chest. It was nice to know he actually wanted to be here with me.

“Trust me, I’d notice if you tried to disappear with another man,” he added with a playful wink, then pulled out his phone for a quick glance, probably to make sure the world hadn’t ended without him.

The waitress returned soon after and set our drinks on the table. I thanked her with a smile, while Davidson offered a polite thanks without even looking at her.

A flicker of disappointment crossed her face before she forced herself to hand us the menus and move on, pretending she didn't care. But I noticed.

"Looks like you just broke her heart," I teased, trying not to laugh.

"Who? You mean the waitress? What did I do?" he asked, genuinely confused.

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"Yes. She wasn't thrilled that you didn't give her more attention," I said, nodding with a smile.

Davidson only shrugged.

“Honestly, she has no idea what our story is. For all she knows, you could be my girlfriend or my wife. If she still tries to flirt with me, it’s hard to take her seriously.”

“For once, I have to agree,” I said, nodding. “How about we share some nachos and fries?”

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“Absolutely. I’m in,” I said with a bright smile.

After we placed our order with the waitress, we fell into easy conversation, filling the time while we waited for the food. I couldn’t shake the urge to explore the boardwalk, even with food on the way. Every minute stretched on, even though we had the whole day ahead of us.

“Don’t even think about it, Davidson, or I’ll drag you into the ocean myself,” I warned, bubbling with laughter.

The last few hours had flown by as we explored Coney Island together. We’d gone on a handful of rides—at least the ones he could handle. Anything taller than a Ferris wheel, he avoided, which honestly made me laugh every single time.

Afterward, we wandered through the crowded stalls, soaking in the energy of the place. There was a contagious kind of joy in the air that made everything feel lighter. Now we were walking along the shore, sand clinging to our feet.

“You really think you could throw me in? I doubt you’ve got the strength,” he said, sounding far too confident.

“You want to find out? We can settle this right now,” I shot back, laughing as I planted myself in front of him.

“Oh, I’m in,” he replied without hesitation.

Before I could react, he scooped up a huge splash of seawater and flung it at me, drenching me completely. The sudden cold made me shriek as it soaked through my clothes.

“Davidson, you’re dead!” I yelled, yanking at my soaked shirt.

He didn’t care in the slightest—he just doubled over laughing, looking far too pleased with himself.

“Nice choice of bra,” he teased, lifting his eyebrows with a smug grin.

I glanced down and realized my white shirt had turned fully transparent, leaving absolutely nothing to the imagination. Davidson was definitely in trouble now.

I lunged at him, kicking up water and sending a messy splash his way, but my attack barely reached him—he was practically dry. When I realized my tactics weren’t working, I charged to shove him, only for him to catch both my wrists before I could touch him.

“So what’s your next move?” he asked, smiling.

“Careful, or I’ll have to get rough,” I warned, trying my best to sound intimidating—but I ended up laughing.

“Oh, yeah?” His eyes sparkled with mischief. “In that case, Winona, I think it’s time for a dunk.”

“Don’t you dare!” I shouted, backing up to put some distance between us.

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But he was faster. With one smooth motion, he grabbed my waist and pulled me toward him, ignoring my frantic attempts to wriggle free. My laughter and protests blended together while people along the boardwalk smiled at our little show. Davidson had nearly dragged me to the edge of the surf, and there was no way I was letting him win.

“Let me go, Davidson!” I yelled, still twisting in his grip.

“Not a chance,” he replied, his laugh warm against my ear.

Just as we reached the wet sand, I gathered every ounce of strength I had left, twisted free, and planted my feet. I managed to escape the incoming waves, but he wasn’t done. The next thing I knew, he was on my heels, chasing me down the beach as I ran from him.

We could’ve been two kids on summer vacation, running and laughing for no reason at all. In that moment, neither of us cared about looking childish.

“You know you can’t get away from me, right? You might as well surrender now,” he teased, cutting off my path.

Every move I made, he mirrored. I darted left—he followed. I tried slipping right—he stayed with me, step for step. I finally broke free for a brief second, but he caught me in the blink of an eye, spinning me until we were face-to-face.

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His hands tightened around my waist, pinning me in place. No matter how much I squirmed or laughed, he wouldn't let go. If I wanted to escape, I'd have to get creative.

"Any last words, sweetheart?" he asked, and his stupid grin made me roll my eyes.

"Yeah. Just this," I said, delivering a quick kick to his shin before he could see it coming.

He lost his balance and toppled backward onto the sand—exactly what I'd hoped. The only problem was, he didn't let me go, so I fell right on top of him, and we both burst into laughter. His hands found my hips, and for a second, neither of us could stop laughing.

"Didn't see that move coming, did you?" he murmured between breaths.

"Shut up," I said, still laughing as I tried to sit up.

The way he was holding me made it nearly impossible to get up, but I was determined not to let anyone get the wrong idea about us.

“Davidson, if you wanted me on top of you, you could’ve just asked,” I joked, a playful smile on my face.

“You’re the one who took me down, remember?” he said, shaking his head with a laugh.

“And you refused to let go, so this is really all your fault,” I shot back, pouting just for effect.

Instead of answering, he rolled us over in the sand, suddenly pinning me beneath him. My hands were trapped above my head, his fingers laced through mine as he pressed them into the warm grains. The abrupt shift sent my heart stuttering, stealing my breath with a mix of surprise and anticipation.

Having him this close, feeling his weight on me, sent my thoughts racing in directions they absolutely shouldn’t have.

“If I’m being honest, I prefer taking control. The view’s better from up here.”

Damn it. What was wrong with me? My mind was spiraling, and being alone with him like this was definitely testing my resolve.

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“Are you blushing, Winona?” he teased, a low laugh in his voice.

“Stop. I’m not blushing,” I replied, unable to keep the smile off my lips.

“Sure you aren’t. If I didn’t know you better, I’d say you’re enjoying this,” he said, slowly running his tongue over his lip.

I tried to shake my head, but my lips betrayed me, mirroring the motion. Davidson leaned in, brushing a damp strand of hair from my face, never once looking away from my eyes.

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He moved closer, his lips only a breath away, and every inch of space between us felt electrified. Warm air grazed my cheek as his hand slid through my tangled hair, then settled gently along my jaw. My body went taut, completely still, knowing exactly where this was heading—yet I couldn't make myself move. If I was honest, a part of me didn't want him to stop.

"Davidson... what are you doing?" I whispered, barely able to get the words out.

"Don't talk. Just let this happen," he murmured, his voice softer than I'd ever heard it.

Instead of fighting it, I nodded, surrendering to the moment. He leaned down and his lips met mine in a kiss so gentle I barely felt it at first. A soft sound slipped from me as I pressed into him, unable to stop myself. His groan vibrated against my mouth.

My fingers threaded into his hair, pulling him closer, deepening the kiss without even thinking. His hands slid to my waist, holding me tight as if he never wanted to let go. Logic told me this was wrong, but nothing had ever felt so good.

A spark turned into a fire. The kiss grew desperate, urgent—his tongue tracing my lips before slipping past them. I melted into him, letting the heat take over while he gripped my hips, holding me like the world was about to vanish.

My hands traced along his spine, feeling his muscles tense and release beneath my fingers. The kiss burned with the same heat as that first night, but this time I didn't want to pull away.

Every part of me responded to him, my body softening against his, until—suddenly—Davidson broke the kiss, leaving me breathless.

“Fuck,” he muttered under his breath, letting out a heavy sigh as his fingers raked through his hair.

He shifted away, sitting in the sand beside me, silent. I pushed myself up, a strange unease filling my chest. I wrapped my arms around my knees and stared out at the ocean.

“Winona, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have kissed you. I just got carried away and... I wasn't thinking clearly,” he said quietly.

I turned to him and saw the regret written all over his face. Even though he was right—this probably shouldn't have happened—the guilt in his eyes hurt more than I expected.

“It's okay, Davidson,” I said, forcing a gentle smile.

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“This day meant a lot to me. It’s been a long time since I truly laughed, since I truly enjoyed myself. For a moment, I felt like the person I used to be. That’s probably why I acted on impulse.”

He hesitated, then apologized again. “I’m sorry, Winona.”

“I missed seeing you like that, too. Everyone at work misses that side of you. Let’s forget what happened and hold on to the good parts of today,” I said, smiling.

“Winona, you’re shaking. Are you cold?” he asked, worry flickering in his eyes.

He was right—my damp clothes were freezing.

“A little, yeah,” I admitted, forcing a laugh.

Davidson jumped to his feet and offered me his hand. “Let’s warm you up. I’ve got a hoodie in the car with your name on it. Then we’ll go get dinner,” he said with a reassuring smile.

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I slid my hand into his and let him pull me up. Together, we headed toward the parking lot, tossing around ideas for where to eat. We didn’t mention the kiss, and it almost felt like we’d silently agreed to pretend it never happened. Maybe that was for the best.

“Winona, is it true?” Brenda’s voice cut in while I stirred sugar into Davidson’s coffee.

“Is what?” I looked up at her, confused.

“Are you really dating Mr. Briggs?” she asked. “Leona’s been spreading this rumor that you two... well, you know...”

Of course Leona couldn't keep her mouth shut. Who knew what else she'd been telling everyone about Davidson and me? Suddenly, it felt like every move I made had consequences, and I realized I needed to be careful. One wrong word could expose us.

A dozen responses flashed through my mind, but in the end, simple felt safest.

"You'll have to keep guessing, Brenda," I said with a sly wink, slipping away before she could ask anything else.

"Go get him, girl! People say he's worth every rumor!" she called after me, teasing.

Her playful shout pulled a smile from me as I left the break room and headed toward Davidson's office. The moment I was out of sight, I stopped, took a few steadying breaths, and wondered if I'd just made everything a hundred times worse.

There was no avoiding it. I had to tell Davidson—though I had no idea how he'd take it.

My hand hovered at his door for a beat before I finally stepped inside. Davidson was in the middle of a tense phone call, his tone sharp.

“Leona, my relationship with Winona is none of your business. Once this divorce is final, I never want to see you again. Stay out of my life,” he snapped, frustration laced through every word.

He ended the call with a hard slam of the receiver, rubbing his forehead as he tried to collect himself. I stood in the doorway, unsure whether to speak or wait for him to calm down.

“Everything okay, Winona?” he asked, trying to sound casual. “I’m fine. She just gets under my skin,” he muttered, shaking his head.

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Seeing how tense he was, I wished Leona would just leave him alone and stop inserting herself into his life. Quietly, I walked over and set his coffee on the desk. He thanked me with a tired smile.

Standing there, I hesitated, weighing whether this was the right moment to tell him what had happened with Brenda.

“Winona, is something wrong? You look like you’ve got something on your mind,” he said.

“Yeah,” I admitted softly, bracing myself.

He leaned back, his expression easing.

“Come on. Sit down. Just tell me,” he encouraged, offering a reassuring smile.

I sat across from his desk and exhaled, trying to steady myself. With a small smile, I decided to rip the bandage off.

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“I ran into Brenda in the staff room. She wanted to know if you and I are together, because apparently Leona has been spreading that rumor around the company. I honestly

didn't know how to handle it, since this is still just an act for everyone else. We never really talked about what version I'm supposed to stick to at work," I admitted.

Davidson's mouth curved with amusement as he listened.

"And what did you say?" he asked, leaning forward slightly.

"I told her some secrets are better left unshared, winked at her, and walked away," I said, heat creeping up my cheeks.

Instead of looking annoyed, Davidson tipped his head back and laughed. He smiled at me, shaking his head.

"That was smart. The more you lean into that, the more people will believe it," he said.

"You're not mad at all?" I asked, unable to hide my surprise.

"Not even a little. Honestly, that's exactly what we need right now," he replied, winking back at me.

After that, I finally felt myself relax. I was relieved he wasn't upset. He was right—letting the rumor spread would only make our story seem more believable.

Still, one question wouldn't leave my mind: what exactly did he want from me at work?

Did we really need to put on a show for everyone, or was it better to let the rumors do all the work for us?

The thought kept looping in my head, and I barely noticed Davidson had moved closer until I saw him leaning against his desk, watching me with a curious look. I managed a small, awkward smile.

"Looks like there's something else you want to say," he said, brushing a stray lock of hair away from my face.

A silent groan slipped out of me. I hadn't expected him to move my hair like that. I caught the hint of a smile he tried to hide. His gaze stayed on me—patient, intent—clearly waiting for me to speak. My mind raced, searching for a way to ask what I needed without sounding ridiculous.

"What do you want from me at work, exactly?" I asked.

"We need to make our story believable if we want people to buy it. A little gossip here and there won't hurt. But whatever is actually going on between us, that stays private," he finished with a casual shrug.

“That makes sense,” I said, smiling genuinely.

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“So, are you finally going to stop stressing about this?” he asked with a laugh, lightening the mood.

I nodded, giving him my brightest smile. With that settled, I left him to his work and went back to my own office.

The moment I sat down and opened my laptop, someone appeared in front of my desk. I looked up and found Dolores—one of Leona’s friends—standing there with a glare sharp enough to cut glass.

Here we go again, I thought, bracing myself.

“Do you need something?” I asked, keeping my tone as neutral as possible.

“Why are you messing with Davidson? You do know he’s still married to Leona, right?” Her voice was harsh, dripping with accusation.

Was she really doing this here, in the middle of the office? The way Dolores acted, you’d think Leona could do whatever she wanted, but Davidson had to follow an entirely different set of rules.

I took a slow breath, determined not to let her rattle me or cause a scene at work.

“You’ve got to be kidding. Leona is the one who left Davidson. She’s the one who cheated. They’re separated—almost divorced. Davidson can date whoever he wants, and it’s none of your business,” I shot back, keeping my voice low but firm.

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“That’s not the problem here.” She frowned, her gaze sharpening.

“Oh, yeah? Then what exactly is the problem, Dolores? Enlighten me,” I taunted, letting my irritation show.

For a moment, she just stood there, lips pressed tight, but nothing came out except a frustrated exhale.

“You should stay away from him,” she warned, almost whispering.

Before I could respond, another voice cut in from behind her.

“No, Dolores. She doesn’t have to listen to you. What Winona and I do is our business—not yours, and certainly not Leona’s. Show some professionalism. You work for me, and I won’t tolerate threats or gossip. Winona, if you’re uncomfortable with this, you’re free to leave whenever you want. But I will not allow anyone to intimidate you. Understood?” Davidson said, his tone hard as steel.

Dolores’s confidence vanished instantly. She turned, mortified, and dropped her head.

“I’m sorry, sir,” she mumbled before retreating quickly down the hallway.

Davidson turned back to me, concern softening his expression. “Are you okay?” he asked.

"Yeah. I'm fine. Thank you, Davidson." I gave him a small smile, and the tension finally eased.

"If you need anything, you know where my office is," he said with a wink before heading back down the hall.

Watching him walk away, I couldn't help worrying that his open support would spark even more gossip. The last thing I wanted was for anyone to think I was getting special treatment because of some supposed relationship with my boss. I'd worked too hard for my position, and I refused to let anyone question it.

Pushing those worries aside, I turned back to my computer and tried to focus on work.

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Chapter 48:

At least the weekend had finally arrived, which meant two days away from the office drama. Tomorrow night's gala loomed over me, along with a ridiculously long to-do list. I needed a hair appointment, a fresh manicure, and a full outfit check just to make sure nothing was missing.

If only I could relax enough to shake these nerves...

All I could do was hope Leona wouldn't turn the event into another spectacle and make things even worse for Davidson in front of everyone.

The night had settled over the city as the gala drew near. My reflection stared back at me, and I couldn't help admiring how well the gray suit fit. I headed out to the car waiting at the curb, ready to pick up Winona.

"Good evening, Felix. How's everything?" I greeted the driver standing by the vehicle.

More than an employee, he had always been family to me. As long as I could remember, we'd trusted him completely.

“I’m very well, sir. You look very handsome. Are you excited for the gala?” His smile was genuine.

“I’m fine. I think tonight will go great,” I replied, returning his smile.

I slid into the back seat while Felix took his place up front. As the car pulled away, we fell into easy conversation. The closer we got to Winona’s place, the more my nerves started to show. I couldn’t stop imagining how beautiful she’d look tonight. I had no doubt I wouldn’t need to fake my feelings for her.

“Everything alright, Mr. Briggs?” Felix asked, watching me in the rearview mirror.

“Yeah. Just a little on edge about seeing Winona,” I sighed, running my fingers through my hair.

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Felix knew all about the charade Winona and I were putting on for everyone else. Over the years, he’d become someone I trusted—almost like an uncle. Before he started working for me, he’d spent decades as my father’s trusted driver.

“If you don’t mind me asking, are you sure this is really just an act?” There was a hint of a smile he tried to hide.

A laugh slipped out of me as I shook my head. Felix, like everyone else, had never been particularly fond of Leona. Sometimes I wondered how I'd ever married that woman.

"Honestly, I've been asking myself the same thing. Winona's been very direct with me. She isn't interested in starting anything, and she's made it clear she doesn't want to be seen as the other woman." Disappointment crept into my voice.

"Your father always used to say what's meant for you will find its way to you. I think about that a lot, especially now." Felix's face softened, a gentle smile forming on his lips, though there was a quiet sadness in his eyes.

He and my father had been close friends for as long as I could remember. Sometimes I could still see how much he missed him.

"Yeah. He always liked saying that," I managed with a small smile.

Our conversation drifted into memories of my father, and every story carried us a little deeper into the time when he was still alive. By the time we reached Winona's building, my nerves were back. I paused, drawing in a few deep breaths before stepping out.

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“Good luck to you, sir,” Felix said, offering a warm smile.

My nerves tightened as I reached her apartment. Taking a steadying breath, I knocked and waited. The crisp sound of her heels grew louder with every step until the door opened—and for a second, I forgot how to speak.

“Good evening, boss. You clean up nicely,” she teased.

Truthfully, it wasn’t her face that caught my attention first. My gaze drifted downward, taking in every detail, because she looked absolutely stunning. For a moment, I forgot how to breathe.

Finally, I found my way back to her eyes. She wore a playful smile and tilted her head, clearly amused.

“Still sure you’re not a stalker?” she said with a soft giggle.

“Come on. Seriously, you look incredible. Every woman at that gala is going to be jealous,” I said, brushing it off, then winked to make her laugh.

She laughed, shaking her head and turning slightly as if to hide her flushed cheeks. That only made me want to pull her closer, so I gently lifted her chin until she looked at me again.

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“Let’s go, beautiful,” I said, unable to hide my smile.

Her nervous smile made me chuckle. I stepped aside so she could lock the door. Once she was beside me, I slid an arm around her waist, feeling her shiver at my touch. That reaction nearly made me laugh, but I held it back.

As I guided her to the car, I made sure to introduce her to Felix, who waited patiently by the vehicle—they’d never met.

“It’s nice to finally meet you, sir,” she said, offering him a polite smile.

“The pleasure is mine, miss—Winona, right? I’ve heard quite a bit about you,” he said with a grin.

“Then what exactly have you heard?” she asked, shooting me a playful look.

All I could do was grimace and shake my head, because there was no denying it. Felix opened the door and climbed into the driver’s seat. I let Winona get in first, and I couldn’t help noticing what that dress was doing to me.

A strangled breath escaped me when I caught myself staring. That spark of desire hit hard before I forced myself to refocus. Going after her wouldn’t be a good idea—at least not tonight. I straightened, climbed in, and closed the door.

“All set?” Felix asked, glancing back.

Instead of answering, I simply shook my head. He gave me a knowing wink, then pulled away from the curb, taking us straight to the hotel where the gala was being held.

No matter how hard I tried, it was impossible to keep my eyes off her. When she crossed her legs, the dress rode up just enough to test every ounce of my self-control. I tightened my grip on the edge of the seat just to keep from reaching out. One wrong move could ruin everything before the night even began.

“Davidson, would you mind not looking at me like that?” Winona’s laughter snapped me out of it.

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“Sorry,” I muttered, dropping my gaze to the floor.

Suddenly, I felt awkward and out of place, counting the seconds until the ride was over. To distract myself, I pulled out my phone and pretended to check something important. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Winona let out a soft sigh, shaking her head with a conspiratorial look. She’d caught me completely.

“We’re here,” Felix announced.

Relief washed over me, and I got out as quickly as I could, grateful for the cool night air. I knew I had to pull myself together if I wanted the evening to go smoothly. Taking Winona's hand, I helped her out of the car.

"Ready for this?" I asked, trying to sound steadier than I felt.

"As ready as I can be. Davidson, you really need to relax. If you keep acting this nervous, this isn't going to work," she said, giving me a pointed look.

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Normally she was the one with nerves of steel, not me. Tonight, though, she noticed every slip, every uneasy glance. Giving in, I offered her a confident smile and pulled her closer with an arm around her waist, guiding us toward the bright lights of the lobby.

"Davidson, you're here!" my mother exclaimed the moment we walked in.

"Hi, Mom. How have you been?" I answered, matching her enthusiasm.

"Now that I've seen you, I feel much better. It's been far too long since your last visit." Her hug lingered, and I returned it just as warmly.

The truth was, I'd been avoiding everyone these past few weeks, hiding whenever I could. When my mother pulled back, her attention shifted to Winona, still tucked securely under my arm.

"Winona, my goodness, you look incredible tonight. Leona's been spreading rumors about you and Davidson, but honestly, it sounded like she was just trying to stir the pot," my mother said, unable to hide her amusement.

Winona stiffened. She struggled to find the right words, clearly anxious about facing my mother. Lying to her was the last thing Winona wanted, but this act was necessary for now. I hated putting her in that position.

"We're just spending time together, Mom—keeping things simple. Don't read too much into it, alright?" I said, aiming for casual.

"You have my word. I won't meddle. And for the record, I've always hoped something would happen between you two." My mother lifted her hands in surrender, a warm smile on her lips. "How have you been, sweetheart? It feels like forever since I last saw you."

"I'm well, Mrs. Briggs. And you? It really has been a long time. Work has kept me pretty busy," Winona said lightly, adding a soft laugh.

"I think I can guess who's been keeping you so busy. I'm well, thank you for asking," she teased, then hugged Winona. "Why don't we go to the bar together and get a drink?"

