

A Favor 411

Chapter 411

“Daniel...” His name fell from both of our lips at exactly the same moment, surprise unmistakable in our voices. Andrew dropped his hand from my shoulder as though burned.

“You both look like you’ve seen a ghost,” Daniel said, his voice cold and clipped. His eyes moved back and forth between us, jaw tight.

“Daniel, I was just making sure she got back to her room safely.”

“Is that what you call looking after her, Andrew? After everything you said before I got married, you really expect me to believe this is nothing?”

I shot Andrew a bewildered look, silently asking for an explanation, but he simply held his ground. “I wasn’t trying to cross any line, Daniel. I was just looking out for her. That’s all.”

“That’s true — Andrew was only trying to help me,” I said immediately, hoping to ease the tension between them. He hadn’t lied, and I wanted to make sure Daniel understood that.

“And?” My husband’s gaze hardened as he closed the distance between us, his voice dropping to something cold and cutting. “What the hell are you doing here, Sophia? As far as I know, I told security not to let you leave the house without my permission.”

“You told them to call you before I went anywhere, but when I tried to reach you, you ignored every single one of my calls!”

“Because I was busy!” His voice rose, drawing curious glances from the nearest tables. “Who gave you permission to leave? Who let you out of my house?”

“Does it matter, Daniel? Are you planning to fire whoever helped me?”

“Stop dodging the question. Who helped you get out? Tell me right now.” He stepped closer, his tone sharp.

“You want the truth? Fine,” I replied, holding his gaze without flinching. “It wasn’t your security team. Nanay Emily and Tatay Berto helped me slip past them. Satisfied? And just so you know, Bingo helped too — he distracted Ben and his men so I could hide in the trunk. Anything else you’d like to accuse me of?”

His grip on the glass tightened until I thought it might shatter. I nearly reached out in concern, but then he said something that turned my stomach.

“So why are you really here, Sophia? Was all of this just to track us down in San Diego? Or did you come to be with Andrew?”

“What on earth are you talking about?”

“Don’t even try to deny it! You’ve known for a long time how Andrew feels about you, and now that I’m not around, you’re throwing yourself at him. You want his attention — don’t you?”

“This is insane! I have absolutely no interest in seducing Andrew, for God’s sake!”

A chill ran through me. How could he think that? If he knew I was here for him — and only him — would he still be saying these things?

He clicked his tongue dismissively and shook his head, leaning toward me with a sardonic look.

“Even knowing how good you are at this, I can’t shake this feeling.”

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“Good at what exactly, Daniel?” I asked, my patience snapping. Something about the direction this conversation was taking felt deeply wrong, and I doubted I was going to like where it landed. He raised an eyebrow and gave me a mocking look. “Don’t play innocent. You’ve gotten away with it before, haven’t you?”

“That’s enough,” Andrew said sharply behind me, cutting through the tension.

“My past is none of your business, and I have no idea why you’re so obsessed with dragging it up every chance you get.”

“You managed to seduce your fiancé’s best friend the night before your wedding, and now you’re turning your charms on my assistant.”

For a moment, his accusation left me cold. I clenched my jaw and felt the heat rise to my face, unable to respond as I stared back at him.

“Why do you do this, Sophia? Does causing this kind of chaos please you?” He held my gaze, indifferent to my silence. “Daniel, I’ve told you over and over. I did nothing of the sort, and I am not trying to seduce Andrew!”

He simply shrugged, disbelief etched into every line of his expression. “I don’t buy it.”

Fine. If that was how he saw it, I wasn’t going to waste my breath trying to change his mind. I was done defending myself to someone who only ever heard what he wanted to hear. When I turned to leave, his grip on my arm pulled me back.

“Stop performing, Sophia. I’m not going to fall for the innocent act. Go home — or I’ll accuse you of infidelity right here and now.”

Before he could finish, my hand rose and struck him sharply across the cheek.

“You have no right to call me an adulteress. I know exactly who I am. I once thought you had changed — that there was something more to you than your arrogance — but you’re still the same heartless fool I met. Honestly, accepting all of this and ever getting to know you was the biggest mistake I’ve ever made.”

He went still for a moment.

A soft female voice drifted from somewhere behind him, and I already knew whose it was without turning around. Daniel's jaw tightened, but I kept my eyes fixed on his.

"Go ahead. Add it to your collection," he murmured, stepping away from me.

His words made no sense, and before I could piece them together, I watched him move toward Chloe. Without warning, he wrapped an arm around her and pressed his lips to hers, kissing her openly in front of everyone.

I stood there staring, unable to process what I was seeing. A wave of jealousy tangled with fury surged through me.

"Sophia!" Andrew's voice reached me, and his hand settled gently on my shoulder as if to hold me back. I shrugged it off and refused to let him stop me, so he had no choice but to keep pace as I moved forward.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, Daniel?" I heard Andrew's voice, sharp and furious, break through the tension before I could find my own words.

Hot tears burned at the corners of my eyes, but I forced myself to swallow and blink them back. “So you’re really going to do this in front of me? Do I mean nothing to you as your wife?”

When he finally released her and turned to face us, a smug smile played at the corner of his mouth.

“You’ve just shown me exactly how foolish I was to trust you,” I said, barely holding my rage in check. “You didn’t just kiss her. You made sure I watched. What kind of husband does that?”

He narrowed his eyes, a challenge glinting in them. “Are you actually jealous right now, Sophia?”

“It’s not jealousy—” I started, but he cut me off.

“Stop pretending, sweetheart. This was never a real marriage. It was business — nothing more. I don’t owe you anything.”

“You’re right. I’m not your wife in any real sense, so I have no right to question your behavior. But you have no right to humiliate me either. One day, when the truth finally comes to light, I hope you remember how you treated me — everything you accused me of, and every moment you made me fall in love with you.”

My words seemed to knock the air from him. He looked at me, completely thrown, as though he hadn’t expected that confession to slip out.

“That’s right. You heard me clearly. I am in love with you, Daniel. The only reason I came here wasn’t for any competition — it was for you. I wanted to see you. You let me believe there was something real between us, made me think you truly cared, but it was all just an act, wasn’t it?”

His voice dropped to a murmur. “Sophia...”

“I will never forgive you for this, Daniel Kelley. You dragged my feelings through the mud and made a fool of me in front of everyone.”

“Sophia...” He tried to step closer, saying my name again in that soft, careful tone.

But I raised my hand before he could reach me — a clear warning.

“This arrangement is over, Mr. Kelley. I am done with all of these lies. Tomorrow I will make sure the divorce papers are sent, whether you agree or not.”

The moment those words left my mouth, I turned away so he wouldn’t see me cry. I pulled my phone from my bag and dialed my lawyer’s number as I walked toward the exit, without looking back even once.

“Belle, aren’t you going to work today?”

Bryan knocked on my bedroom door. I pulled myself out of bed and let out a sigh — one of many I had released since dawn. “You’ve been back from San Diego for three days and haven’t said a word about the trip. You just locked yourself in here and went quiet,” he said the moment I opened the door.

“I’m going to shower.”

“Really? You’re not going to fill me in?”

“Maybe later, Bryan. I need to hurry if I’m going to make it to work.” I managed a small, awkward smile before turning back toward my room.

“Are you sure you’re all right?”

Chapter 414

Another sigh slipped out. I was hoping he’d take the hint and go, but instead he followed me to the wardrobe. “I’m fine, Bryan.”

“No, you’re not.” He took my hand, arching an eyebrow as he studied my face. “You’re not leaving this house until you tell me what actually happened in San Diego.”

“Bryan, I promised I’d tell you everything. Can you at least let me get dressed for work first?”

“Not a chance. You’re not going anywhere until we talk.” Rolling my eyes, I gave in and followed him back to my room.

He settled on the edge of the bed and patted the space beside him in silence, waiting for me to join him.

Flashback...

“Sophia, are you really going through with this?”

“I’ve already made my decision, Andrew.”

“You know, you could let your lawyer handle it. What’s the point of delivering those papers yourself?”

“I can’t explain it.” A small laugh escaped me as I shrugged. “Something tells me I need to look him in the eyes when I hand them over.”

“You have his room number. Do you want backup? I can come with you.”

“No, thank you — but this is something I need to face on my own.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am. I have to see this through to the end.”

“Sophia!” He caught my arm, stopping me just before I reached the elevator. “What will you do if he refuses to sign the divorce papers?”

“He doesn’t have a choice, Andrew. He’ll sign them.”

“And what if he says he still loves you? What if he begs you to give him another chance?”

All I could offer was a bittersweet smile as I shook my head.

Sometimes he made me believe he truly cared — but it never lasted. The moment someone whispered a rumor or spread a lie, even a stranger’s word, he turned cold again. He judged me so quickly that he never bothered to ask my side, never gave me the chance to explain myself. I couldn’t take being the target of his harsh words anymore. I took a slow breath, searching for the right words. “If you truly love someone, you don’t look for reasons to condemn them. Love and judgment don’t belong together.”

I stepped into the elevator, closed my eyes, and tried to steady my nerves. Under my breath, I repeated Daniel’s room number like a quiet mantra.

After everything that had happened the night before at the bar, I had called my lawyer, Attorney Relagio, and asked him to send over the divorce papers. Then, that morning, I reached out to Andrew and asked for Daniel's room number. He refused at first, but once I told him what I intended to do, he finally gave in.

Walking down that hotel corridor made my heart race. A strange tightness settled in my chest when I stopped in front of his door.

Room 186.

A sharp breath slipped out as I tried to summon the courage. I positioned myself out of sight of the peephole — I didn't want him to see me through it.

Chapter 415

I was just about to knock a second time when the door handle turned. My pulse spiked, and I braced myself for whatever came next.

The last thing I expected was to find myself face to face with a woman wrapped in nothing but a white towel. A lump rose in my throat, and I stood there completely stunned as reality settled over me. My husband was nowhere to be seen.

"Sophia."

She blinked in surprise at first, but the moment she read the expression on my face, a sly, triumphant smile curved her lips.

No word — not shocked, not shattered, not even devastated — could fully describe what I felt when Daniel appeared behind her, looking exactly as Chloe did. He had only a towel wrapped at his waist, water still dripping from his hair and trailing down his shoulders.

“Oh my God.”

That was all I managed, my voice barely above a whisper. His eyes went wide when he saw me standing there, but I didn’t care anymore — what had clearly just happened in that room was plain enough. I was so paralyzed by the sight of them that I couldn’t even cry.

“Sophia!”

He lunged forward when I stumbled, grabbing the doorframe to steady myself. My head spun, and I caught a glimpse of Chloe retreating back inside as I fought to keep my balance.

“Sophia.”

I looked away, my chest burning, every nerve raw. It felt as though a hundred knives had been driven in one after another, leaving behind nothing but unbearable pain.

“You’re wrong. It’s not what you think,” he insisted, shaking his head. His face shifted from disbelief to desperate pleading. He stepped toward me again, but I stepped back and shook my head. “Sophia, let me explain. Just listen to me, please...”

My laugh cut through his plea — sharp and bitter — somehow finding its way out even though all I truly wanted was to scream or collapse right there in front of him.

“Explain? Now you want to explain?” I met his eyes and held them, daring him to look away. “What’s behind this sudden need to defend yourself?”

“Look, I know how this appears, but I promise you—”

“And what exactly do you think I saw? Two people in towels, freshly showered, sharing a room and very likely a bed. But nothing happened between you two, right? That’s all.”

“Sophia, I swear to you, we didn’t sleep together. We didn’t—”

“And you actually expect me to believe that?” I scoffed, shaking my head as another humorless laugh slipped out.

“Just let me tell you the truth, Sophia. Why won’t you give me the chance to explain—”

“Sophia, please...”

“Please? Listen to yourself — suddenly you remember how to beg. I loved you. I truly did. But that doesn’t mean I’ll stand here and let you play with my feelings again. I begged you so many times to listen to me, to give me a moment to explain myself — but you always shut the door in my face. You never once let me speak, Mr. Kelley.”

“There’s nothing between us—”

Chapter 416

“I don’t care! I didn’t come here for excuses, and it doesn’t matter whether you were with her or with ten others. None of it matters anymore. You were the one who said we weren’t a real couple, that I wasn’t your real wife. So I suppose I have no say in anything you do — isn’t that right?”

With trembling hands, I lifted the divorce papers between us, holding them steady enough.

“There’s nothing between us...”

“Do you really think I care? I didn’t come here to listen to your explanations. Whether you spent the night with her or with anyone else, it means nothing to me whatsoever. You were the one who said we were nothing — that I was just your stand-in wife. So I suppose I have no right to question any of this, do I?” I pressed the divorce papers into his hand, my fingers trembling with fury and heartbreak.

“No.” He shook his head, refusing to accept them.

“I mean every word, Mr. Kelley. My signature is already on those papers. All that’s needed is yours. You’ll finally have the freedom you wanted from the very beginning.”

When he hesitated, I pressed the documents firmly into his palm and looked him directly in the eyes.

“Once we’re divorced, you will never see me again. This marriage — this entire charade — ends today.” I turned toward the door, but just before stepping out, I looked back. “And don’t worry — I won’t accept a single cent of your money, or anything else you ever gave me. Goodbye, Mr. Kelley.”

The moment I turned away, the tears I had been holding back finally broke free. I pressed a hand over my mouth, fighting to muffle my sobs as they escaped.

“Sophia!”

He called after me, desperation in his voice, but I refused to look back. I ran straight for the elevator and froze the moment Andrew appeared out of nowhere.

“Sophia, what happened?”

I couldn’t answer him. My face said everything. I stepped into the elevator, jabbed the basement button with force, and let the doors close between me and everything I was leaving behind.

I was grateful the elevator stayed empty all the way down to the basement. That meant no one would see the tears I was trying to hide, or the storm quietly raging beneath my calm surface.

His words from the night before kept echoing, sharpening the ache in my chest. Everything I had just witnessed left me raw — but not quite broken. Just enough to make me wish I could scream.

Fighting for something that was never truly yours was pointless. But nothing hurt more than realizing I had loved someone, believing he might love me back, only to find that I had been waiting for nothing all along.

End of flashback.

“That was all of it.” I forced a shrug and wiped the tears from my face.

Bryan sat in silence, but the fury inside him was unmistakable — jaw clenched, fists tight at his sides.

“You are never setting foot in that man’s house again, Sophia,” he said through his teeth.

“Don’t worry. Even if you hadn’t said it, I would never go near him again.”

“If I ever see him, I swear I will destroy him.”

Chapter 417

A laugh escaped me before I could stop it.

“You don’t have to fight my battles, Bryan. It’s enough for me that you believed in me — that you were by my side when I needed it most. You’ve always been there, no questions asked, no conditions.”

“You’re my sister, Sophia. Maybe not by blood, but you’re my family, and that’s all that matters.”

I groaned when he ruffled my hair, which made him laugh.

“I mean it, Sophia. I can’t control who you fall for, but I can promise I won’t let you make a fool of yourself over him.”

“Oh, so falling for someone like him isn’t foolish enough on its own?” A dry laugh escaped me. “If I’d known the disaster it would cause, I would have built a wall around my heart.”

“Loving deeply is not a mistake. The only real mistake is giving your heart to someone who doesn’t know how to value it. Maybe he simply isn’t ready to love someone like you.”

He smiled, giving my shoulder a reassuring squeeze as he stood.

“Come on, get dressed. I’ll take you to work today.”

I gave him a look. “Bryan, I don’t need you to be my superhero. I can get to work perfectly fine on my own.”

“Sure. Try convincing me of that.”

“Bryan!”

“I know you can manage it, but let me be here for you — all right? Go get ready.”

All I could do was sigh as I watched him walk toward the door. Just as he reached for the handle, he stopped and looked back.

“By the way, do you mind if Aira comes with us to your studio?”

“Of course not. She’s welcome to come.”

“Great. We’ll be waiting in the dining room.” With that, Bryan stepped out, pulling the door closed after catching my nod.

Daniel’s Point of View

Flashback...

The shower water was still warm on my skin when the doorbell rang. It hadn't occurred to me that I wasn't alone in the suite, so I simply grabbed a towel, wrapped it around my waist, and didn't bother drying my hair.

I stepped out, scrolling through my phone, half absorbed in new emails and notifications. I didn't notice the door opening until a gasp of surprise shattered the quiet.

"Oh my God!"

My head snapped up toward the sound, and there they were — Chloe beside me, also wrapped in a towel, and Sophia frozen in the doorway, eyes wide with disbelief.

"Hell," I muttered, the word out before I could stop it. "Sophia—"

I set my phone aside and moved quickly toward her, reaching for her hands, desperate to keep her from leaving. She stepped back instantly, knocking my hand away and putting herself out of reach.

"Sophia, it's not what it looks like," I insisted, shaking my head. The words tangled in my mouth. I couldn't even begin to explain why Chloe was there, and nothing I said felt right. "Sophia, please — just listen to me..."

Chapter 418

Her response was a sharp, hollow laugh.

“Oh, now you want to explain yourself?” She fixed her eyes on mine, daring me to look away. “I know what you’re thinking, but I swear to you—”

“And what exactly do you think I saw? All I saw was you and her in towels, with water dripping everywhere, clearly sharing the same room and most likely the same bed. But go ahead — tell me I saw nothing.”

“We didn’t sleep together, Sophia. I promise you.”

“And you honestly expect me to believe that?”

I nodded, but she only gave another humorless laugh. I was desperate to close the distance between us, to make her understand it was nothing — but the words refused to come.

“Tell me, Mr. Kelley — why should I give you the chance to speak? Why should I give you what you never once offered me when I needed it most?”

“Sophia, please—”

“So now you remember how to say please? I loved you. I genuinely did. Falling in love with you never meant I would stand here and let you play with my heart again. I begged you to hear me out so many times — to let me explain myself — but did you ever stop long enough to actually listen? No. You shut the door on me, Mr. Kelley.”

A knot tightened in my throat and I closed my eyes, forced to remember the night I came home and found her in tears. She kept pleading for a chance to speak, and I denied her even that. I had been furious and terrified — convinced she would run back to her former fiancé and pick up their wedding plans the moment I let my guard down.

“There is nothing between us,” I said dismissively, but she cut me off before I could go on.

“I couldn’t care less!”

Her words hit me like a slap, and the fury in her eyes turned my stomach.

“I didn’t come here to hear excuses. It doesn’t matter to me who you slept with or who you didn’t. It means nothing. You told me we weren’t real. You said I was only your fake wife. So I have no right to question any of this — isn’t that exactly what you said?”

“I only came to give you this.” She thrust the divorce papers toward me, her hand trembling.

“No.” I stepped back, shaking my head. “I won’t let you go like this.”

“I’ll honor my word, Mr. Kelley. My signature is already there. All you have to do is sign them and file them. That’s all. You’ll finally be free — from this arrangement and from me.”

She took my hand when I refused to take the papers, but I pulled away, still shaking my head.

“Once the court approves it, you won’t have to see me again.”

Chapter 419

Something in those words pierced through me. I felt it sink somewhere deep — somewhere I hadn’t known she could reach. And in that moment I understood: I wasn’t ready to lose her.

“I won’t accept a single cent of your money — not now, not ever! I don’t want anything you’ve given me. Goodbye, Mr. Kelley!”

“Sophia!”

Her name left my lips and I nearly went after her, but someone grabbed my arm and pulled me back. “Let go of me!” I snapped, shaking Chloe’s hand off and rounding on her. “What the hell are you even doing here?”

Chloe walked past me, unbothered, and settled herself inside the apartment.

“You were drunk last night, Daniel. I offered to help, and you let me stay in your guest room.” She shrugged as though the whole thing were perfectly ordinary. “I stayed the night, showered this morning — that’s all of it.”

“I want you out of my apartment. Right now.” My voice was sharp and final as I pinched the bridge of my nose, trying to steady myself.

“What the hell, Daniel?”

“You heard me. Go. Now.”

“You want me to just leave like this? You want me wandering half-dressed through the hallway?”

Anger simmered just beneath my skin. I clenched my fists and dragged a hand through my hair, fighting to keep it together.

Just as I sank onto the sofa to collect myself, the door swung open and Andrew walked in.

“Where is Sophia? What did you do this time, Daniel?” Andrew’s voice filled the room as he strode toward me.

“It’s not what you think, Andrew! Last night I was out of it and Chloe just—”

“Helped you into bed and out of your clothes? Is that it?”

“No, that’s not—”

“Really? Because anyone who walked in and saw the two of them — Chloe half undressed and you looking guilty — would draw their own conclusions.”

“Nothing happened between us! I had no idea she was still here until a few minutes ago!”

“Do you think any of that matters to me, Daniel? I only came to find out why Sophia left here in tears.”

“She was crying?”

“What did you expect? She walks in, sees another woman in a towel, and you don’t even try to deny it? She told you she loves you — and this is what you give her in return?”

Andrew stepped away from me and looked at Chloe with open disappointment.

“Given how much she let herself hope, I wouldn’t be surprised if Chloe took advantage of you last night.”

“Enough, Andrew!”

“Why not? You were so drunk you don’t remember a thing. For all you know, Chloe could have climbed into your bed after you passed out!”

“Don’t blame me — I didn’t do anything, you idiot!” Chloe snapped, her eyes blazing.

“Chloe, I want you gone. I mean it. Leave,” I said, my voice low and absolute, while Andrew simply raised an eyebrow and watched the fallout unfold.

She stormed into the guest room, slammed the door, and left the entire apartment rattling from the impact.

Chapter 420

I dropped onto the edge of the sofa, buried my face in my hands, and tried to slow my breathing.

I hadn’t noticed Andrew was still there, watching me.

“So this is what you always wanted, isn’t it? Push her away, keep her at arm’s length, and divorce her once the Giovanni partnership was secured. Congratulations, Daniel. You don’t even have to lift a finger. She’s doing the work for you. Her lawyer has already drawn up the divorce papers.”

"No, Andrew! I won't let her go. I'm not signing anything." I grabbed the documents from the table and tore them apart, shredding them until my hands shook. "Why fight it? You told me you didn't love her."

"I never said that."

His mouth fell open.

"I never said I didn't love her, Andrew."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I love her. I've loved her from the beginning. I just couldn't admit it. I love her regardless of what happened with Félix De Luca. I don't care who she was with before me. None of it changes anything. I love her, and I will do whatever it takes to keep her."

"Then why didn't you tell her that to her face? Instead you pointed fingers and pushed her away."

"I was afraid, Andrew! I thought she still had feelings for him. I couldn't bear the thought of her running back to someone else."

“You should have been honest. Do you remember last night? You even accused me of trying something with her.”

“I know. I’m sorry. It was pure jealousy—”

“Jealousy? Of me? Unbelievable.”

“I know what you feel for her too.”

Andrew clicked his tongue, frustrated. “You ruined everything, Daniel. You have no idea how far Sophia went just to see you. She slipped past her bodyguards, hid in the trunk of a car, and still made it all the way here. All she wanted was to be with you. And what did you do? You destroyed every chance you had and drove her away for good.”

He gave me one last look of disappointment and headed for the door.

“Andrew, wait—”

The door closed, leaving me alone with nothing but regret — the weight of my own mistakes pressing me down into the sofa. That was how it ended.

I crushed the paper in my fist, unable to stop thinking about what had happened in San Diego less than a week ago.

Leaning back in my chair, I stared at the photo of my wife on my computer screen. All I wanted was to call her, to look her in the eyes and finally explain what she believed she had seen. The problem was I didn't know where to begin. Lost in that tangle of regret and longing, I was startled by the sharp ring of my phone. I glanced at the screen — it was my private investigator.

“Good morning, Mr. Kelley.”

“Have you found anything new on him?”