

A Favor 451

Chapter 451

I'd barely had time to process his words when he played the video.

I frowned in confusion when my own face appeared on the screen. I looked at him, searching for answers, but he simply urged me to keep watching.

In the video, I was walking into a house I recognized all too well. A woman in a maid's uniform greeted me at the door, and we spoke briefly before she pointed toward the stairs.

The moment I realized what it was, a chill ran down my spine. I remembered exactly where and when that scene had taken place. The memories of that nightmare came rushing back in full force.

"No, please, don't do this, Félix, don't do it..."

A gentle hand settled on my shoulder. Only then did I realize that tears were falling silently down my cheeks.

How are you supposed to leave the past behind when it's the very thing chasing you, whispering in your ear to turn around and set things right?

“Where did you get it?” I asked quietly, my voice trembling as the video faded to black. I couldn’t force myself to watch the rest; seeing myself on that screen, screaming for help that never came, was too much to bear.

“Someone sent that USB drive to my office. There was no note, no name, nothing to say who the sender was.”

I closed my eyes and bit my lip, struggling to hold back the sobs rising in my chest. No matter how hard I tried, the pain found its way out.

“I... I really thought I was okay...”

“I’m sorry.”

His words barely registered before I felt his arms wrap around me from behind. I didn’t know how it happened, but I simply let myself collapse into his embrace, sobbing as if I had no strength left to hold it in.

“Shhh...” he whispered, pressing a soft kiss to my forehead, but not even his warmth could ease the ache in my chest.

“He tried to rape me. He abused me. He...”

I choked on the words, fury and shame burning in every syllable. The memory of Félix's hands, his disgusting smell of cigarettes and cheap cologne, the sick smile on his face as he touched me... every detail made my skin crawl. I wanted to scream until there was nothing left.

"He twisted everything to suit himself, Daniel. He fooled everyone just to cover up what he did."

He turned my chair toward him and knelt down. He held my face in his hands, forcing me to look at him.

"I promise you, Sophia, I'll make them pay for everything they did. I'll make every one of them suffer for the pain they caused you."

He spoke with a firmness that calmed the storm inside me; his voice was gentle, but his gaze was fierce and unyielding.

Chapter 452

Then he pulled me toward him, holding me as if he could shield me from the world. His hand traced soothing circles across my back and his lips pressed soft kisses into my hair. I didn't know how, but for the first time in a long while I felt safe, as if his arms had been made to hold my pieces together.

Sophia's point of view:

"Is daydreaming your new hobby?"

I didn't bother to turn around, since there was no need. The familiar scent of his cologne and the quickening beat of my heart were enough to tell me exactly who had come looking for me. Daniel Kelley.

Even so, I kept my gaze fixed on the horizon and let out a soft sigh as I watched the sun sink beyond the balcony.

"I saw you from the door while I was parking. You looked like you were in another world," he said as he settled into the seat beside me.

I gave him only a brief sidelong glance before turning back to the streaks of orange, yellow, and deep blue stretching out before me.

Sunrise and sunset always reminded me of life itself. Sunrise meant new beginnings, while sunset was the inevitable end. No matter how hard you tried, a day comes when the sun sets for everyone. Some reached their dusk too soon, by accident or illness, while others, like my father, walked slowly toward it as their bodies gave out.

A week had passed since Daniel bought the company and showed me the security camera footage from six years ago. In those days, Dad's health seemed to fade a little more with each sunrise.

"Are you thinking about the case?"

This time I turned to him and shook my head.

“It’s not that. I was thinking about Dad. I don’t know how we’ll get by without him this time.” I tried to smile, but my smile wavered. “We managed before, but this... this is different. Now he’s leaving us, and he won’t come back.”

I turned my face away as tears streamed down my cheeks. Still, I didn’t pull back when he took my hand and wiped my cheeks with his thumb.

“I’m here. And I’m not going anywhere. I’ll help you get back up and get through this,” he replied firmly, cradling my face.

Regret pressed down on my chest. I should have known sooner. I never wanted to leave him behind. This was all my fault...

“No. You can’t blame yourself for this. None of this was your fault.”

“But it is. If I hadn’t left before, if I’d just endured what Félix did to me and faced him instead of running away, maybe Dad wouldn’t be sick. Maybe he wouldn’t be...”

I never finished the sentence. His hands closed around my face and his mouth came down on mine. The kiss wasn’t gentle or tender. Nor was it like the one a week ago in the living room. This one was hard and demanding, full of breaking restraint and barely contained anger.

I closed my eyes and let the tears fall. He was furious. I could feel it.

When he pulled away, his jaw was tense, just as I expected.

“Don’t ever say that again, Sophia.”

“I told you to stop blaming yourself, that was never your fault.”

Chapter 453

The sudden hardness in his voice stopped my tears instantly. I looked at him, stunned.

“If you think hurting yourself like this will fix anything, you’re wrong. And if you think I’d let that man get away with it just so you can keep carrying this guilt, then you don’t know me at all. Hearing what you went through nearly destroyed me, knowing I wasn’t there. But that ends now. I swear I’ll make sure he answers for what he did.”

I blinked hard, trying to process what had just happened as he strode purposefully toward the garage, leaving me there, frozen in surprise.

By the time I found my voice, he was already halfway down the driveway. I hurried after him, shouting, “Where are you going?”

“To go after that bastard ex-fiancé of yours,” he shot back without missing a step, determined and angry.

“Daniel!” I yelled after him, but he kept going. Desperate, I rushed ahead and grabbed his arm, halting his stride. “And what exactly do you plan to do to him?”

“That’s none of your business, so step aside and let me through.”

“Excuse me? Of course it’s my business! Don’t I have a right to know what you’re about to do?”

“Why, because he’s your ex?”

For God’s sake! I wanted to scream. Instead, I shouted, “No, because you’re my husband, damn it!”

He froze; surprise flashed across his face and his lips curled into a smug smile. Only then did I realize what had just come out of my mouth, and I hurried to correct myself.

“I mean... my ex-husband! Because you’re my ex-husband, that’s all!”

He let out a scornful snort. “You already said it, why are you trying to take it back?”

“This isn’t about us, Daniel. It’s about my past, about Dad’s health, and about what lies ahead for me.”

His shoulders relaxed as he stepped closer and gently took my hands in his.

“Does that future you’re talking about have a place for me?” he asked quietly, and his eyes betrayed his sadness.

“Daniel...” I pulled my hands free. “I already told you, this isn’t about us. There was never an ‘us.’ What we had was an arrangement, nothing more. We played our parts because of a contract, and our paths were never meant to come together.”

I gave him a stiff, awkward smile and turned back toward the house. I’d almost reached the porch when his voice stopped me.

“Sophia.”

I went still, but I didn’t look back.

“If I don’t have a place in your future, can I at least stay in your present?”

That made me turn around. I looked at him in silence and held his gaze as he waited, hopeful and vulnerable. The truth was that even I didn’t know how to answer him.

“Why do you want to stay in my present?” I asked him.

“Because I love you.”

For a few seconds, I couldn't breathe. My mouth fell open, but no words came out.

Chapter 454

“I love you, Sophia. I know you doubt me, but it's real. Marry me again, this time for real. No contracts. No arrangements.”

And yet... nothing stirred inside me.

I wasn't celebrating. I wasn't overwhelmed by happiness. I felt empty and torn apart, unable to reconcile what my heart should feel with the reality bearing down on me. There he was, confessing his love to me, while inside the house my father lay hooked up to machines, his body pale and frail. Every passing second seemed to pull him further away from us.

My tears welled up again. Was I really supposed to celebrate now?

“I'm sorry, but I can't give you an answer to that right now.”

I shook my head and turned away before my emotions could betray me. Without another word, I hurried into the house.

His voice echoed behind me, but I didn't turn around. I went straight to my parents' bedroom, where Dad was resting. Just the day before, he'd suffered a stroke, the second since we'd arrived in Italy.

I stopped in front of the door and quickly wiped the tears from my cheeks before going in. Inside, I saw my mother and the nurse tending to him in silence.

"Is he asleep?" I asked quietly, looking toward the frail figure on the bed.

"No, he's awake. Do you want to talk to him?" My mother shook her head.

"Yes."

"We'll give you a moment. We'll come back to give him his medication." She gave my shoulder a gentle squeeze, and with that, she left with the nurse.

I sat down in the chair beside Dad and carefully held his cold, thin hand.

"Hi, Dad. How are you feeling?"

"I think I should be the one asking you that, sweetheart."

His voice was so weak I could barely hear it. I swallowed to loosen the knot in my throat, trying to steady myself.

"I'm fine, Dad," I answered, forcing a smile that felt brittle.

"Your eyes are swollen. Have you been crying?"

"No! Angie was cleaning the stairs and some dust got into my nose and eyes. I sneezed, and that's why they're swollen. Really, that's all it was."

I nodded, trying to make the lie believable, but his next words caught me completely off guard.

"I know you're lying."

"Dad?"

"You never learned how to lie, my child." He gave a faint smile.

"That's not true. I'm being honest."

“So... did he propose to you?”

“What? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Did your husband tell you how he feels about you?”

I didn’t answer him. I closed my eyes and squeezed his hand more tightly between mine, afraid my voice would betray me.

“I want you to marry him again, Belle.” I turned sharply toward him, my eyes wide. “He’s a good man.”

A short laugh escaped me as I shook my head. “A good man? Dad, you’ve known him for a little over a week. How can you be so sure?”

Chapter 455

“Because I know you. And I know your heart has known him far longer than I have. He loves you, and you love him; that’s the only thing that truly matters. Take hold of that love and start over. Build something new together. Create memories that belong only to the two of you.”

“We can’t be together, Dad.” My words were barely a whisper, and I blinked hard, trying to hold back the tears pooling in my eyes. “This marriage began as a simple act, and I’m afraid that if we keep

pretending, in the end we'll be left with nothing. It's just that we're... too different. There's too much going on, too many things to deal with besides us."

"Ysabelle, if you're referring to me, I want you to stop. I love you, sweetheart, and all I want is your happiness. Please, don't use me as an excuse to put your life on hold. I know I've caused you a lot of pain, and for that I'm deeply sorry. But none of this is your fault, or anyone else's, but mine."

"It's not just about you, Dad."

"Then promise me one thing: when all of this is over, when De Luca is finally behind bars, you'll go back to truly living, alongside him. He gave me his word that he'd be by your side and protect you for as long as I live."

"He... he really told you that?"

Dad nodded, his gaze soft. "He did, and I believe him. I saw how much he meant it when he asked for your hand. Marry him, Belle. Because when I'm gone and can no longer keep my promise to look after you, he'll be there for you. He'll take your hand every step of the way and shield you from the worst the world can throw at you."

I simply nodded and managed a sad smile, because I didn't know what to say after hearing what Daniel had done.

"I need to rest now, Belle."

“Do you want me to stay with you...?”

“No, just go and find your mother, please.”

“All right, Dad.”

As I started to get up, he squeezed my hand more tightly.

“Promise me you’ll talk to him. Let him show you who he really is.”

“I... I’ll try. Good night, Dad.”

“Good night, sweetheart. I love you.”

I waited for him to close his eyes, then leaned down and gave him a soft kiss on the forehead.

“I love you too, Dad.”

Later, I slipped away to the music room, trying to pull myself together. My phone buzzed on the table beside the old piano. I looked at the screen and saw Andrew's name. I answered right away, and a wave of panic swept through me when he blurted out that I had to come to the police station.

"Hey, slow down! Can you ask me one thing at a time? I'm not Einstein, you know? I can't process all of that..."

"Andrew Peterson, just tell me why you're at the police station and where my husband is."

Instead of giving me a straight answer, he burst out laughing on the other end of the line.

"I love how you shouted the word 'husband,' Sophia. I wonder what Daniel will say when he hears it."

Chapter 456

"If you're not going to answer me, you'd better hang up and leave me alone," I snapped, desperate to get him to take me seriously.

"Okay, okay, I was joking. We're both fine. We'll explain everything when you get here, but for now just grab a taxi and come. We can't come pick you up, we're busy with something important."

"Wait, you still haven't told me what you're doing there!"

“You’ll see when you arrive.”

“But Andrew...”

“I have to hang up, Daniel’s calling me.”

“Wait... Ugh!” I muttered and stamped my foot in pure frustration when the call cut off abruptly without giving me any answers.

I tucked my phone into my pocket and ran straight to my room, grabbed my bag, and didn’t even bother to change my clothes. All I could think about was what the hell had happened at the police station.

“Where are you going?” I was almost at the door when my mother’s voice stopped me.

“To the police station, Mom.” I hurried over and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek.

“Why the police station?” She looked at me in surprise.

“Andrew just called. He’s there with Daniel.”

“Oh my God! What happened to them?”

“I don’t know yet, Mom. Andrew wouldn’t tell me anything over the phone. I need to go, I’m going to take a taxi and see what’s going on.”

“Be careful, Ysabelle.”

“I will. Thanks, Mom.” I gave her another kiss on the cheek and ran out, my heart pounding with worry and uncertainty.

Sophia’s point of view:

“So... Sophia!”

Andrew’s eyes widened when he saw me running toward the police station’s front desk. I was seconds away from unleashing a barrage of questions at the officer when he intercepted me.

“Andrew, where’s Daniel?” I asked, panting and distraught.

“Uh... he’s inside.”

I wanted to press him for more details, but at that moment the only thing that mattered was finding my husband. Without another word, I brushed past him and hurried inside.

“Wait! Sophia!” Andrew called after me, running behind me, but I had no time to lose.

There he was. Daniel had his back to me, deep in conversation with an officer. I reached out to take his hand, just as Andrew shouted behind me:

“Daniel, Sophia’s here.”

He turned around as confusion clouded my face. For some reason, Andrew was avoiding my gaze. What was wrong with him?

“What the hell are you wearing?” my husband growled. Before I could sort out the chaos in my mind, I felt the weight of his thick jacket settle over my shoulders.

I barely had time to react before he turned and kissed me, catching me off guard. He stole my breath and turned my world upside down. I was in no way prepared for him to kiss me like that, right there, in front of everyone.

He pulled me toward him, his arms firm around my back, and when the kiss finally ended, he buried his head in my neck as if that were his place.

“Daniel, what are you doing?” I murmured close to his ear, but instead of letting go, he held me tighter, pressing me against his body.

“What do you think I’m doing, Sophia?”

“I don’t understand you at all. Why are you here?”

“Answer my question first. What exactly are you wearing?”

“What are you talking about?”

He loosened his hold a little to turn me so he could see me clearly. That’s when it all clicked. The taxi driver’s uncomfortable stare. Andrew’s hesitation. Daniel’s sudden reaction.

All I was wearing was a white tank top and a thin pair of cotton shorts.

It hit me all at once. Why hadn’t my mother stopped me?

“Okay, I get it. But that doesn’t explain why you kissed me.” My voice dropped even lower. “Everyone’s looking at us. Andrew, the officer behind you. Everyone.”

“Because I needed them to understand that you’re mine.” My fingers clutched the edge of his jacket as he continued, his voice firm: “And I won’t let anyone look at you like that. If they keep staring, I swear I’m going to lose it.”

“Why?”

“Because I’ll lose my patience.”

I pressed my lips together, holding back a smile at how sweet he was when he got possessive.

“Are we a little jealous, Mr. Kelley?” I teased, raising an eyebrow.

“Very jealous. You have no idea what you do to me, my love.”

A discreet clearing of the throat interrupted us. “Excuse me, sir,” the officer called, drawing Daniel’s attention away before I could ask him what he really meant.

“Officer Romano, I’d like to introduce you to my wife, Sophia Kelley.” He made the introduction so seriously that he didn’t even bother to smile.

I tried to extend my hand, but Daniel gently pulled me in and placed me in front of him. My breath caught at his sudden change in demeanor. Carefully, he adjusted the jacket on me and buttoned every button all the way up to my neck.

“Mr. Kelley, we’ll be starting the interrogation soon. Are you ready, sir?”

“W... wait! What do you mean, interrogation?” I stammered, shifting my gaze between the officer and Daniel.

“We can begin, officer. I just need a moment alone with my wife.”

Officer Romano nodded quickly and stepped into a room with a heavy door that read “Interrogation Room — Restricted Area.”

“What’s going on? What do you mean, interrogation?” I turned to face Daniel the moment we were alone.

“I caught him.” He looked me in the eyes, his voice low and calm.

“Caught who? What are you talking about...?”

“Félix De Luca.”

The shock was instant and absolute. I stared at him, unable to breathe. "Are you telling me the truth?"

He nodded once, firm and resolute.

"How? How did you manage it?"

"It doesn't matter how I caught him. What matters is that you're finally going to get justice for what he did to you."

"Where is he? I want to face him," I snapped, clenching my fists, fury surging through my veins.

Chapter 458

"He's in the interrogation room. The police are handling it now, and their only goal is to get him to confess."

"But what if he refuses to talk? What if he twists things again and manipulates the investigation, like before?"

"Sophia, listen to me." Daniel gripped my shoulders and looked into my eyes. "I'll never let that happen again, I swear. If he refuses to cooperate, I'll make sure he answers for everything he's done."

“But what if he buys his way out? He’s always had the money for that...”

“He can’t. He doesn’t have a single cent left to use.” Daniel’s lips curled into a cunning, almost dangerous smile that sent a chill through me.

“What are you saying?”

Taking a deep breath, I nodded, and he guided me down the hallway, toward the room the detective had entered earlier.

My mind felt like a whirlwind as we approached the interrogation room. I clung to Daniel’s hand, my knuckles tight and my heart pounding as I finally saw him: the man who had haunted my dreams and turned my life upside down. He was seated, handcuffed, in a sterile, soundproofed room, with two high-ranking officers interrogating him across the table.

Disgust and fury boiled inside me. I clenched my jaw, barely aware of how hard I was squeezing Daniel’s hand. Instead of pulling back, he drew me closer and leaned in to whisper in my ear:

“Everything’s going to be fine. He can’t run or tamper with the evidence anymore. Not this time.”

“Can he hear us?” I asked, watching Félix through the thick glass and glancing between Daniel and the officer stationed nearby.

“No, ma’am. The room is soundproofed and we’re monitoring everything he says with a secure device.”

“Can I go in?”

“Absolutely not!” Daniel shot me a look that left no room for argument.

“I’m sorry, but only the police may enter during the interrogation. You’ll have a chance to speak with him once the interrogation is over, when they take him to his cell.”

“Don’t even think about it, Sophia. I don’t want you anywhere near that guy.”

“Daniel, please. Just this once. I need to see him face to face, I need him to know I’m not afraid anymore. I want to slap him and make him regret everything.”

“All right. But this is the only time, Sophia. I won’t let him near you after today. You won’t take even the slightest risk again.”

I nodded, but I turned away, closing my eyes for a moment to hide the wicked little smile threatening to spread across my lips. I bit my lip hard, trying to keep the excitement from betraying me.

“What are you doing?” Daniel asked, suspicious, but I kept my eyes closed, savoring the thought of finally confronting my monster.

“Nothing. Just imagining a thousand ways to kill him,” I answered, but deep down I was suppressing all the wild emotions churning inside me. My heart, always so stubborn, nearly betrayed me with a beat of excitement. Traitor.

Chapter 459

We waited nearly an hour before the officers brought Félix out of the interrogation room.

I took a deep breath, bracing myself to look into the eyes of the monster, the man I had dreamed of seeing in handcuffs for years.

“Well, well, if it isn’t my beautiful Bella,” he murmured, his voice laden with that old, false charm.

“Go to hell! You ruined my life for years, but I swear you’ll never get away with your lies again!”

The words came out fast and furious as I slapped him, unable to hold back my anger any longer. The officers held him firmly in place, so all he could do was take the slap.

He let out a mocking, cold laugh that made my hands tremble with rage and my eyes fill with tears.

“I never did anything to you, my love,” he spat, using that repulsive pet name.

I was about to insult him, but before I could speak, Daniel stepped between us. His fist slammed into Félix’s jaw and split his lip, sending blood dripping down his chin.

“If you say one more word in Portuguese, I’ll cut out your tongue and make sure you never touch a woman again! You made me trust you and I hurt my wife because of your lies!” Daniel’s voice was cold, every word carrying the full weight of his fury.

Félix spat blood and gave a horrible, familiar smile. He looked into my eyes, then at Daniel, and let out in a voice thick with venom:

“Your wife?” he sneered. “How ironic! You call this woman your wife? She’s nothing but a slut, a whore who seduced my best friend before her own wedding.”

What the hell...?

The words caught in my throat as Daniel lunged forward and his fist struck Félix’s face over and over, without stopping.

“I’ll kill you for touching my wife, you bastard!”

“Daniel!” I screamed, trying to grab hold of him, but he, unfazed, kept hitting him.

“You filthy piece of trash!”

I felt an immense relief when two officers rushed in with Andrew behind them and restrained Daniel to pull him away from Félix before he ended up beating him to death.

The moment they held him back, I grabbed his arm and wrapped my arms around his waist, pressing my cheek against his chest to calm him. His heart hammered against my ear, but it gradually slowed as he wrapped his arms around me, until his breathing finally settled.

“Get that idiot out of my sight,” Andrew snapped at the officers, pointing at Félix, who was bleeding and could barely stay on his feet.

“And who the hell are you?”

I looked over Daniel’s shoulder and saw Félix’s defiant glare fixed on Andrew. The latter responded with a short, mocking laugh.

“Who am I? Are you sure you want to know?”

Félix gave a stiff nod.

Chapter 460

"Then let me introduce myself," Andrew said, striding forward with purpose. He grabbed him by the collar of his shirt and landed two brutal punches to his stomach. "I'm your conscience and your angel of death, you miserable bastard!"

"Enough! Officers, take him to his cell!" Officer Romano intervened, his voice heavy with authority.

Andrew's lips curled into a grim smile as they dragged Félix away. "You get it now, huh? That's who I am, you piece of garbage."

Félix only flashed an arrogant smile and raised his middle finger as the officers hauled him out.

Andrew lunged again, boiling with rage. "You damn bastard...", he said, but Daniel was quick to step in, pulling him back to stop him.

"Andrew!" Daniel's tone was stern, keeping him from doing any more damage.

The other let out a huff of frustration, shaking off his friend's grip. "What an idiot," he muttered, finally regaining his composure.

Despite the simmering anger vibrating inside me, I couldn't help letting out a small smile at Andrew's outburst.

“What did you just say?” I leaned forward in my chair, every muscle tense as I took in Daniel’s words.

An unusual silence hung over the café, and the aroma of the rich chocolate cake barely managed to distract me from my shock.

He repeated the sentence without blinking: “I bought your company. And all the assets De Luca had in Italy are now mine.”

The question slipped out before I could stop it. “Why would you do something like that?” It was all I could say, since I was still processing the news.

“Because I didn’t want you to worry about him. He won’t have a single euro to bribe anyone or twist the truth.”

“But what will you do with his company and the rest of his assets? You already have your business in Los Angeles. You bought my father’s company, and now this? What’s the point?”

“I have a plan. I’m going to merge the two companies: your father’s and De Luca’s. When your brother finishes university, he’ll be able to take charge of the whole operation.”

My spoon clattered onto the plate and my hands were trembling. I could barely speak. “Why are you doing all of this, Daniel?”

“What are you really asking me, Belle?”

“I want to know the truth. Why go so far for me? You saved my father’s company, took over De Luca’s company, paid off all the debts, and you’ve been supporting me throughout this whole case. Why? Why would you do all that?”

“Because I promised your father I’d take care of you. That I’d always help you, no matter what.”

“And why did you make him that promise?”

“Sophia, don’t you get it yet? I love you.” He leaned toward me and his fingers intertwined with mine.

“And I meant it with all my heart when I said I wasn’t going anywhere until the day you looked me in the eyes and said those same words to me.”