

A Favor 491

Chapter 491

“It was. And it worked. Now that he has already taken the bait, I need something bolder. Something dramatic enough to force him to stop acting.”

“This is getting interesting, Madame Sophia. Call me anytime. I am more than happy to help you.”

“Thank you, Denise. That means a lot to me.”

The smile stayed with me as I stepped back inside and spotted JM Saavedra with Craig and Bryan, deep in conversation.

“Sophia, you look glowing tonight,” JM said, greeting me warmly. I returned his smile.

“Does your offer still stand, Mr. Saavedra?”

“Forget the formalities. Just call me JM. And yes, the offer is still very much open. I am only waiting for your answer.”

“Perfect. I accept.”

“Wait. Are you serious?”

“I am. I agree to be your partner at the company’s annual party this Thursday. But I do need one favor.”

A laugh escaped him as he extended his hand toward me, clearly amused by my sudden decisiveness.

“Whatever it is you are planning, Sophia, I am honestly glad you said yes.”

“I will explain the favor another time. I hope you will still be willing to help when you hear it.”

“I already told you, as long as you agreed to be my partner, I am on your side no matter what.”

“Thank you in advance, JM,” I responded, finally accepting his handshake.

The moment Craig and I were left alone, he pulled me down into the seat beside him so suddenly that I nearly choked.

“What exactly are you asking help for, Sophia Ysabelle?” he asked, studying my face.

“Relax, Craig.”

“Relax? You do realize he is your husband’s competitor, right?”

“No. Not in business. Their rivalry was in sports. Softball, to be exact.”

“I thought Daniel told you the Saavedras were his rivals.”

“That is only half the story,” I said. “Their parents are still close friends even now. The rivalry started back when they were in school because they always ended up on opposing sides.”

I paused before adding, “JM also had a crush on one of the university cheerleaders. She happened to be Daniel’s girlfriend at the time. When they broke up, Daniel blamed him for it.”

“So he still holds a grudge over that?”

I nodded. “Yes, even though it happened years ago.”

“That was a long time ago.”

“I know. And JM is close friends with Bryan now. That is just how things are, and we cannot change it.”

“What do you think he’ll do when he finds out you’ve agreed to see JM on Thursday? It’s only Tuesday, so you’re running out of time!”

“Don’t stress. If you decide not to help, Denise said she’d cover for me.”

She let out an exasperated sigh. “Fine! I’ll help. Just make sure he falls for your scheme this time!”

“I’m hoping he does. But if not, I’ve got another move ready.” I grinned, my confidence returning.

“Oh, Lord, what are you getting yourself into?”

Daniel’s POV:

“She hasn’t called yet?”

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I turned to Denise, my brows furrowed. Sophia hadn’t come by my office in three days. It wasn’t the lack of home-cooked meals that bothered me — it was how much I missed her, the way her perfume lingered after she left.

"No, sir, there's been nothing."

"Damn! What is going on with her?" My fists hit the desk. "Call Andrew as soon as you leave!"

"Yes, sir."

I couldn't tell if she'd smiled, and I didn't let myself dwell on it. My phone was already in my hand, Craig's number halfway dialed, when Andrew strode into the office.

"Denise mentioned you wanted to see me, sir?"

"That's right. Did my wife reach out to you?"

"Wait a minute, didn't you say you weren't married? That she wasn't any of your business?"

"For God's sake, Andrew, just answer the question!"

"Hey, relax. She hasn't called, alright?"

He looked a little surprised at my outburst, but with typical Andrew ease, he just chuckled and sank into the sofa.

“Then why do you look so tense about it?”.

“It’s been three days, Andrew. Three days since she stopped dropping by with lunch. She hasn’t called or messaged, and I have no idea what’s going on with her!”.

“Let me get this straight, you’re upset because she isn’t showing up with lunch? She’s not your maid, you know. You can’t expect her to cook for you every single day”.

“That’s not it! I’m just worried. What if she’s sick? What if she’s gone back to Italy? I just want to know she’s okay. Damn it!”.

“Why don’t you just give her a call or swing by her old place? You could see for yourself how she’s doing”.

“That’s not possible, Andrew”.

“And why not?”.

“I can’t explain. Not right now”.

"Honestly, Daniel, when are you going to quit playing games and finally admit you're lost without her? You still love her, everyone knows it but you".

"You have no idea what it does to me, Andrew. Every time she walks in with lunch, just standing there at my door, I nearly lose my mind. Her scent lingers, and I have to keep pretending everything's fine until I finish this".

"What exactly needs finishing before you talk to her? Is any of that more important than your marriage?".

"Of course not! But I told you, I can't say more about it yet".

"Alright, if that's how you want it. But don't call me in the middle of the night again to drown your sorrows if things fall apart!".

"It'll work out, just trust me".

"Sure," Andrew scoffed and crossed his arms. "You want me to call Craig and ask where she is?".

"That won't be necessary. I was about to call him myself before you walked in".

“Is there anything else you want from me, sir?”. Andrew couldn’t resist putting a little extra emphasis on “sir.” “Seriously, did you just call me in here to ask about your wife?”.

Ignoring his jab, I started to dial Craig’s number.

Andrew muttered under his breath, “Honestly, what a piece of work,” as he strolled out of my office.

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His sarcasm made me laugh quietly. I pressed my phone to my ear and waited for Craig to pick up. When he finally answered on the fourth ring, he didn’t even give me a chance to speak.

“Let me guess, Mr. Kelley. You’re about to ask if she’s with me. The answer is still no”.

“How’d you know I was going to ask about her?”.

“Are you calling for some deep conversation with your wife’s gay best friend, or is this the only reason you ever ring me?”.

“Wait, what?”.

“Look, maybe try calling her yourself for once instead of tracking her through me”.

“She didn’t pick up when I tried”. The lie rolled off my tongue.

“She’s probably got her phone on silent so nothing ruins the party”.

“Wait, did you say party? She’s at a party? Where is she? What kind of party are you talking about?”.

“Daniel, one question at a time, please! I’m not your secretary, you know”.

“I’m sorry, Craig”. My voice shook as I let out a frustrated sigh, fists clenching tight. “I really need to know where she is”.

He let out a laugh that grated on my nerves. “And why is this suddenly your business? Weren’t you the one insisting she’s not your wife and that her life isn’t your concern?”.

His words echoed what Andrew had said earlier. For a moment, I just closed my eyes, letting the guilt settle in.

“I get it, okay? I was wrong. Please, Craig, I’m losing my mind over here. Just tell me where she is and who she’s with”.

“Fine, if you’re that desperate. She’s at the Saavedra place with...”.

“Wait, you mean JM Saavedra? She’s with him?”.

“That’s right. JM himself”.

“Why would she be there? What’s going on between them?”.

“Word is, JM asked her to be his date for the annual company event tonight”.

Hearing the word “date” sent a surge of heat straight to my head. My mind spun with questions.

She actually said yes, and...

She actually agreed to go with him and...

“Damn it!”. My anger exploded before I could stop myself, making Craig fall silent on the other end. I slammed my hand against the desk, pulse pounding.

“Whoa! Don’t take it out on me. I’m just telling you what you asked...”.

I didn't give him the chance to finish. The call ended with a sharp click as I shoved the phone into my pocket. My jacket and car keys were in my hands a moment later, and I stormed toward the door.

Andrew and Denise stood chatting in the hallway, but they froze as soon as I appeared.

"You're heading home, sir?"

"No, I'm not. I'm going to the Saavedra residence to get my wife out of there. And if JM tries anything, God help me, I'll break his neck".

"Alright then, good luck, and be careful out there!"

Their voices faded behind me as I marched toward the elevator, not sparing a glance for either of them. I never saw the smirks and high-fives exchanged after I left, nor did I catch the laughter as if they'd just won some inside bet.

Sophia's POV:

Screeeech...

“What on earth just happened?”

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“Oh, my God!”

JM and I blurted out at the same time as the car jerked to a stop. We had barely left the mansion grounds when everything came to a standstill.

“Robert, what’s going on?” he asked his driver.

“I’m sorry, sir. Another car just cut across our lane and pulled right in front of us. He’s blocking the road completely.”

“Who in the world would pull something like that?”

“I can’t say for certain, sir, but I believe it’s the CEO of Kelley International Corporation.”

My breath caught, and I just stared at Robert in disbelief.

“He’s getting out now and heading this way. Should I speak to him, sir, or would you like to handle it yourself?”

“No, don’t stop him.” JM’s voice was calm as he spoke, his gaze settling on me before a slow smile spread across his face.

Earlier, about twenty minutes back, our conversation had circled around Daniel. We had both agreed that if he failed to show up at the party, JM would take me back to his apartment and we would wait him out there. That plan no longer mattered. Daniel had already made his dramatic entrance tonight.

“I can’t wait to see his face when he realizes you’re sitting right here next to me.”

My teeth caught my lower lip as I drew in a steady breath. For reasons I couldn’t fully explain, my nerves flared the moment I spotted Daniel striding toward my side of the car.

“There he is. Your very angry husband,” JM said lightly.

“You remember what to do,” I murmured under my breath.

“Always,” he replied, but whatever else he meant to say was cut short. A sharp knock hit the window.

“Sophia! I know you’re in there. Get out here!”.

“Wow. He didn’t waste any time, did he?”. JM blinked, clearly impressed.

“Sophia Kelley, get out of that car right now! If you don’t, I swear I’ll smash this window to pieces!”.

“Wait here. Let me handle this first.”

I gave a quick nod, eyes never leaving Daniel as JM stepped outside. Even with the tinted windows, the rage in Daniel’s face was unmistakable. I felt it as much as I saw it.

JM’s security team appeared ready to intervene, but a sharp command from him kept them back. Only then did I notice that Daniel had come alone, no bodyguards flanking him tonight.

“You really going to follow through with that threat, Kelley?”.

“You arrogant bastard! What the hell did you do to my wife? Why is she with you? I told you to keep your filthy hands off what’s mine!”.

In an instant, Daniel lunged and grabbed JM by the collar, fury pouring off him in waves. JM just laughed, unfazed, staring Daniel right in the eyes. The boldness rattled me, my hands shaking as I watched them, and my mind suddenly flashed back to an earlier conversation with Craig.

Flashback—

“Sophia, are you absolutely sure about this plan of yours?”

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I let out a heavy sigh and met Craig’s worried gaze. He’d already asked me the same question three other times.

“Craig, just breathe, alright? JM and I already talked this through, and he’s on board. You can stop worrying.”

“I’m not worried about you, you know.” He huffed, folding his arms in a dramatic show of protest.

“I’m worried about JM! Your husband might not lay a hand on you, but I wouldn’t put it past him to go after JM Saavedra the second he spots you two together.”

His concern made me laugh, especially the way he rolled his eyes at the whole situation.

“Relax. We’ve gone over this a dozen times. Everything’s set. Bryan and Aira will be there, too, just in case.”

“Just promise you’ll call me no matter how things turn out.”

"I will. But for now, I have to get going. The party starts at 3:00, and you know what to say if Daniel calls."

"Yeah, yeah. I've got it covered."

"Thanks, Craig. You're the best."

End of flashback...

"Hold on! Did I hear you right? You're calling her your wife now? That's a new development, especially considering everyone's been saying your marriage was a sham."

"You don't know a damn thing, Saavedra. So just keep your mouth shut. Our marriage is real, and I don't need your pathetic opinion on it."

"Sorry to disappoint, Kelley, but the woman in that car isn't yours anymore. Soon enough, she'll—".

"Go straight to hell!".

I watched, stunned, as Daniel cut JM off with a vicious right hook to the jaw. My heart hammered as four bodyguards sprang into action, only for JM to wave them back, never breaking eye contact with Daniel.

"If you so much as think about putting your hands on her, I'll end you. She's my wife, mine, and you'd better remember that!".

Daniel's words were raw with fury. He landed two more blows to JM's face, and still, JM refused to fight back. He just stood there, accepting every hit as if daring Daniel to do his worst.

The scene became unbearable. I threw open the door and stepped out, unable to watch any more of Daniel's anger unleashed.

"Daniel Kelley!".

Both men turned around to look at me.

"Is this what you really want? You once said I'd be out of your life soon, that I'd be your ex-wife and nothing more. So why does any of this matter now?".

"Sophia, why did you get out of the car?". JM's tone was gentle, though his face was bloodied. He glanced at me, but Daniel's rage kept his focus elsewhere, missing the subtle wink JM gave in my direction.

"No, JM. Let him hit me, too. Let him treat me the same way he's treating you."

“What in God’s name are you talking about?”.

Daniel spun me around to face him, confusion etched across his features. Something in his voice, the way he uttered that word — woman — made me bite back a smile. It was the very first name he’d given me, long before he’d ever called me anything tender.

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“Go ahead, hit me! Let it all out, Daniel. Treat me the same way you did to JM. If you need someone to take your anger out on, I’m right here.” I stepped toward him, eyes locked with his, refusing to look away.

His gaze held mine, dark, intense, and ice-cold, yet still beautiful enough to send a chill down my spine.

“You know I could never do that.”

“Then tell me why you’re here,” I insisted, stopping just inches from his chest. “Why did you show up tonight, making a scene, chasing after the same woman you keep claiming means nothing to you? You told me I’d be your ex-wife soon, that I should just disappear from your life. I’m only giving you what you wanted, Daniel. Isn’t this what you wanted all along?”.

He didn’t answer, not with words, at least. In a flash, he pulled me close, capturing my lips in a kiss so deep it nearly stole the breath from my lungs. My heart pounded wildly, caught between the thrill and the shock of it.

Still, I forced myself to stay calm. There was more to my plan than this. He was close, so close, but he hadn't yet fallen for my trap.

"Let go of me!". I exclaimed, pressing my hands against his chest and forcing a little space between us.

"Why are you with him?".

"That has nothing to do with you, Mr. Kelley."

"And who decided that? Everything about you concerns me. You concern me. You are my wife."

A laugh slipped out before I could stop it, and I lifted a brow at him.

"Funny how that works. Right now, I'm your wife, but two weeks ago I was nothing to you. Stop pretending, Daniel Kelley. Let me go."

He let out a sharp breath, almost a growl. "Never. Not in this lifetime. You belong to me. You always have."

His hand closed around mine as he dragged me toward his car.

“You’re mine!”. The words kept echoing in my head as he pulled me along.

“Where were you taking me?”. I tried to pull my hand away, but he only tightened his grip.

“Sophia...”. Both of us had heard JM’s voice ringing out, sharp and anxious.

“Don’t even think about following us, JM! If you do, you won’t like what happens next. We’re leaving,” shouted Saavedra, shooting a glare over his shoulder and ignoring my question completely. “Right now!”.

“I wasn’t about to get in that car with you, Mr. Kelley!”.

Maybe he had no future on stage, but if anyone deserved an award for putting on a show, it was me. I could have taken home Best Actress that year.

“You’re really refusing to come with me? Is this because of him? Did you want to go with him instead?”.

I took a steady breath, nodded, and said, “Yes.”

“You thought I would just let you leave? Tss! That’s never going to happen, sweetheart. Get in.” With a quick motion, he yanked open the passenger door.

He called me “sweetheart” again, and hearing it unsettled me all over.

“No! I told you I wasn’t going anywhere! Get in the car, Sophia Kelley!”. He raised his voice.

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“And now you call me Sophia Kelley. Weren’t you the one who always insisted I was just Sophia Del Mundo?”.

“Damn it, Sophia!”. He slammed his palm down on the car roof, his voice shaking with frustration. “I don’t care if you call yourself Sophia Del Mundo or Sophia Kelley. I told you to get in the car!”.

Still, I hesitated.

“Get in the car, Sophia, or so help me, I’ll break that guy in half and finish what I started!”.

My breath caught in my throat.

Something in his eyes flickered, and that hint of nerves made me scramble to obey. I slid into the passenger seat without waiting for him to shout again.

Inside the car, my pulse thundered in my chest. The worry wasn't for him; it was for the fallout that could come from the plan I'd put in motion. I'd finally trapped him in a lie, and he'd just screamed at me in front of everyone, swearing up and down that I was his wife, that he wouldn't ever let me go.

"Where are we going?" I asked, looking over once he settled into the driver's seat.

He didn't answer. Instead, he leaned across the console, closed the distance between us, and buckled my seatbelt himself. I held perfectly still, my breath shallow as he tugged the strap into place.

"Where are you taking me?" I asked again when he finished.

"You'll find out soon enough."

"Is that supposed to be an answer?"

"If you want answers, then start by giving me some of your own. Why were you with him? Why did you agree to partner up with that guy?"

"Huh? Where did you even get that idea?" I kept my face carefully blank, feigning surprise.

"Am I supposed to act like I don't know what's going on? For heaven's sake, you're married! And you think it's fine to go off with him and agree to be his partner?"

“With all due respect, I don’t see the harm in partnering with him tonight. At least I’m not the one with an ex who just strolls into my bedroom whenever she feels like it.”

He snapped his head toward me and, without warning, swerved the car onto the shoulder.

Damn it! Why did I have to drag that into the conversation?

“I didn’t even realize she was still in the apartment, Sophia.”

I kept my eyes fixed on the window, refusing to meet his gaze, and stayed silent.

“You don’t believe me, do you?”.

In my heart, I wanted to believe him.

“Nothing happened between us. I was wasted that night, Sophia. I had no idea she was even in the other room. I figured she’d left for the night. And even if I’d known she was there, I never would have done anything.”

“Why are you trying so hard to justify yourself now? I didn’t ask for any explanations, so there’s no need for all this. Besides, we’re about to get divorced. I’ll be your ex-wife soon, so my life and my choices aren’t really your concern anymore. Anyway, I’m sorry if any of this affects your precious reputation, but don’t worry, the divorce will be final soon and you won’t have to hear from me again.”

I expected him to snap back, but he said nothing. Instead, he just shut his eyes, his jaw tightening as he clung to the steering wheel. The silence stretched between us, and he didn’t say a single word, not until the car rolled to a stop and he finally broke it. “Get out,” he said flatly.

Wait, what were we doing here? I glanced around, confused. The place looked unfamiliar.

“You heard me. Out of the car.”

Seriously? Was he not even going to open the door for me?

I gave him a look, hoping he’d catch on, and after a moment, he climbed out and came around to open my door.

That was a surprise. He actually picked up on it.

“Let’s go.”

“Hold on. Why are we here?”.

My confusion only grew when I realized we were parked in his reserved space at the KI Corporation building.

“Don’t tell me you dragged me all the way here just to dive back into work! Honestly, is your job title that thrilling?”. I shot Daniel Kelley a look, squinting at him.

I could barely contain my frustration. Was Andrew actually right about him? I swear, if he keeps this up, I’m going to lose it.

“What do you think you’re doing? Put me down right now!”.

My voice echoed down the parking garage as he carried me off like I weighed nothing.

“Daniel! I’m serious, put me down! What’s gotten into you?”.

Instead of answering, he landed a sharp smack on my backside, making me yelp.

“You did not just slap me!”.

He did it again as we stepped into the private elevator, leaving me stunned.

“Are you out of your mind? Stop it, and let me down!”.

“Nope. Stay put, unless you want another one. This is what you get for running off with Saavedra.”

“Punishment? Seriously? I’m not a child! You can’t, ow!” . I yelled as another slap landed, indignant and breathless.

“What is wrong with you, ow! Seriously, stop! Why are you smacking me like this?”. I snapped, my teeth clenched in annoyance.

“Keep mouthing off, and you’ll just earn yourself more. Up to you.”

Ugh!

Trying to argue with him while hanging over his shoulder was nearly impossible. I could barely catch my breath, let alone make my point, and before I knew it, our spat was cut short — we’d already left the elevator and entered a private suite.

“Where are we now?”.

I managed to gasp as he started up the stairs.

I held on, waiting for the dizziness to pass once he finally set me down. He opened a door, flicked on the lights, and left me standing outside the room.

“Wow, Daniel Kelley. You’re a real gentleman, aren’t you?”. I muttered under my breath as he vanished from sight.

Only then did I realize where we’d ended up. Since I’d been slung over his shoulder the whole time, I hadn’t seen which button he pressed in the elevator.

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Were we still in the KI Corporation building? How could I have missed a secret suite like this? Maybe I’d have to interrogate him about it later.

Impulse tugged at me, so I followed him in. My surprise doubled when I realized it was his private room. A king-size bed dominated the space, and there was a small picture frame next to the lamp. As I wandered over to take a closer look, I caught the distant sound of a shower running.

Why bring me up here just to leave me outside the restroom?

I shook my head, staring at the locked door. Drifting over to the table, I reached for the photo, my eyes widening when I saw our wedding picture inside. The same one I remembered seeing by his office.

A smile tugged at my lips as I picked up the little portrait, surprised to see my own face framed in his space. The first time I'd ever stepped foot in here, the shelves had only been filled with his family's photos. Now, there was a piece of our past on display too.

Lost in my thoughts and grinning like an idiot, I hadn't even noticed the water had stopped or that he'd slipped out of the shower and come up behind me.

"Why don't you go get cleaned up and change into something comfortable?"

"Why don't you freshen up and change your clothes?", he suggested, his voice close behind me, sending a chill along my spine.

I took a steady breath and turned to face him, only for his words to cut off as his scent filled the room. The soap and aftershave lingered in the air, wrapping around me.

He stood there, shirtless, with nothing but a white towel hanging low on his hips. My throat went dry, and I couldn't help but stare — until then, I had never realized what he'd been hiding beneath those suits.

Beads of water slipped from his hair and trickled over his shoulders, trailing down his toned chest and firm stomach. Without meaning to, I bit my lip as my gaze followed each droplet.

It wasn't until our eyes met, and I caught the stormy frown on his face, that I realized what I was doing.

“Knock it off, love,” he said through clenched teeth.

“Knock what off?”, I asked, feigning innocence. Even though my heart hammered in my chest, I kept my voice steady.

“Stop biting your lip like that! You’re making me lose my mind.”

“What? But I—”.

“You have no idea what you’re doing to me, Sophia. Please, just stop.”

“All I’m doing is biting my lip. Is that really such a big deal?”.

And, just to prove a point, I bit my lip again. The meaning behind his words finally dawned on me when he wrapped an arm around my waist and pulled me flush against him, his mouth capturing mine in a kiss that left my whole body trembling.

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The force of it surprised me, but I didn’t hesitate for even a moment. I kissed him back just as fiercely, the distance that had always lingered between us disappearing in a rush of heat and longing.

My arms slipped around his neck as he held me tighter, his lips trailing across my skin and teeth grazing my ear. The rush of sensation made my knees go weak, but he kept me upright, his hands anchoring me to him.

For once, I gave in completely. I clung to him, pressing myself closer as his hands slid over my body and my fingers tangled in his damp hair.

We might have lost ourselves entirely if he hadn't stopped suddenly, pushing me away just as the world seemed to spin out of control. My head was still foggy, my heart racing with protest, when he spoke.

"We have to stop, Sophia." His breathing was ragged as he stepped back. "You should leave now. I'll get dressed and show you to the guest room."

My thoughts reeled, not sure how to process any of it.

"I'm serious, five seconds. Out, Sophia, or I'll lose whatever's left of my restraint."

"What is this supposed to mean? You drag me out of JM's car, haul me here, and now you want me to just leave? After everything, you shut me outside and then act like it's my fault?"

I stared at him, part baffled, part hurt.

“Because if you stay, I can’t promise what’ll happen next.” His voice shook with restraint. “Your scent is driving me over the edge, and your touch... I’m barely holding on here. Leave, Sophia, before I cross a line.”

A shiver ran through me. I realized the same tension pulsed in his voice that I’d felt in his kiss.

“And what if you do lose control?”

His gaze locked on mine, eyes dark and wide with longing. The sight of him, breath unsteady, pupils blown wide, made me smile, knowing the effect I had on him was just as powerful as what he did to me.

“Go on. Whatever you want. I’m yours.”

“Be careful, Sophia. You don’t know what you’re inviting.” He let out a slow, heavy sigh.

My heart pounded.

“Maybe I do,” I murmured, sliding my arms around his neck and pulling him in for a deep, lingering kiss. His mouth met mine, hungry and desperate.

Soon enough, I felt fabric slipping away, my skin meeting cool air and then the soft warmth of the bed.

“Are you sure about this, Sophia?”. He paused, searching my eyes, his voice barely above a whisper.

I nodded without hesitation.

“Once I begin, I don’t know if I’ll be able to stop myself,” he warned in a whisper, his voice dropping low. But I could not find words, and impatience had already taken over. I reached up, pulled him down, and kissed him with every ounce of longing I had kept hidden.

That kiss said everything. He responded with just as much hunger, his hands wandering over me, his touch full of reverence and desire.