

A Favor 511

Chapter 511

“Oh my God. Are you trying to turn me into some kind of—”.

I stopped myself too late, already horrified by my own words.

His laughter filled the car.

“No. If anything, I am the one at your mercy. I would do anything you asked of me.”

The air conditioning blasted cold air through the car, yet heat crept over my skin as though flames had sparked beneath it.

I stayed quiet after that, letting the silence stretch all the way into the parking lot and linger through the ride up the elevator, my thoughts far too loud to give voice to.

The moment we stepped inside the penthouse, he backed me against the wall and claimed my mouth in a kiss that felt urgent and unrestrained. My wrists were lifted above my head, held firmly in place, while his other arm secured my waist, leaving no room for retreat.

Nothing needed to be said. Our bodies spoke for us, driven by a shared heat that pushed us forward. I met his intensity without hesitation, letting the kiss grow deeper and slower, until the space around us changed and we were suddenly inside his bedroom.

I could not even remember the walk there. All that lingered in my mind was the way he kissed me in the living room, how his hand explored me with purpose, memorizing every curve. He drew in a steady breath, and my palm found his chest, sliding over firm muscle and tracing lower until my fingers rested where his body tightened beneath my touch.

He guided me to sit at the edge of the bed, then pulled his shirt over his head and dropped to his knees in front of me. My heartbeat thundered so loudly it nearly drowned out everything else when he took my hands and pressed his lips to them. The warmth of his mouth sent a shiver through me, unraveling thoughts I did not even realize I was holding onto.

“I am sorry.”

The word caught me off guard, and confusion crept across my face. An apology was the last thing I expected in that moment.

“I know I treated you terribly when we first met. I did not stop after we got married either. I was blind and careless. I hurt you, ignored you, insulted you, and made you cry. I was wrong, Sophia. I truly am sorry.”

I pressed my teeth into my lip as he spoke, unsure whether I was truly hearing him or simply feeling everything at once. My ears followed his words, yet my eyes stayed fixed on his mouth, on the way it moved with each sentence. When he ran his tongue over his lips, a sharp swallow followed, and my focus slipped completely from reason to sensation.

I sat across from him, yet my thoughts drifted far away, lost in a hazy place where my hands traced the strength of his body, lingered over his broad shoulders, and followed the lines of his firm frame. In that imagined space, my fingers slid through his hair, and my mouth found his lips in slow, lingering kisses.

“I am sorry. I should never have believed what Joseph told me, and I hate that I made you cry that night. If I could turn time back, I would do everything differently. I would stand between you and every hurt that came your way.”

A smile tugged at my lips as I met his gaze, though holding myself back was becoming harder by the second. I drew in a steady breath while he spoke on, and the faint trace of mint on his breath only made my resolve weaken further.

He smiled at me, unaware or perhaps pretending not to notice how restless I had become, how little attention I was paying to his words.

“Sophia...”.

My eyes rolled before I reached for him, gripping the back of his neck and cutting him off. “Enough. Daniel, that is all in the past. I already forgave you.”

Confusion flickered across his face, but it vanished the instant I took his mouth in a hurried kiss. I did not hold back, nipping at his lower lip and deepening the kiss with impatient intent, determined to make him feel exactly what words could not say.

Once again, words were unnecessary. He seemed to read every thought, every feeling, and most of all, every unspoken want. Without hesitation, he answered that quiet plea, meeting my mouth with the same urgency I gave him.

Time lost its meaning after that. One moment blurred into the next, and before I realized it, the night had carried us through wave after wave of closeness until exhaustion finally claimed us both.

Only then did it sink in that this was not some passing fantasy. This was real. I was there, in his bed, my head resting on his arm, my hand curved over his waist, listening to the steady rhythm of his breathing as sleep claimed him.

Amusement tugged at my lips while I watched him rest. His mouth had fallen slightly open, and the sight made me wonder how we ever ended up like this. The untouchable billionaire, reduced to this quiet vulnerability, wrapped around me. I could not help but credit a bit of that to my own charm.

Sleep pulled at me again, and I shifted closer, fitting myself against his warmth. His arm tightened around me on instinct, drawing me in, and the sound of his heartbeat filled my ears like a private melody. It made me smile without even realizing it.

Despite the long night, I still woke early, at least half an hour before he did. With careful movements, I slipped out of bed and made my way to the kitchen to prepare breakfast for him.

"I'll be there for you until the earth stops turning, playing in your heart like love songs do. I'll be there for you like a candle burning, just believe it's true, I'll be there for you..."

"Well, someone seems to be in a very good mood this morning."

What?

Chapter 513

I turned with a startled laugh and saw Nanay Emily standing a short distance away, arms crossed over her chest, a knowing smile playing on her face. She had clearly caught me mid-song and mid-dance.

Heat rushed to my cheeks, but I still managed to return her look with a smile of my own, one that was equal parts shy and unmistakably pleased.

“How did you sleep last night, Anak?”.

“I slept fine, Nanay Emily. It was a good night.”

The question felt odd, and my answer sounded just as strange even to my own ears.

“That is good to hear. So, are you cooking breakfast for your husband?”.

As she stepped closer, she did not need to stress that last word. The playful curve of her smile made her meaning perfectly clear.

“Yes. The bacon and sausages are done, and I am working on pancakes with maple syrup now.”

Her expression did not change as she nodded, clearly pleased.

“And what did you make for yourself?”.

“I kept it simple. Just toast with chocolate syrup and a couple of banana slices.”

“Make sure you drink some milk too. That is better for you than juice.”

As she said it, her hand brushed lightly against my stomach, and the unexpected touch made me inhale sharply. My eyes dropped to where her hand had been before lifting to her face again.

“Call for me if you need anything, Anak. Grandma Emily will be in the living room.”

She finished with a wink and walked away.

I stood there, stunned and silent, my thoughts tangled in confusion. Grandma? What did she mean by that? I had always called her Nanay, not Grandma.

That was... strange.

Despite the whirlwind her words left behind, I kept working on the pancakes, moving to my own quiet rhythm as the pan sizzled. I had no thought of impressing anyone, let alone tempting my husband, mostly because I did not realize he was already there. He came in fresh from a shower, only minutes after Nanay Emily left the kitchen, yet my attention stayed fixed on the stove until his familiar scent reached me.

I had just begun to turn when strong arms slipped around my waist, and his chest settled firmly against my back.

“What a way to start the morning, my love,” he said, and a laugh escaped me when his breath brushed my neck and his teeth grazed my ear, leaving my senses dizzy. “You know how dangerous you look when you move like that. Are you trying to test my restraint?”.

Surprise widened my eyes. “Absolutely not.”

A low sound left him. “I am not convinced.” His thumb traced slow circles over my stomach, and I swallowed as my pulse jumped. “You do not have to try so hard. Your skin alone, that soft vanilla scent, is already undoing me.”

His lips followed the line of my shoulders, and instinct flared before I could stop it.

Chapter 514

Even with my body responding far too eagerly, I hovered on the edge of turning to him, of touching his face and closing the distance between us. Then reality rushed back. We were still in the kitchen, and anyone could walk in. Especially Nanay Emily.

“Daniel,” I whispered, clamping my lips together to hold back a sound when his hands wandered too boldly. “We are not alone. Daniel Kelley.”

My jaw tightened as panic mixed with heat. Getting caught would be mortifying. I swatted his hands away and carefully freed myself, only for him to turn me around instead. The kiss he gave me was firm but sweet, stealing my breath before I could protest.

A sharp gasp slipped out when he shifted closer, the intent impossible to miss.

I pressed my palms against his chest, trying to push him back. “Daniel, she is right there in the living room.”

“And? As if she does not already know what kept us awake last night, or how many times I made you forget everything else.”

“For heaven’s sake, Daniel, did you really have to say that in the middle of the kitchen?”.

He just laughed, finally easing away, while I shot him a warning look.

“What dragged you out of bed so early?”, he asked, slipping a piece of bacon between my lips before I could answer.

A smile tugged at my mouth as I turned off the stove.

“I wanted to make you breakfast. There’s bacon, sausages, pancakes with maple syrup, and I even made apple juice.”

I paused mid-sentence when I realized he was staring at me, that soft smile still sitting on his face. “What?”.

Instead of answering, he shook his head, stepped closer, and wrapped his arms around me.

“I had no idea how lucky I was until I married you.”

Excitement bubbled up so fast I had to bite my lip. “Really? Because that is not what you said the first time you saw me at that café. And I distinctly remember you yelling that I was not your type and never would be.” I gave his back a light pat. “So what changed?”.

“I know, and I am sorry.” He drew me closer and rested his head against the side of my neck. “You have no idea how much I regret saying those things. And for the record, I really did think you were beautiful that day.”

I huffed and rolled my eyes. “Oh, really? Was it actually me you found beautiful, or were you just distracted by my chest?”.

Laughter spilled out of him and echoed through the kitchen.

“Both.”

I narrowed my eyes and crossed my arms, pretending to be unimpressed.

“By the way, did you ever ask your mother whether she offered me money? Or have I already made it clear that marrying you was never about that?”.

“No, my love, I have not asked her yet. And as for the rest, I honestly would not care even if money were your reason. You are mine either way.”

“You know that is not why. You know it was because of Joseph. Because I wanted...”.

Chapter 515

“Shh,” he murmured, cutting me off with a quick kiss that stole the rest of my sentence. “I know. I already know, my love. You do not have to explain anything to me. I saw all of it. Your pain, the nights you could not sleep, the things that still haunt you. And even if money had been the only reason you agreed back then, I would still be standing right here.”

He shrugged lightly, a confident curve tugging at his lips.

“Honestly, I could not care less. I am a billionaire. One of the biggest in California. I make more in a day than most people see in a lifetime. I can give you everything. Security, freedom, travel, anything you want.”

Wow! The numbers alone made my head spin. I exaggerated a wobble and grabbed onto his arm, pretending I might faint. He caught me easily, laughing under his breath.

“And yet, I do not need your billions. I only need you.” I punctuated it with a playful wink.

“I know. And I know that, deep down, you want the same.”

I let out a long sigh just as his hand suddenly guided mine, bold enough to make my eyes widen instantly. “You are unbelievable. Such a pervert.”

“Oh, sweetheart. That is not what you were saying last night. Or on our first night together.”

“Daniel,” I warned, quickly covering his mouth. Heat rushed to my face, turning my cheeks a deep shade of red.

His laughter only made it worse. Maybe one day I would get used to his shameless humor. Still, part of me was glad we had finally shed our walls and learned how to laugh like this together.

A quiet wish settled in my chest, one I did not dare say out loud. I wanted this moment to stretch endlessly, to stay untouched until the very end of our lives.

Time eventually nudged us forward, and we lingered in the kitchen before sitting down to eat together.

“Ugh, I am going to miss you again,” Craig said with a dramatic pout. He walked up behind me and wrapped his arms around my waist. Standing in front of the mirror, I caught the faint crease forming on his forehead.

After breakfast, Daniel wasted no time. He insisted on packing up my things from the apartment and moving everything straight to the penthouse.

“Relax, I will be at Daniel’s place. You can visit whenever you want. And hello, we still see each other at the studio.”

“The real point is that you are actually living with him now. And this time it feels different. He finally knows how to treat you like his wife. Not like before, when he treated you like something he could toss aside whenever he felt like it.”

The word wife made me turn toward him, a slow breath leaving my lungs.

“What was that for?”, he asked, pulling me gently toward the bed and guiding me to sit. Concern flickered across his face. “What is going on? Do you want to talk about it?”.

Another sigh escaped me. “Last night, he told me how much he regretted the way he treated me back when I was living at the mansion. Even from the moment we first met.”

“That is actually good. At least he admitted he was wrong.”

“It is. But that was not what I needed to hear from him.”

Chapter 516

“What is it, then?”.

Those three words. The ones that change everything.

The three words?

“I love you.” I rolled my eyes as I said it.

“I thought he already said that back in Italy.”

“He did, but that was two months ago, and it was different. Since I came back from Italy, and even last night, he has not said it again. Not once.”

“But he shows it, does he not? You always say actions matter more than words.”

“I know that. But I am still a woman, Craig. I need to hear it. I need reassurance.”

“Then why not ask him?”.

“And say what exactly? Should I just blurt out, ‘Why have you not told me you love me?’. Or maybe, ‘When are you finally going to say it again?’”. I looked at him pointedly. “Is that seriously what you think I should do?”.

“And there is more than that. Why did he act like his feelings were gone? Why did he talk about divorce when, all along, he was already in love with you?”.

I caught my bottom lip between my teeth and let out a slow breath. Those questions never stopped circling in my head. Before I could answer him, Daniel’s voice drifted in from the hallway, followed by a firm knock on the door.

“Sophia, are you ready, my love?”.

Craig and I glanced at each other. He immediately put on a dramatic imitation of Daniel's tone and even rolled his eyes, which sent a laugh bubbling out of me. I stood up to open the door while he pretended to gather my toiletries and shove them into the suitcase.

"Just about done," I said with a smile as I opened the door and found Daniel standing there, looking unfairly handsome.

"Do you need help? I already took care of your other suitcase," he asked, slipping an arm around my waist.

"No." I shook my head. "Craig is helping me, and we are almost finished. Besides, are you not supposed to be at work today?"

"Not today," he replied smoothly, punctuating it with a wink. My heart nearly tripped over itself. Seriously, when was I ever going to get used to that? Every time he did it, my insides turned to liquid.

"And what about that important meeting you said you had?"

"You do not need to worry about it. Andrew and Denise handled everything for me."

"Oh," I murmured, nodding as the pieces settled into place.

Once my belongings were settled in the penthouse, he wasted no time dragging me back out. Instead of heading home, he drove us straight to the mall and walked me into a furniture store, which immediately left me puzzled.

“Are you planning to replace everything?”, I asked as we wandered toward the living room displays.

Our hands stayed linked, fingers comfortably woven together, while he gestured toward a cream-colored L-shaped sofa.

Chapter 517

Rather than answering me, he tilted his head and posed a question of his own, as if my words had never reached him.

“How do you feel about this one, love?”.

“It looks nice,” I said after a moment, nodding as I studied the sofa more closely.

“If I built a house for you someday, or even bought one, what would you want the inside to feel like?”.

The question caught me off guard, but I still answered without overthinking it.

“Purple,” I said with a small shrug.

“That is exactly what I expected.” A soft sound of amusement left him.

“Why? You know that has always been my favorite color.”

“I do,” he responded, laughing again. He lifted my hand and brushed a kiss over my fingers. “Now come on. Help me pick out the right furniture.”

“Wait. Are you seriously changing the furniture in your penthouse?”.

“Our penthouse, Sophia. It is ours, not just mine.”

“So we agree it is ours. But are you actually buying all of this for the penthouse?”.

“Could you take us to the dining table section?”, he asked the salesman instead of answering me, and my brows immediately drew together.

Seriously? Why did he always dodge my questions like that? I let out a silent sigh as the two of them started talking logistics, and before I knew it, I was following behind the salesman with my hand still firmly linked in my husband’s.

From that moment on, he handed me full control. Every decision became mine. The furniture style, the layout, the artwork, the wall pieces, even the curtain colors. Nothing was too small for him to defer to me.

Almost three hours vanished inside that store, and just when I thought we were finally done, he steered me straight into a women's boutique. By then, my original question had completely slipped my mind.

"Wait. Why are we going in there?", I whispered, tugging lightly on his jacket.

"What else? We are buying clothes. Lots of them."

"But you already bought me so many dresses. You remember that, right? I have not even worn most of them."

"It is fine. We will still get the dresses, the shoes, and the accessories."

"What am I supposed to do with that many outfits? I barely go to events."

"Not this time," he said, shaking his head. My confusion must have shown because he smiled, leaned down, and brushed a kiss across my forehead. "From now on, you will be coming with me. To dinners, to galas, to far too many parties. And speaking of that, KI Corporation is hosting a Thanksgiving event this Wednesday. I want you there by my side."

“Alright. I will go with you. But you really do not need to buy me anything.”

“That is not up for discussion. I will buy what you need and whatever you want. Not because you asked, but because I want to.”

“But I just said—”.

Chapter 518

“And I already told you. I am a billionaire. If you think any of this is a waste, forget it now. I will keep doing this whether you complain or not.”

I rolled my eyes as he released my hand and crossed toward a display filled with long gowns and designer heels.

Money was not the issue. Pride was. I clicked my tongue quietly, shaking my head. Some things never really changed. No matter how much time passed, he was still Daniel Kelley, confident to a fault, convinced that wealth could smooth over everything. I murmured the thought under my breath while watching him inspect the dresses one by one with careful attention.

A soft laugh drifted up behind me. One of the saleswomen had clearly been listening to our conversation, and judging by her amused expression, she had caught my comment. I smiled at her and lifted a finger to my lips, silently asking her to keep it between us. She smiled back and nodded in agreement. I almost swallowed my tongue when I noticed Daniel looking straight at us.

I could not tell if he understood our wordless exchange, but his raised brow said enough. The faint, knowing curve of his lips made it clear he was already plotting something.

“Try this one on, love.”

I stepped closer and accepted the wine-colored dress from his hand. Too many eyes were on us, so I stayed quiet and headed straight for the fitting room.

“What on earth are you doing?”, I hissed, eyes widening when he followed me inside the cubicle.

“I want to see it on you,” he said with a casual shrug. I did not buy that for a second. There was a familiar spark in his eyes, one that usually meant trouble.

“You know I would show you later. And this is the women’s fitting area. You are not supposed to be in here.”

“And who exactly is going to stop me? I am Daniel Kelley.” The confidence in his voice made it obvious he had another motive.

Unbelievable. Still arrogant.

“Careful. That is the second time you have used that word.” He stepped closer, reaching for my waist, and I moved back instinctively. “Do you think I did not notice earlier? I saw you whispering with one of the saleswomen.”

I blinked and gave him an innocent-looking smile. The space felt suddenly too small as his broad frame filled the room.

“I was joking,” I said quickly, lifting two fingers in a peace sign. “Promise.” My back met the wall before I could take another step.

“I am already looking forward to hearing you say my name again. Especially when you tell me just how arrogant I am going to be later.”

Heat rushed to my face before I could stop it, and I felt my cheeks and neck burn with embarrassment. His arm slid around my waist, and a sharp breath left me when his hand wandered far too boldly. The closeness of him stole my air as his breath brushed my skin.

“Daniel Kelley. Have you completely forgotten where we are? This is a public fitting room. People are right outside.”

Chapter 519

I tried to pry his hand away, but he only drew me closer. His other hand settled at the nape of my neck, fingers tangling lightly in my hair, leaving me with nowhere to retreat.

"They can wait. I do not care how long," he murmured, unbothered. A smile curved into his words as he leaned close, his breath teasing my ear.

"I do. So you need to leave. Now. Before they start getting ideas."

"Let them assume whatever they want," he said with a careless lift of his shoulders.

"Daniel Kelley, if you do not walk out right now, I am not trying on a single dress," I warned, fixing him with a hard stare.

"Fine, I will leave." A familiar grin curved his lips. "But only if you promise to make it up to me tonight."

"What do you mean I am doing the work tonight? What the hell, Daniel!" The realization hit me all at once, and the words burst out before I could stop them.

His laughter came quick and unrestrained, clearly entertained by my reaction. It was not that the idea bothered me. What made my skin prickle was knowing we were not alone, that anyone outside could overhear us.

"See? You are hesitating. If you keep that up, I might just stay and watch you change."

"Fine. I will do it. Now please leave."

He did not answer immediately. The air inside the cubicle shifted, thickening under the weight of his gaze, and a shiver ran straight down my spine.

“I am already counting the hours.”

His fingers brushed my cheek, and then his mouth captured mine in a kiss that left my thoughts scattered. When he finally stepped away, I stood there stunned, my heart pounding as if I had just run a race.

Honestly, the effect he had on me was unreal. I drew in a slow breath and pressed a hand to my chest, trying to calm the frantic rhythm of my heart.

“Looks like another delivery from your secret admirer.”

Craig set the bouquet on the table, then pulled out a chair and settled himself across from my desk. I did not bother asking where the flowers came from. I already knew.

“They were from TM,” he said, which made me roll my eyes.

That nickname again. Up to that point, my so-called secret admirer, TM, had not missed a single opportunity.

Craig once mentioned that the deliveries only stopped while I was in Italy, but the moment I returned, the flowers started showing up again like clockwork. There were times when I caught myself wishing they were from Daniel, but that thought never lasted long. I always ended up throwing the bouquets away, because I knew flowers were not something he cared about.

And honestly, who else could they have been from?

He leaned back in his chair, clearly entertained. "What if it was your husband?"

I let out a tired sigh. "Daniel never gave me flowers."

That finally caught his attention. His hands paused mid-movement, and his focus shifted fully to me.

"Not even once? Not a single red rose or those purple tulips you liked so much?"

I shook my head.

Chapter 520

"And he never said it either?"

My response stayed the same. I shook my head again.

“You had been living together for three weeks already, and he still had not said those three words?”.

“No.” I took a long, steady breath before letting it out.

“Did you ever ask him about it?”.

“I did. But his answer completely caught me off guard.”

I could tell my words threw him off. His brows pulled together, and he fixed his gaze on me as if trying to piece everything together.

“Hold on. I’m lost. Can you explain what you mean?”.

“Earlier this morning, before he left for work, we talked for a bit. I brought it up and asked him directly, but his answer was not what I expected.”

“Not what you expected how? What exactly couldn’t he do?”.

“He said he couldn’t say those words again. He told me he was no longer able to repeat them. When I tried to get him to explain himself, he suddenly acted pressed for time and said he had an important meeting at the office.”

“What the hell? Did you go to his office and confront him about it?”.

“I couldn’t.” My body felt drained the moment his words sank in.

Exhaustion washed over me, leaving me hollow. A bitter laugh slipped out as I shook my head. “And what about all those nights, Craig? What about the times he nearly yelled in front of everyone that I was his wife? What about the way he held me, kissed me, and acted like he was proud to have me by his side? And the weeks we spent living together. What were those supposed to mean? I’m completely lost.” I squeezed my eyes shut and leaned back against the chair.

“Maybe there’s a reason behind it.”

“Oh, I’m sure there is.” My patience snapped, and the words rushed out before I could stop them. “I’m sure he has a damn good reason for pulling this kind of thing. But I’m exhausted, Craig. I’m tired of all this confusion and drama.”

He stayed silent, staring at me as if he had not expected that reaction at all.

“You really need to talk to him, because even I am getting lost trying to understand what the two of you are doing. Seriously, are you actually ending up together, or are you just pretending to be perfect for each other?”.

I gave him nothing in return. My silence did not slow him down in the slightest.

“When you first admitted how you felt, he refused to believe you. Then he chased after you all the way to Italy and told you he loved you too, and you were the one who said you were not ready. Now you are living together, sharing the same space every day, and suddenly both of you are too proud to say what you feel. For heaven’s sake, how does that even make sense?”.