

A Favor 521

Chapter 521

His voice kept filling the room while I stared ahead, saying nothing. Then a thought clicked into place. Without warning, I pushed myself up, grabbed my bag, and reached for my jacket draped over the chair.

“Where are you going?”. He jolted to his feet.

“I’m heading back to the penthouse.”

“And what are you planning to do once you get there?”.

“I am going to make him lunch. Then I will bring it to his office.”

“And after that?”.

“After that, I am going to talk to him. I am not leaving until I get a real answer from him, Craig.”

He let out a low sound of understanding and nodded. “Well then, good luck and best wishes,” he responded, finishing it off with a playful wink.

“Best wishes? What are you even talking about?”.

“What? Aren’t you planning to propose to him?”.

A laugh slipped out before I could stop it. “No. I do not even have a ring yet. If everything between us were already settled, then maybe I would consider that idea.”

“So you are actually fine with being the one to take the first step and kneel in front of him?”.

“I do not see why not. We are living in a different time now. Plenty of women make the first move these days.”

He tapped his fingers together, thinking. “But what if he ends up surprising you and asks you to marry him first?”.

“I doubt it, Craig. If that had crossed his mind, he would have done it before he moved all my belongings into his penthouse.”

“Alright then. You should probably head out now before the traffic gets worse.”

“You are right. I should go.” I walked over to him and pressed a quick kiss to his cheek before leaving the office.

The moment the elevator doors opened, my hand went straight to my forehead. Ben stood there with two other men, waiting in the lobby. Of course. It was him and his new team again.

Daniel had insisted last week that Ben and two other members of his security team would be assigned to me. Again. I did not even get the chance to argue before he made the decision for me.

“Madame Sophia...”.

“Ben, we are going back to the penthouse,” I interjected, cutting him off before he could continue. Without waiting for a response, I turned and headed straight toward the parking lot.

Naturally, if my husband decided to assign the security team back to me, then I also expected him to return the purple Rolls-Royce SUV he had given me months earlier.

“Sophia, I already prepared everything you need for the menudo,” Nanay Emily said, which was the very first thing she told me the moment we stepped back into the penthouse.

“Thank you, Nanay Emily.”

A smile crossed my face as I hurried into the kitchen, already focused on cooking Daniel’s favorite dish. She came in after me and quietly helped sort the spices while I tied the apron around my waist.

“Why are you rushing so much? He is only one floor away.”

Chapter 522

“I just really want to talk to him. What we discussed this morning has been weighing on me all day, and I could not even concentrate at work.”

“I see. Do you want me to stay and help you a bit more?”.

“Oh, thank you, Nanay Emily, but I can handle it.”

“Alright. Call me if you need anything.”

I gave her a small nod and watched as she left the kitchen. That was what I appreciated most about Nanay Emily.

She felt like a second mother in this home, but she also knew when to step back. She never pushed or pried. She waited until we were ready to speak, respected our boundaries, and gave us room to fix what needed fixing. She never judged. Instead, she understood. And when things became too heavy, she was always there, steady and kind, ready to listen.

My hands moved through the motions of cooking his favorite meal while one thought kept pounding in my head. We need to talk. It took half an hour to finish everything, yet the result made the effort worth it. The flavor turned out exactly the way he liked it.

After cleaning up, I fixed my makeup again and added mascara to bring out my brows. A few sprays of my favorite perfume followed before I asked Ben to help me carry the food containers down to Daniel's office.

"Be honest. How do I look?". I turned toward him.

"You look... um... fine?". The uncertainty in his voice made it sound more like a guess than an answer.

"You look beautiful with makeup, Madame Sophia." The other guard cleared his throat.

I groaned inwardly. "That is not what I meant. Do I look nervous?".

They all paused, then slowly scanned me from head to toe. A second later, they spoke at the same time.

"Why would you be nervous?".

"Oh my God. Forget it. Just forget I asked." I stared at the elevator doors.

A quiet click sounded as the doors slid shut. I shook my head.

Why did I ever think asking them was a good idea?

The elevator doors slid open, and we stepped out together, moving straight toward Daniel's office. By the time we reached Denise's desk, my pulse had already picked up.

Surprise flashed across her face when she saw me, though I had no idea that her next words would leave me even more stunned.

"Madame Sophia, are you here to see Mr. Kelley?" She rose from her chair with a polite smile.

"I am. I brought him lunch. I also made something for you and Andrew."

That single sound made me stop short. "Why? Andrew is not here?"

"He is here, madame Sophia. But your husband is not."

"What do you mean he is not? He told me he had a board meeting at 11 this morning."

"There was a meeting scheduled, yes. However, he canceled it after Mrs. Enriquez called earlier. She wanted to discuss her current project with him."

Again? That woman again?

Chapter 523

Confusion twisted into irritation, and my brows pulled together. The words slipped out before I could stop myself. “Why does it feel like she is trying to take my husband away?”.

The moment the sentence landed, the air shifted. Denise froze, and Ben stiffened beside me, both of them clearly caught off guard by what I had said.

“He did not even bother to call me.”

The frustration kept spilling out under my breath as resentment took hold. I barely noticed the quick glance Denise and Ben exchanged while I stood there, simmering.

Questions kept piling up in my head. Had he not already placed her in charge of that project? If that was the case, why did she need to run to him over every small problem?

Was she really incapable of handling things on her own? The frustration slipped out of me even though I was not speaking to anyone in particular.

Denise shifted in her seat. “Madame Sophia...”.

"I know they are business partners," I said, stressing the words. "But being partners does not mean they have to be attached at the hip. This is ridiculous."

"Do you want me to call him?"

I turned toward him, then shook my head. "No, Ben. Do not call him." My gaze slid back to Denise. "And please, do not tell him that I came here."

"But..."

"He should be the one to reach out. He is my husband. If he needs to be somewhere else, then he should be the one to tell his wife where he is."

They exchanged brief looks before answering together, "Yes, madame."

"What should I do with the food, Madame Sophia?" Ben glanced down at the paper bags in his hands.

"Give Denise her portion and make sure Andrew gets his. Take the rest with you."

I had nearly reached the elevator when Denise called out from behind me.

"Maybe he was just tied up, Madame Sophia. That is probably why he did not get the chance to inform you. I am sure he will call you later."

"I hope so." I lifted my shoulders in a small shrug and gave her a smile that did not quite reach my eyes. Before she could say anything else, I turned away and headed straight for the elevator.

Ben and the other two guards fell in behind me after making sure Denise and Andrew received their share of the food.

I waited for his call until the sky began to darken, hoping for even a short message explaining where he was. Nothing came. Craig had been watching me quietly ever since I returned to the studio, though he clearly held back, waiting for me to speak first.

Forcing myself to stay productive, I went back to the report I had been working on before I left to cook for my husband. Still, my focus kept slipping. Every few minutes, I checked my phone, scanning through the notifications that had piled up since morning. Not a single one was from him. The disappointment settled in heavier each time.

"Ahem."

Chapter 524

Craig's voice pulled me out of my thoughts. I looked up and found him standing by the door, and I had no memory of hearing him come in.

“Why don’t you just call him?”.

A long breath left me, followed by a stiff smile that even I did not understand.

“Why would I do that?”.

“To figure out where he went,” he said with a shrug as he started toward me.

Instead of answering right away, I pushed back my chair and walked over to the glass window beside my desk.

“What made you think that?”. I asked, throwing a glance over my shoulder before turning back to the city below.

A quiet sigh reached me, followed by the sound of his footsteps closing the distance between us.

“I talked to Ben. I asked him what really happened.”

My eyes slid shut, and I let the silence stretch between us. After a few moments passed, I was the one who spoke again.

"I love him, Craig."

"I know you do. That is exactly why you should call him."

"But something feels off lately. I cannot explain it, but he has been acting strange."

Movement caught my attention. When I turned, I saw him staring down at a phone while tapping the screen. It took me a second to realize the device in his hand was not his.

"Wait. What are you doing? Why do you have my phone?" .

"I am calling your husband. If I leave it to you, your pride will keep you waiting forever."

"Craig!". I lunged for the phone, but he swatted my hand away with ease and kept tapping the screen like nothing happened.

"Give it to me. I will do it myself."

"No. If you do not call him, how are you supposed to know where he is?" .

“He should be the one calling me. He should be telling me where he went.”

“And that is exactly why I am holding onto this phone. Because I know you will not do it.”

“I will call him.”

“No, you will not. I know you too well, Sophia.”

No matter how many times I tried to argue or reach for it again, he refused to hand the phone back. Eventually, I stopped fighting him and let him continue. It was not that I doubted my husband. My hesitation came from someone else entirely. I did not trust Chloe. And more than anything, I wanted him to be the one to explain himself, to tell me directly where he had been.

Minutes dragged on, and that was when I noticed something off. Craig had not stopped trying.

“What is it?”.

“He is not picking up.”

My brows drew together. “What do you mean he is not answering?”.

“Oh my God. He rejected the call.”

“What? Call him again.”

I watched him try several more times, each attempt ending the same way.

He lowered the phone and stared at me, disbelief written all over his face.

“Why would he do that?”. I asked. I turned away before I could see his reaction, missing the way his brow lifted and a knowing curve touched his lips.

Chapter 525

“He could be in a meeting. That might be why he cannot answer.”

“Then why would his phone be off?”. I took my phone and tried calling Daniel myself, only to confirm what Craig already knew. The call went straight to nothing.

“Or maybe he was tied up with something else, and that is why he cut the call short. You know what I am saying.”

“What exactly are you trying to say?”. I snapped my head toward him. The tone of that last remark sat wrong with me. Something about it felt off, and a knot formed in my chest.

“Hey, relax. I just mean he could be busy giving orders to his people, or maybe he is in the middle of a client meeting.”

I did not bother responding. A shake of my head was all he got as I walked back to my chair and sat down. Still, my hearing betrayed me. Even when he lowered his voice, I caught every word he muttered.

“A client meeting. Behind closed doors. Just the two of them.”

My eyes slid shut, and my hands curled into fists. I was not stupid. I understood exactly what he was implying.

Even so, I kept my mouth shut and acted like I had not heard him at all, despite the sharp jolt his words sent through me.

He was lucky he was my best friend. Anyone else would have been in serious danger of getting shoved out the window.

At least, that was what I believed at the time. What I did not realize was that he had said those words on purpose, knowing I would hear them. Craig was hiding something from me, and I had no idea what that secret was yet.

Sophia's POV:

The drive home felt endless, and I kept waiting for my phone to light up the entire time. I even tried calling him again, but the signal still refused to go through.

Once dinner was over, I settled into the living room and decided to wait there. I turned on the DVD player and chose a few random movies, hoping they would distract me while I waited. That plan failed almost immediately.

My thoughts were too tangled for me to follow what was happening on screen. The dialogue drifted past me without meaning. I could not tell you the title, the characters' names, or even the plot. Maybe I heard them speak, but none of it stayed in my head.

A tired sigh escaped me as I leaned back against the sofa. I had lost count of how many times I checked my phone since the afternoon. Still nothing. Not a single message.

Sometimes I swear that if my phone had a voice, it would snap at me. "Stop staring at me. Are you really going to check again?"

I shook my head and let out a quiet laugh at myself before looking back at the television.

Chapter 526

"Why can't he just call me or send one message?", I muttered under my breath. On the screen, one of the women suddenly started crying. "What the hell! What is wrong with her now?"

"Maybe he's busy," another woman said gently, trying to calm her down.

"Busy? Is he so busy that he can't even make one phone call?", the crying woman snapped. She glared at the other woman, who might have been her friend, her sister, or someone else entirely. I honestly did not care. "Whatever!"

"Exactly," I said aloud without thinking. The realization hit me a second later, and my brows drew together. They were dealing with the same problem. Tsk. Tsk. Who would have thought?

A few moments passed, and for the first time that evening, their conversation finally pulled me in. I was so focused on the scene that I failed to notice someone entering the living room and walking toward me. I did not realize she was there until she spoke.

"Aren't you worn out after everything that happened today?"

"Huh?"

A sharp breath rushed out of me as I twisted around in surprise. Nanay Emily stood behind the couch, wearing an apologetic smile that softened her gentle expression.

"Oh, I am sorry. I did not realize you were so focused on the television. I thought you noticed me already."

I smiled back at her and rubbed the back of my neck, lifting one shoulder in a small shrug.

“I am actually waiting for my husband.”

She hummed in understanding and nodded as she moved closer. “Why not give him a call and ask when he plans to come home?”.

She settled beside me on the couch.

Another sigh slipped out of me. “I have been trying since this afternoon, but I cannot reach him. I even brought lunch to his office, and he was not there.”

“He mentioned having a council meeting today, so I do not understand where he could be.”

Nanay Emily listened quietly, and I felt the frustration spill over. “Denise told me Chloe called him this morning. Something happened, apparently, and she needed my husband there. So my thoughtful and ever attentive husband put on his polished shoes, grabbed his coat, got into his expensive car, and rushed off to her side.”

My jaw tightened as I finished with a sharp, irritated sound.

“Did he really do all that?”. My head whipped toward her without warning, and I pressed my lips together. A second later, another thought hit me. “Wait. Who is Chloe? Is she another woman in Daniel’s life?”.

“No, Nanay Emily, I was exaggerating. And to answer that question, no. Chloe Enriquez is only his business partner. Nothing more.”

“Still, I would never allow her to become anything else. Over my dead body.”

She studied me for a moment, then shrugged. “Well, if she is only his business partner, then there is really nothing to worry about.”

“Exactly,” I answered a little too fast. “She is just Daniel’s business partner. As long as she stays in that lane, everything is fine.”

“And what do you mean by that?”.

Chapter 527

“Aside from being his business partner, she also happens to be his ex-girlfriend. The kind who still shows herself off like she expects him to want her again, as if he would still touch her the same way he used to.”

Her reply barely registered. When I looked at her again, there was a crooked smile playing on her lips.

"You are jealous of her, aren't you?".

"What? No. Of course not. Why would I be jealous? Daniel is my husband, and she is nothing more than his ex."

"Tsk. Tsk. Tsk. You are a terrible liar, Sophia."

"Nanay Emily...".

"Come on now. There is nothing wrong with admitting that jealousy sneaks in sometimes."

"That is not really the main problem," I said slowly. "But fine, I will admit it. I do feel jealous, and I cannot stop myself." My voice softened. "Who would not be? She is prettier than I am."

"That is not true at all. A kind heart is far more valuable than any kind of beauty. Beauty does not come from a face alone. It comes from the mind, the heart, and the soul. That is where your strength lies."

Her words made me pause, confusion knitting my brows together as she continued, "Daniel loves you. You know that, do you not?".

"I do," I responded, nodding. "But lately, I have started to doubt everything. He has been acting differently. Every time I try to talk about us, he changes the subject. It feels like he is avoiding the conversation on purpose, and it only makes me more upset. I have been calling him and waiting all day, and it feels like he has forgotten he even has a wife named Sophia Ysabelle Kelley."

"Perhaps he has been carrying a lot lately. Try speaking to him again and hear him out. Believe me, Anak. Daniel loves you. Your husband cares for you deeply, and I am sure the pressure on him has doubled, especially now that he is planning something."

"What do you mean he is planning something?". I lifted my brows and looked at her when she suddenly stopped. "What exactly is he up to, Nanay Emily?". Confusion crept into my voice.

"Ah, no, no. Forget what I said, Anak. Your Nanay Emily is getting old, and sometimes I talk too much. I end up saying things that do not even make sense. I should head to my room before your Tatay Berto wakes up." With that, she stood up at once and turned toward the stairs.

"Huh?". The whole exchange left me stunned.

"I am going to sleep now. Good night, Anak."

What was that all about?

"Oh, Sophia." She paused again, one foot already on the step, and glanced back at me. "You should wait for your husband in your room so you can rest too. I am sure he will call once he is finally done with work. Try not to worry so much and get some sleep."

“Yes, Nanay.”

She did not wait for anything else. All I could do was sigh and nod at her retreating back as she climbed the stairs.

What just happened? I let out a small laugh to myself.

Chapter 528

I could tell she had more to say. The way she cut herself off mid-sentence felt deliberate, as if she suddenly realized she had gone too far or was not supposed to say anything at all.

She mentioned that Daniel might be planning something, and now my thoughts would not settle. Planning what, exactly? Were they keeping something from me? Was it a secret, a surprise, or something tied to his work?

Great. Thanks a lot, Nanay Emily. My head hurt even more now.

I leaned back and was about to close my eyes when the television caught my attention. Wait. Was it already finished? It felt far too short. I did not even know the name of the male lead, let alone how the story ended.

I took the disc out of the player, slipped it back into its case, and returned to the living room couch. To distract myself, I opened YouTube and let a series of dance videos play, hoping the movement and music would keep my thoughts from spiraling while I waited for Daniel.

Time refused to move properly. Minutes dragged into hours.

1:00 in the morning.

1:30.

2:00.

2:30.

My eyelids kept drooping, fighting a losing battle. I wished I had toothpicks or anything at all to keep them open. Sadly, that was not an option.

I tossed and turned in bed, fully awake, as my hand blindly searched the sheets for something I could not find. My phone.

Where was it? Damn it. What time was it? I kicked the blanket aside, then froze.

A blanket? How did that even get here? I brushed the thought away and sat up, already irritated.

“Where is he?”, I muttered, smacking my forehead.

I remembered then. I had left it on the coffee table.

A voice behind me made me turn around, confusion spilling across my face as Nanay Emily stood there.

“You are looking for your phone, aren’t you?”.

I nodded.

“It is on the coffee table.”

I nodded again, but my focus jumped elsewhere. “What time is it, Nanay Emily?”.

“It is seven o’clock.”

“Oh God. I overslept. Did Daniel call? Is he home already?”.

“No, Anak. He is not home yet.” She shook her head gently.

The answer hit me harder than I expected.

“Did he at least call or leave a message?”, I asked, walking toward the coffee table. I did not need her reply. The moment I picked up my phone, the screen told me everything.

He had called earlier that morning.

I twisted around so fast it made my joints protest, fully focused on whatever she was about to say next.

“He said he could not come home. One of his engineers was involved in an accident, so he had to stay at the site to oversee the progress.”

“Hold on. Construction?”. I lifted my hand at once, cutting her off. Confusion rushed in as I stared at her. “Since when does he personally supervise construction projects? He is the CEO of KI Corporation. That is exactly why he has people assigned to handle those things. And last time I checked, KI Corporation is a manufacturing company. What kind of construction are we even talking about?”.

Chapter 529

I slowed my steps and watched her closely. I could not tell if it was my imagination, but her face seemed to lose color as she scrambled for an answer. "M-maybe they are building a new facility. Or perhaps a new store for their products. That could be it. That would explain why he needed to stay."

I almost said it out loud. Nanay Emily, you are not very good at lying either. The hesitation. The stammering. It was all there. Still, I kept the thought to myself and offered her a polite smile instead.

"I see," I said, nodding as if everything made sense.

"Would you like to have breakfast now? I can prepare it for you."

"No, Nanay Emily. I think I will just eat at work today."

"Are you certain? I could pack something for you to take along."

"That actually sounds good. Thank you."

"Oh, and Rian called earlier as well. She was asking about you."

"What did she say?".

“She mentioned she is coming to see you at the studio today.”

“Did she explain why?”.

“She only said she wants to spend some time with you. Just the two of you.”

“Uh-huh. But why the sudden interest? Why now?”.

Nanay Emily lifted a shoulder in a casual shrug. “That is for you to find out. And for me to ask you about later.” Her lips curved into the same knowing smile she wore last night. The very same smile Craig had given me not long ago.

Something was definitely wrong.

Even so, I forced the thought aside and decided to act like none of it mattered.

“I am going to take a bath, Nanay Emily.”

She nodded, still smiling, as I walked away. Even while climbing the stairs, I could feel her eyes following me.

Can you feel the love surrounding us tonight? This moment right here is exactly where we stand. For someone who once wandered with open eyes and no direction, making it this far already feels like more than enough.

If only I could focus on the computer screen.

That hope vanished the moment I stepped into the studio. Craig had been singing nonstop since I arrived, and to make it worse, he followed me straight into my office.

At first, I ignored him. I assumed he was simply in a good mood, probably still riding the high from his romantic date with Gavin yesterday. Rian's best friend.

He kept singing as though he were locked inside a recording booth instead of a dance studio. It never crossed his mind that his voice might be driving me insane. Worse than that, he was looping the same song again and again, like it was some kind of personal torture.

"And can you feel the love tonight? How it's laid to rest?"

Right on cue, he wandered into my office carrying a bouquet of purple tulips. I did not bother asking where they came from. I already knew. Without even glancing at me, he set them neatly on my desk drawer.

A long breath escaped me as my eyes rolled on instinct.

“Craig.”

“It’s enough to make kings and vagabonds...”.

“Craig.”

Chapter 530

I raised my voice slightly, but he continued singing as if my presence meant nothing. Either he truly did not hear me, or he was enjoying this far too much.

“Believe the very best...”.

“Craig!”.

My shout bounced off the walls, loud enough to finally snap him out of it.

“Oh. Sorry. Were you calling me?”. He tilted his head, either genuinely confused or doing a very convincing act.

“No.” I shook my head calmly. “I was just practicing how to say your name.” A tight, sarcastic smile followed.

“What is wrong with you today? Do you not see that I am actually working?”. I asked, lifting a brow.

For some reason, he flashed me a warm smile, and it threw me completely off. What was that supposed to mean?

“Are you sick or something?”.

“Sick? What are you even saying? If I were sick, you would not be hearing me sing nonstop.”

“Right. So you are perfectly fine.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Then do me a favor and stop singing. And lower your voice. Do not yell. In case you have not noticed, my ears are already suffering from hearing the same song blasted at me ever since I walked into the studio.”

“But I am not yelling. I am singing,” he insisted.

“No, you are not. Craig, seriously, what is going on with you? I cannot get any work done like this.”

“Sorry. I am just really excited about the party.” He shrugged.

That answer earned a short, sarcastic laugh from me. “You are singing because you are excited? What party are you even talking about?”.

His eyes widened for a split second. Surprise flickered across his face before he burst into laughter, loud and exaggerated. It was the same laugh he always used when he was hiding something important.

“Party? Did I seriously say the word party just now?”. I waved it off with mock realization. “Ah, right. I did. Relax. I am just excited about Jasmine Kim’s birthday celebration.” He quickly followed up, avoiding my eyes as he busied himself with the bouquet.

“Jasmine Kim?”.

“Yes. Jasmine Kim. She is my favorite character from that series I watch every night. She is turning eighteen, and the premiere of her birthday episode is tonight. Of course I am excited.”

“Uh-huh.” I nodded slowly, my brows lifting on their own. If I did not already know how obsessed he was with nightly dramas, I would have called that excuse ridiculous.

“Alright, I am done here. I am heading out. Let us start rehearsing the new choreography you came up with.” He shot me a wink and dashed toward the door.

“Yes, yes. Let us rehearse the new steps,” I muttered under my breath, mocking his tone as my eyes dropped back to the computer screen.

Less than an hour passed before his voice drifted down the hall again.

Oh no. Not again.

“And can you feel the love tonight?”.

What was I supposed to do with him? Someone needed to hand me duct tape, immediately.

I glanced up just as the door swung open.

“Ladies and gentlemen, my one and only friend has a visitor.”