

A Favor 601

Chapter 601

“Ahh, is that so?” I paused, then stood up. “Then you can take your deal, Mr. Wilsons. I’m sorry, but I won’t be accepting it. And since we’re not in the office, as you pointed out yourself, that means you don’t get to boss me around here.” I slid the check back toward him. “Keep your offer, or take it to someone who’s only willing to hear your side of the story. Good night, Mr. Wilsons. Thank you for the invitation, and for the meal.”

I stood, gave him a small smile, and took a deep breath before walking away.

His gaze, after my little speech, sent a chill straight through me.

I knew it was a little rude, walking out on him like that—especially since he was, technically, my boss. But those were his own words: we weren’t in the office, so the formalities didn’t apply here.

Which meant, right now, he wasn’t my boss at all. If anything, I was the one standing on my own ground—the owner, the boss, in this place.

Gabriel’s point of view

What... that stubborn woman. Who did she think she was?

I clenched my fists and tightened my jaw as she walked off ahead of me.

I'd left some money on the table before standing up and heading for the exit.

A few eyes had been watching our little scene, but I ignored them. I was sure everyone assumed they'd just witnessed a small lovers' quarrel, my girlfriend storming off and leaving me sitting there alone.

I'll admit, I'd offered her an absurdly large sum of money. I was genuinely shocked when she turned down both the offer and the check.

I mean, who turns down that kind of money these days? I'd only known her for two months, but I could already tell she wasn't like the rest of the office—neither she nor my secretary belonged to my so-called fan club.

Honestly, I think she's perfect for the role. Beautiful, intelligent. She isn't infatuated with my looks, not like the girls who melt the second I give them a stern look. She's nothing like that.

She'd even had the nerve to raise an eyebrow at me. I know she doesn't realize I've caught her doing it more than once. I see it when she thinks I'm not looking, watching her out of the corner of my eye.

The worst part is, she's done it several times, and I've simply let it go. After all, she's the only personal assistant I've ever had who doesn't flaunt her body or her cleavage since I became CEO of WEC.

She never gives me a seductive smile, never tries to flirt when she's around me. She stays neutral, smiles often enough, and treats me with total professionalism, as if my presence doesn't affect her in the slightest.

And after tonight, I'm even more convinced she's the perfect candidate for this. Not just intelligent, but strong-willed, and she thinks before she speaks.

I won't give up trying to convince her, even if it means doubling the offer. Honestly, if I thought it would change her mind, I wouldn't hesitate for a second.

A mischievous smile crept onto my lips without my permission.

Madi's point of view

I arrived at the office twenty minutes earlier than usual, and I was more than a little surprised to find Sandy already at her desk.

This was the first time she'd ever gotten there before me.

Chapter 602

"Can I call this a miracle?" I asked playfully, poking my head through the door.

The moment she saw me, she let out a long, exhausted sigh.

“Why are you here so early?”

I was about to sit down in the chair in front of her desk when she stopped me immediately.

“Don’t! Go to your office!”

I furrowed my brow slightly. “What? Why? It’s only 7:40. It’s still early, the workday hasn’t even started. What’s going on with you?”

“Madi, it’s not me. It’s the boss.”

“What do you mean, ‘it’s the boss’?”

“He got here at seven sharp. And he’s in a terrible mood.”

“Ahh, really? I don’t think I’ve ever seen him walk in in a good mood. So what’s new about that?” I laughed, shaking my head.

“No, Madi, I’m serious.”

I let out a slightly irritated sigh. “Alright. So do you know why he came in so early?”

“I don’t. But you know what? He called me at five o’clock this morning and told me to be at the office before seven.”

My eyes snapped to her, caught off guard by that.

“What? Are you serious?”

“I am. He called super early, five in the morning, and caught my boyfriend and me in the act! Can you believe it? For God’s sake, Madi!”

I had to clap a hand over my mouth to keep from laughing out loud.

“The worst part is, he interrupted us right before I could have my first orgasm—”

“Okay! Great, that’s enough! I get it! You don’t need to give me the details of what you and your boyfriend were doing this morning!” I cut her off before she could go any further. Gross.

“You’re so uptight, you act like a virgin,” she shot back. “Anyway, like I was saying, this is the first time, Madi. My God. He made me come in this early just to make his coffee and go over his schedule. And—wait a second—that’s your job!”

My eyebrows furrowed again, worry creeping in now.

“I have no idea what’s gotten into him. That’s why I’m really hoping you can explain this, since you’re his assistant. He should’ve called you at five in the morning, not me. Not to mention I had to remake his coffee twice just to get it right! He told me to sort out his schedule for the day too. I swear, Madi, I’m going to lose it if this keeps up tomorrow.”

“He asked you to do my job? Making his coffee, managing his schedule?”

“My God, Madi, what did I ever do to deserve this kind of punishment?”

I guess the real question is what did I do wrong, for him to hand my work off to someone else, I thought, an idea slowly forming.

“What else did he ask you to do? Or better yet—what else of mine did he give you?”

Chapter 603

“Well, besides taking a few of his calls and sending those documents by fax,” she said, gesturing toward the folders piled with papers, “and answering the emails that keep flooding my inbox.” Sandy let out another exhausted sigh.

“Okay, let me help you with this,” I said, reaching for the three folders on her desk.

“No! Don’t do that! He was very clear when he told me I couldn’t hand anything over to you, or let you do any of it.”

“What?” My voice came out higher than I meant it to. I didn’t know whether to feel relieved that he was giving me a break, or offended, like he was trying to tell me, without saying it outright, that I no longer had a place here.

“So what am I supposed to do all day? Count the strands of my hair one by one until the afternoon?”

Sandy laughed at how ridiculous that sounded.

“Honestly, that’s probably exactly what he wants, since he hasn’t given you a single task.”

“Well, I need to figure out what’s behind all this. Could it have something to do with what happened last Friday?”

“Let me take these folders. I’ll go talk to him.”

“No, Madi, I really think you should talk to him first. I don’t want to lose my job over letting you take these.”

“No, Sandy. None of this was part of the contract we signed when we started working here. Don’t worry, I’ll deal with it. I’ll talk to him myself later. And don’t worry about his coffee either—I’ll take care of that.”

“Are you sure, Madi?” I could see the hesitation, the worry, still lingering in her eyes.

“I’m sure. And besides, don’t worry about losing this job—there’s plenty of work waiting for you out there,” I said, giving her a wink.

I grabbed all three folders, including the documents that needed reviewing and the email meant for the company’s new investors.

I headed to my office and started organizing everything by category.

If he wanted to play games, fine. I knew how to play too.

Madi’s point of view

My wristwatch read 10:30 when the intercom on Sandy's desk buzzed. She came rushing into my office to tell me that the grumpy man—Mr. Wilsons, that is—wanted another cup of coffee along with the documents he'd need for his next meeting.

"Don't worry, I'll handle it," I said, standing up.

"But Madi—"

"Sandy, relax. I want to talk to him anyway. I need to get to the bottom of this. He should've told me himself, or at least called me. I'm his personal assistant, not you. This job should be mine. If he doesn't want me as his assistant anymore, then fine—I'll deal with that too."

She let out a resigned sigh as I headed out to handle both tasks—first the coffee, then the documents he needed.

I took a deep breath before knocking on his office door. I'd already rehearsed exactly what I was going to say.

Chapter 604

When I heard his voice from inside, I pushed the door open and walked toward his desk. Since he wasn't looking at me, I couldn't read his expression. His eyes stayed fixed on his computer screen even as I stepped in.

"Good morning, Mr. Wilsons. Your coffee, sir," I said, only once I was standing directly in front of his desk.

His eyes shot up the moment he recognized my voice. I don't think he'd expected me to be the one bringing it.

"Here are the documents for your next meeting," I added, setting the folder down with a polished, professional smile.

"Where is Mrs. Aguilar?" he asked, eyes already back on his screen. "I gave clear instructions that she'd be handling this."

I really wanted to roll my eyes at that, but I just kept smiling.

"Mrs. Aguilar is checking the meeting room, sir. So I brought the documents and made your coffee myself, since those are still my duties as your personal assistant. If I may—thank you for letting Mrs. Aguilar help me out with my work. I really appreciate it. But I believe she has other important tasks of her own, so I'd like to go back to my regular routine. Thank you, sir."

I finished my little speech with a very deliberate, appreciative smile—laced with just enough sarcasm to make my point. I knew he'd done all of this on purpose.

He looked up from the computer again, and I just smiled back, as if I had no idea what game he was playing.

"Take that coffee away. I'm not drinking it."

“What?!” My eyebrows shot up this time, though I kept my voice level.

“But you asked for coffee, so I made it.”

“I said to take it away and throw it out. I’m not drinking it, and I never asked you to make it. I don’t need it.”

Maybe if I were Sandy, I could’ve let that attitude slide. My nerves were shaking under the surface, but I refused to just accept it. I was Madi, and I had better instincts than simply rolling over.

“Ahh, but that seems like such a waste. There are people out there who can’t even afford coffee, let alone food,” I said calmly, with a shrug. “Anyway, since you’re not going to drink it, I guess I’ll just have to...”

I let the sentence hang deliberately, waiting for his eyes to lift from the screen again, anticipating what I’d say next. Inside, I was grinning. Outside, I kept my expression perfectly neutral.

“I suppose I’ll have to drink this myself, rather than let it go to waste.”

I gave him another one of my polished smiles. I caught the flash of amusement in his eyes before he quickly buried it under his usual coldness.

“Will there be anything else, sir?”

“Call Mrs. Aguilar and tell her to make me a new cup of coffee.”

Did he really just put extra weight on the word “new”?

“Um... but I just brought you a cup. Do you want a second one, or do you simply not want me making your coffee at all?”

For the first time since I’d walked in, he looked straight at me, sharp and direct.

Chapter 605

“Mrs. Davis, you just told me you’re going to drink that coffee. So it’s yours now. Go ask Mrs. Aguilar to make me a new one. And from now on, you’ll be the one checking the meeting room.”

“Huh!”

An irritated smile crept across my lips, and I didn’t bother hiding it.

“With all due respect, Mr. Wilsons—no one informed me we were swapping job descriptions with Mrs. Aguilar. Why are you doing this, sir?”

He stopped typing and smiled at me.

I nearly lost my breath at that.

For God's sake, did he really have to look that good doing it? I swallowed hard, trying to shove the completely inappropriate thoughts out of my head.

"Is this about what happened last Friday? Because if it is, I'd have to say I find it fairly unprofessional of you, sir."

His smile vanished instantly, replaced by a cold, intense stare that made my nerves rattle.

"Are you really going to use the word 'unprofessional' with me, Mrs. Davis? I hope you haven't forgotten you're 'just' my personal assistant. What happened last week, outside this office, is entirely off the table here. Bringing it up again—that's what I'd call unprofessional." He repeated the word "unprofessional" twice, along with "just," making sure the emphasis landed exactly where he wanted it.

"Sir, I understand perfectly well what my 'only' role in this company is. What I don't understand is why you told Sandy to take over my work. I've been doing my job well, and she has her own responsibilities to manage."

"Are you questioning my decisions, Mrs. Davis?"

Was he even listening to what I was actually saying? I felt the blood rush straight to my head.

“Not at all, Mr. Wilsons. I would never question you. I’m simply asking a question.”

“Seriously, Mrs. Davis? I’d say that’s the same thing.”

“No, sir, there’s a difference between the two,” I said, drawing myself up straighter. “To ask is to seek information or clarification. To question is to doubt, or to challenge a decision.”

He held my gaze, defiant, but I didn’t back down.

“Like I said, I’m only asking, sir. So I’ll ask again.”

“Let me make this perfectly clear, once and for all, Mrs. Davis. Let me remind you exactly who you’re speaking to. I don’t care whether you call it asking or questioning—I have every right to give orders to anyone in this company, with or without your permission. Have I made myself clear enough, Mrs. Davis?”

He raised his eyebrows on that last question, driving the point home. He actually raised his eyebrows at me.

“Of course, sir. Perfectly clear. Well, if that’s what you want, who am I to disobey an order? Good morning, sir. I’ll go get Mrs. Aguilar,” I said, finishing with my sweetest, most artificial smile. I’d finally accepted I wasn’t going to win this one. There was no point asking him anything—he was, after all, our arrogant, stubborn, ice-cold boss.

I picked the coffee cup back up and carried it with me to my desk.

Madi’s point of view

I just shook my head, imagining Sandy’s reaction once I told her what that idiot had said to me.

Chapter 606

I took a sip of the coffee that was now, apparently, mine, before dialing her number.

“Madi?” she asked, picking up.

“Hi. Where are you? Still in the meeting room?”

“I am, but I’ve finished tidying up, I’m heading back now. Why?”

“Because our boss wants you to make his coffee again.” I rolled my eyes just saying it out loud.

“What? Didn’t you already make it and bring it to him?”

“I did, and I took it in. Want to know what he said? ‘I’m not going to drink this, I don’t need it. Call Mrs. Aguilar, tell her to make me a new cup,’” I said, doing my best impression of his voice.

“What the hell, Madi? What is going on with him? Did you ask him?” I could hear how worked up she was just from her tone.

“I did. He said he doesn’t need my permission, since he’s the CEO, and that I should know my place as his personal assistant. He’s also decided that from now on, I’ll be the one checking the meeting room, not you.”

I could feel my blood starting to boil just repeating what that jerk had said to me.

“Well, like they say, everyone gets their moment. Maybe this is his. I can’t wait for mine.”

“Oh my goodness.” I could practically hear her facepalming through the phone.

“Sorry, Sandy,” I said, because I already suspected all of this was tangled up with what had happened on Friday.

“No, it’s not your fault. He’s really being a jerk about this.”

I let out a small laugh and took another sip of coffee.

“Alright, just hurry, before the beast in that office gets even grumpier and bites your head off.”

“Hahaha, very funny. I hate you for that,” she grumbled, and I laughed again.

Once we hung up, I decided it was time to tell Sandy exactly what had happened between Mr. Wilsons and me the week before. She deserved to know, since she was the one paying the price for it in my place.

Whatever he claimed, I was fairly sure this whole shift in Sandy’s workload traced right back to it.

Honestly, no matter how much I turned it over in my head, I couldn’t make sense of it. He was the one who’d told me it was unprofessional to bring that subject into the office—yet here he was, dragging it right back in through the side door. Of course, he hadn’t said a single word about it directly, but the way he’d suddenly reassigned my work to Sandy made the connection obvious.

What, couldn’t he just accept that I’d turned down his proposal? Wasn’t that a little childish?

Before lunch, with nothing else on my plate, I cornered Sandy in her office. I wanted to tell her now, since I had something planned.

“Wow, first time ever you’re the one calling me for lunch,” she said, raising an eyebrow in mock shock. I smiled.

Chapter 607

“True, but there’s a first time for everything. Besides, since I don’t have much work today, I figured I’d call.” My smile only widened as her expression shifted—brows knitting together, eyes narrowing.

“Uh-huh. Nothing to do, huh,” she repeated, shaking her head. “You’re enjoying this whole mess, aren’t you?”

“Of course. Who wouldn’t?” I teased.

“I hate you,” she huffed, and I laughed again.

“Actually, I need to tell you something.”

“About what?”

“Something of mine. I need you to listen.”

“Wait—don’t tell me you have cancer! A brain tumor? Blood cancer? Breast? Cervical? Hmm—ouch!”

I flicked her forehead to shut down the joking.

“For God’s sake, Sandy, what is wrong with you? You want me to die a virgin?” I narrowed my eyes at her as she dissolved into laughter.

“I’m serious!”

“Alright, alright, I’ll behave. I was just messing around, okay?”

“Hahaha, nice try.”

She rolled her eyes, a little annoyed I wasn’t laughing along. “So, what is it?”

I let out a long sigh and sank into the chair across from her desk.

“I think I know why everything’s been shifting around here, why he’s been so grumpy—like you said yourself.”

“Really? Go on.”

“I think it’s because of something that happened between him and me last Friday.” Her eyes went wide with surprise and curiosity. “No—God, no, that’s not what I mean!” I corrected her before she could go further.

“But you just said something happened between the two of you—”

“Yes, but not like that. Sandy, can you not immediately jump to sex every single time?” My voice was quiet, but I might as well have been shouting.

“Sorry! Can you really blame me? I was just going off what you said.”

“You’re insane.” I gave her a look, pretending to be offended. “I meant what he and I talked about. We had a conversation last week.”

“What? What kind of conversation?”

Now she was fully locked in.

“Okay, listen. Last Friday, he asked me—no, actually, he summoned me to talk to him. Since it had nothing to do with work, he sent his driver to pick me up. Guess where we ended up?”

“Where?” Her eyes lit up with interest.

“At my restaurant. My very first one.”

“What? Are you serious?”

I just nodded.

“Wow. How did your staff react? And him—did he know it was your place?”

“I called Noelle right away to give everyone a heads-up—told them not to greet me or treat me any differently while I was there. As for him, I don’t think he knew the restaurant was mine. And honestly, I don’t think he knows even now.”

“Okay. And the conversation—what did you talk about?”

I sighed and looked her dead in the eye.

“He proposed to me.”

“What?!”

“Shh! Keep your voice down!” My hand shot up over her mouth before I even thought about it. Exactly the reaction I’d braced for.

“Wait, wait.” She peeled my hand off. “Did I hear that right? Say it again? My ears play tricks on me sometimes, you know how it is.” She waved a hand vaguely.

I sighed again and folded my hands in my lap.

Chapter 608

“I said he proposed to me.”

“Holy shit.” Her eyes wouldn’t stop blinking, mouth hanging open, clearly trying to process what she’d just heard. “What is going on? Are you sure you’re not messing with me?”

“Sandy, do you really think I’d joke about something like this?”

“Damn it, Madi. How does that even happen? You’re not even in a relationship—” She stopped, eyes widening again.

“What?” I asked, not following.

“Unless the two of you are secretly together! You slept with your boss!” She feigned total horror at her own theory.

I shot her a frustrated look and lobbed a little elephant-shaped eraser at her.

“My God, Sandy Aguilar. Do you really think I’d do something like that? And besides, how would that even be possible, when we both know he’s clearly not over what happened to him before?”

“Then why propose to you, if you two aren’t together? Is it some kind of act? A marriage of convenience?”

“Exactly,” I said, nodding.

“I still can’t wrap my head around this.”

“Do you remember the last time you told me about his past?”

“Uh—which part? When I told you about how he changed, how he took the CEO job, how he was crazy about the fiancée who left him, blah blah blah... and that she’s supposedly back in town now?”

I frowned at that last bit.

“What?!”

“Which part are you confused about?”

“Wait, I never heard that last part.”

“Huh—that his ex-fiancée is back in town?”

“That’s it. How do you even know that? Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

“I thought I already had.”

“No, you never said that. You told me everything else, but not that.”

“Ah, right. Well, from what I’ve heard recently, the woman who left him before, his ex-fiancée, is back in town now, showing up all over the place.”

“What?” I couldn’t understand why the mention of his ex-fiancée, the fact that he’d once loved someone else, left this heavy weight sitting in my chest.

“Exactly. And she’s not alone—she came back with another man.”

“My God.”

Now it made sense why he’d been so anxious, so desperate for me to accept that ridiculous proposal.

“So, tell me. Why did he propose to you?”

“Because of her.”

“Because of her?! You mean he proposed to you because of her? His ex-fiancée?”

“Yes,” I said, nodding, a strange sense of disappointment settling over me.

“But why? You know what, this is getting absurd. Come on, let’s go grab lunch in the cafeteria while you tell me the rest of this ridiculous story.”

She stood, straightening the things on her desk.

“Alright.” My stomach was already growling in agreement.

We both laughed at the sound of it.

Madi’s Point of View

We picked a table in the farthest corner of the cafeteria. Troy would probably come looking for us eventually, but we needed this—just the two of us, girl time.

“Alright, back to the topic. Where were we?” Sandy asked the moment we sat down.

“His ex-fiancée.”

Chapter 609

“Right. Go on,” she said, digging into her lasagna.

“So he offered me a contract. He wants me to be his wife—indefinitely, he didn’t say for how long. And he’s willing to give me one hundred million dollars, just for agreeing to his plan.”

I stopped talking when she started coughing on a mouthful of food.

“I really hate you sometimes. It’s always something with you—if it’s not the drink, it’s the food!” I complained, eyebrows furrowed.

“Sorry, I was just shocked.” She wiped her mouth. “How much did you say again? One hundred million?” She swallowed hard, clearly still processing the number.

I just nodded.

“My God, that’s insane, Madi. I could quit my job and start my own business with that.”

I stayed quiet.

“Ah, right, you already have one.” She rolled her eyes.

“Yes, and even if I didn’t, I still wouldn’t take his money. All it proves is how desperate he is to get back at his ex.”

“Wow, revenge? Wait, he wants to marry you just to get back at her?”

“Yes. Stupid idea, right?”

“B-but why? What’s the point?”

“To prove to her he’s moved on.” I shook my head, irritation creeping up my spine. “But the truth is, he clearly hasn’t gotten over her. You can see it in the way he lives now—cold, lifeless. I’m not even sure he remembers how to smile anymore.”

She was shaking her head too, watching me.

“So I take it you turned him down.”

“Yes.”

“My God.” She smacked her forehead. I could tell she’d finally connected the dots about our work situation.

“How did you say no, exactly?” she asked after a beat.

“I just told him no. That I wasn’t accepting his deal, or his offer.”

“And how’d he take it?”

“The usual—sulking. Honestly, he wouldn’t even tell me half the story. If he wants me to pretend to be his wife, I need at least some idea of what I’m walking into. How am I supposed to act convincingly with no context at all? And on top of that, Sandy, he wants revenge. He said he wants to make her pay for leaving him, for betraying him. Basically, he wants her to suffer even more than he did when she left.”

My chest felt heavy just repeating it, and part of me wanted to scream at the idea of him actually going through with something so foolish.

She’d stopped eating entirely, just watching me with an uneasy little smile.

“I-I don’t know what to say, Madi. Revenge? Is he serious? Why would he even need to do something like that?”

I could tell she was moved by it—though maybe not quite as much as I was.

“I know. But I don’t buy it—that this is only about revenge. I can still see the jealousy in his eyes every time he talks about her. His face, his actions, they all show one thing, but his eyes tell a completely different story. Despair. Love. Heartbreak. All three. He still wants her back.”

Chapter 610

I lost my appetite the second those words left my mouth. I sighed, pushing the food around my plate.

“Why does it sound like you’re the one who’s hurt by this? Do you have feelings for him?”

My eyes shot up to hers, and I caught her studying my face.

“What? Of course not!” I said, a little too defensively, straightening in my seat. “I’m just as confused as you are about all this.”

“If you say so.” She just shrugged.

“That’s the thing, I can’t wrap my head around him. Why can’t he just move on? Why can’t he let her go?” I asked, scratching at my eyebrow.

“Did you ask him that?”

“No. I only asked why he needed to spend that much money on her. And he got annoyed, like I’d basically asked why he wouldn’t just let his ex be.”

She laughed at that last part.

“How’d he react when you brought up the money?”

“Well—he slammed his hands on the table and just stared at me. Said it wasn’t for her, it was for me. That he’d pay me if I agreed to go along with his plan. Obviously, I said no. I can earn that kind of money on my own eventually. But helping him get revenge on top of it? That’s too much to ask. What do I even get out of it in the end?”

“And then what? How’d you end things?”

“I left.”

“Tsk—wait, you just left?” She gave an incredulous little laugh.

“Yes,” I said, nodding.

“Seriously?”

“Yes. What was I supposed to do—sit there while he threw millions of dollars at me? Ordering me around after telling me we weren’t even in the office anymore, that I could call him Gabriel and he could call me Madi?”

“Wow, okay, this is getting interesting.” She actually clapped her hands together.

“A minute ago you said this was ridiculous, now it’s interesting? I can’t keep up with how fast your opinion changes.”

“Yeah, well, now I get why he’s been acting like such an idiot.”

“No—he’s not acting. He is an idiot. Period,” I cut in, and she laughed.

“Fine, an idiot and a jerk! And this is what happens when you bruise a man’s ego like that.”

“Bruise his ego? What is this, a diagnosis?” I bit back a laugh.

“Yes! You’ve turned him into an even bigger fool. Jerk. Stubborn. Bossy.”

“Hey, excuse me—I didn’t turn him into anything! The man’s ego is bigger than the Pacific Ocean on its own.” I made a face, and she laughed again.

“So what’s your plan now?”

“Honestly? Nothing. Same as before—follow his rules, take his orders, do my job.”

“Madi, how exactly do you plan to manage that when half your workload’s sitting on my desk now?”