

A Favor 641

Chapter 641

“Love, are you done?” I asked, letting the words carry a little extra weight. He just gave me a grim look. I turned back to the waiter, who was quietly observing the whole exchange. “Hmm, Ezra, you can take my order now, we’ll call you back once my boyfriend’s ready.” I smiled again.

“Wait.” His frown deepened as he finally gave his own order to the poor, confused waiter. Why? Because I was practically beaming, while he sat there simmering across from me, looking ready to devour the man whole.

Once the waiter had escaped our table, his grumpy monologue began.

“What was that?” His brows had nearly fused into one.

“What?”

“What did you mean, ‘are you done’?”

“Are you done? Watching the two of them, or placing your order? Either way, once you’re finished, you can just let it go.”

“And that smile? Were you flirting with the waiter?” he hissed under his breath, eyes locked on my face.

Flirting? Was this déjà vu?

“Flirting? Excuse me, love, I was not flirting with that waiter.” I made sure to lean hard into the word “love.”

“How did you know his name?”

And at that, I genuinely burst out laughing.

“Something funny about my question?” he asked, tone dead serious, though I just kept shaking my head, still laughing.

“Déjà vu, love. Do you know what that means?” I laughed again. “This exact thing has happened before. You accused me of flirting with a waiter and asked how I knew his name, and I’ll tell you the same thing I told you last time: it’s because his name is on his tag.”

I caught his lips curling into a smile, and eventually, he laughed along with me. Part of me wanted to freeze that moment, savor it, since it was the first time he’d ever laughed with me. But I knew the second I lingered on it, he’d shut down again, especially with his ex sitting just a few tables away.

And while we laughed, neither of us noticed the people watching us—some amused, some clearly annoyed, including the very two people who’d brought us here in the first place.

Chapter 642

When our food finally arrived, we began eating right away. Since I was already pretty hungry, I decided not to talk and simply focused on enjoying my meal.

“My love,” I heard him call, but I decided it was better to ignore him.

My love.

“Hmmm?” I looked at him while swallowing another bite of food.

He laughed quietly at the serious look on my face.

“Wow, are you really that hungry?” he asked, a hint of irony in his voice.

“Don’t ask me that, Gabriel. This is all your fault!” I said, giving him a serious look as I put another piece of steak into my mouth.

“Do you want some more food?”

I couldn't tell if he was teasing me or not, but I decided to play along.

"Why? Are you willing to share some of your food with me?"

He nodded, smiling.

Perfect.

"Just a minute," he said, and began cutting the rest of the steak on his plate.

"Relax, I'm just teasing you."

"Okay, but I was serious," I said.

He placed the entire sliced steak on my plate anyway.

"Didn't you enjoy the food?" I asked as soon as I started eating again.

"I like it. Everything is really good."

“Then why did you give me your portion?”

“Just because you asked.”

“I don’t think that’s quite how it went. I never asked you to give me your food.”

“Come here,” he said, making a few gestures I didn’t fully understand.

“What do you mean?”

“Come sit here, by my side,” he said, though he wasn’t looking at me anymore — he was watching two people walking toward us.

In the blink of an eye, Gabriel was beside me, chair and all. Before I could react, he pulled me close and kissed me on the lips.

Oh, God.

I knew it was nothing but an act, yet I couldn’t explain why I felt so thrilled inside. I kissed him back. At first it was just a light kiss, but everything grew more intense the moment I let his tongue slip fully into my mouth. He held the back of my neck firmly as he kept kissing me, deep and slow.

That was when a figure appeared behind him and caught my attention, and I pulled back just slightly. Our breaths fell into the same rhythm as he rested his forehead against mine.

I didn't know if he'd noticed the two people behind him too, but when it came to my peace of mind, I think he understood exactly what he was doing — that was why he was being so tender now. He kissed my forehead and murmured those three dangerous words.

"I love you."

Then it hit me: yes, all of this was part of the act. I closed my eyes for a moment, swallowing hard against the lump forming in my throat.

Chapter 643

"I love you too, darling," I said, smiling, and he smiled back. He brushed my cheek gently before turning to look at Stacey.

I tried to hide my sigh as he held my hand beneath the table.

"Gabriel," Stacey called out. Ray was nowhere near her side.

"Hello, Stacey," he greeted her without missing a beat.

“Oh, you’re here too. What a coincidence.”

Uh-huh. Coincidence, my ass, was all I could think, though I did my best not to roll my eyes.

“Gabi, could I talk to you... alone?”

My brow furrowed instinctively. Gabi? And what did she just say — alone?

He started to get up, but I held his hand firmly under the table. He looked at me, a question in his eyes.

I smiled at him silently, trying to signal that I didn’t want him to go with her. But his ex made a point of speaking up first.

“No need to worry, miss. I promise I’m not going to eat your boyfriend.” Her smile carried a hint of mischief and irony.

I simply smiled back. So she’d already forgotten my name. Wonderful.

“Miss, I have a name, and it’s Madi. You’d better remember it, so the next time we meet you’ll know exactly who I am. As for my fiancé, I don’t need to worry in the slightest if you want to talk to him. I trust him completely — I’m certain he’d never betray me. Isn’t that right, love?”

“Are you alone?” he asked her, before turning and smiling at me.

I watched his eyes shift from confusion to amusement.

“Of course, my love,” he replied, holding my hands tightly.

“I love you,” I said, holding his gaze, and before he could respond, I stole a kiss from his lips. He kissed me back.

Once he recovered from the surprise, he smiled and gave me another soft, fleeting kiss.

“I love you too, my darling. I’ll be back soon,” he said, before getting up and leaving with his ex.

Theoretically, the ex of his past — but not of his heart.

I was left alone at our table. I didn’t quite understand what this feeling was; I couldn’t explain it. Why did I feel so shaken whenever I saw him with her? Why did my chest feel so unbearably heavy?

I sighed deeply and looked back at the food on the table. How was I supposed to eat now? I'd completely lost my appetite.

I called the waiter over and asked him to pack up what was left. If I left it there, it would only end up in the trash, and with so many homeless people on the streets who couldn't afford a meal of their own, I couldn't let good food go to waste like that.

When the waiter returned, he was already carrying everything neatly packed, along with our bill. I pulled my card from my wallet and handed it to him.

Chapter 644

He came back with my card and the receipt. I decided to wait for my "fiancé" in the car — better than sitting at the table doing nothing. Taking the packed food, I walked toward the exit. To my surprise, I saw the man I'd been waiting for, with his ex, kissing in one of the corners of the restaurant.

I blinked several times, just to be sure it was real.

Madi, just leave and ignore them.

That's exactly what I did. I walked even faster toward the exit, letting out a long sigh as I tried to calm myself down.

Maybe they needed more time to enjoy whatever it was they were doing, so I decided to walk through the busy streets near the restaurant instead. I had my purse, my phone, and my wallet with me, so I could return to the office whenever I wanted, or go wherever I pleased.

Why was I feeling all of this? Why did it hurt? I shouldn't feel this way at all — he wasn't even my real boyfriend, for goodness' sake.

I kept walking and came across an elderly man asleep on the pavement. I smiled softly and walked over to him. I didn't disturb his sleep; I simply placed the bag of food beside him so he'd find it when he woke up.

I heard my phone ringing inside my purse. When I checked who it was, it was him. I smiled bitterly, switched the phone to silent, and tucked it back into my purse.

I called a taxi and gave the driver the address of the WEC building. I lost count of how many times I sighed between getting into that taxi and arriving at the building. I paid the driver and told him to keep the change.

I walked toward the entrance with my phone buzzing nonstop in my purse. I didn't know how I could even explain this to him — not that I thought he'd care much anyway. After all, he was with the ex he clearly still loved.

Now I understood exactly how it felt to see the two of them together. Kissing.

The disappointment wouldn't let up. But why? We were only pretending to be together in the first place. Still, he'd had the nerve to kiss me in front of her, and I'd told that woman, Stacey, that he would

never betray me — and then, just like that, I'd seen them kissing. What was I supposed to make of that? I felt like a fool. Yes, I'd been fooling myself this entire time with this arrangement.

I'd endured it the best I could — given away my first kiss, found myself with a fake boyfriend I could call “love” and tell “I love you” — and all I wished now was that he'd warned me before kissing her, or before kissing me, so I could have taken back every word I'd said.

“Hey, you! You haven't finished your story. I'm dying of curiosity!”

Sandy's booming voice filled every corner of my office. My focus shifted from the computer screen to my friend, who had just arrived.

Though we were both disappointed for different reasons, I needed to control myself so I wouldn't show how upset I was. I didn't want her bombarding me with questions.

Chapter 645

“You know it's not my fault!”

“Hmpf,” she snorted, rolling her eyes as she sat in the chair across from my desk. “So, what happened at your lunch meeting?”

“It went well, nothing major. They only talked about business and the project.” I shrugged off the question, avoiding Sandy's gaze. I didn't want her to suspect I was blatantly lying. The feelings I had at that moment were something I wanted to keep to myself — not share, not even with one of my best friends.

"I understand. By the way, why did you come back so quickly? Where's Mr. Wilsons?"

"I left him at the restaurant," I replied, as casually as possible.

"You left him there? Why?"

"Hmm... he still had a few things to do, so I took a taxi back here. Besides, they didn't need me for anything."

"So why did he bring you along in the first place?"

"I have no idea. Maybe so I could hear some important details. Uh — Sandy, do you remember Jamie, the friend who shares the apartment with me?" I abruptly changed the subject, because I didn't know how much longer I could go without looking her in the eye.

"I think so. The bank manager, right?"

"Uh-huh. Well, she's moving out of the apartment. I'm not sure if it'll be tomorrow or the day after. So... would you be open to sharing the apartment with me?"

“Wow, of course! Why not? That’s going to be so cool! Let me know when I can bring my things. That’s great!”

“Mrs. Davis!”

We both turned sharply toward that cold voice. And there he was — Mr. Gabriel Wilsons himself, with his usual demeanor: cold, rude, and arrogant. His eyes were fixed on me, not shifting even for a moment toward Sandy. Before we had a chance to greet him, he was already barking orders.

“Go to my office. Now.”

The moment he finished, he vanished from our sight.

“What happened to him, Madi? Did he have flared nostrils or something?” Sandy asked, her eyes wide with something close to fear.

In truth, I already knew the reason for his anger, but I chose to pretend ignorance and shrugged.

“I don’t know. You know your boss is kind of bipolar, so don’t be surprised by his behavior.” I cleared the mess off my desk, trying to look unconcerned.

“Aren’t you afraid of him?”

I looked at Sandy and smiled. "Why should I be? He's not a monster. He's not going to eat me, and I don't think he'll bite me either."

"Ahh, it's true — he's your boyfriend now..."

"Sandy!" I gave her a look of disapproval.

"What is it?"

"Get back to your office if you don't want to lose your job!"

"Yes, Mrs. Wilsons!"

"Sandy Aguilar!"

She ran off, still laughing at me.

Mrs. Wilsons. How sarcastic.

Chapter 646

I gave a bitter smile at the thought, then let out a disappointed sigh and decided it was time to follow my boss to his office. I gave three light knocks before opening the door.

I found him standing by the large glass window behind his desk, staring intently at the view, hands in his pockets.

My heels clicked against the white ceramic floor as I walked toward him.

“Mr. Wilsons.”

“Where have you been? I haven’t stopped calling your cell phone since I left the restaurant, and you haven’t answered a single call!” He finally turned to face me and stepped closer, hands still in his pockets.

I swallowed hard at how serious his expression was, at how his eyes seemed to pierce straight through me.

“I put my phone on silent when we left the office. I didn’t notice you’d called. I didn’t think you needed me there, so I decided to come back,” I answered calmly.

“What? You didn’t think I needed you there? What’s wrong with you? Didn’t I ask you to wait for me?”

Thanks to the soundproofing in that room, I didn't have to worry about anyone outside hearing us. If someone had, they might have thought something was going on between us — the way he was almost shouting, they could easily have mistaken him for a husband scolding his wife for leaving him alone at a restaurant.

I waited, then simply answered with a shrug.

"So where were you when I got back? I asked the waiter, and he told me you'd already paid the bill! Why did you do that?"

"Why did I pay the bill? Because I—"

"Why did you leave?"

"Ahh, is that what you're upset about? Like I already said, I didn't think you needed me anymore — especially after I saw you kissing your ex. I figured it was better to come back here than be the third wheel." I really don't know how I managed to sound so casual, despite the heaviness sitting in my chest.

"You saw us?" Gabriel looked genuinely surprised, and I couldn't help but let out a small laugh at his expression. The truth was, it had really hurt — but I made sure to show exactly the opposite.

"I saw. As for the bill, it's already taken care of. You don't need to worry about it." I waved my hand, as if to say everything was fine.

“Madi, it’s not what you’re thinking. That kiss you saw—” He reached for my shoulders, but I stepped back, breaking free of his hands.

“Hey, Gab, you don’t need to explain anything. I understand.” I cut him off with a soft laugh. “It’s just that, you know... I would have preferred if you’d told me beforehand — before kissing me, or before kissing her. I have no problem with the kiss. Really.”

What a liar, I heard my own heart scream.

“It’s more because of what I said to your ex. I felt like an idiot, you know? I proudly told her you would never betray me, and the second I turned my back, you were already kissing her.”

Chapter 647

“Madi, listen. I didn’t kiss her. She came to kiss me, and I pushed her away immediately.”

I almost laughed at the absurdity of our situation. We looked like a real couple — the wife catching her husband kissing his ex-girlfriend, and the husband scrambling to explain that it was the ex who’d kissed him, that he hadn’t done anything wrong.

“Gab, wait. It doesn’t matter to me who kissed whom — whether it was her or you who started it, or whether you kissed her back or not. None of it matters. You loved her once, didn’t you? So it’s fine. We’re just pretending to have a relationship anyway.” Liars end up in hell, I thought to myself, gathering the strength to go on. “I just ask that you let me know next time. That way I can prepare myself instead of looking like an idiot again — instead of bragging about things I shouldn’t.”

“Madi...”

“Gab, everything’s fine. I promise. Let’s just forget about this.”

I forced a laugh, fake as it was, hoping to convince both him and myself that everything really was okay.

“So what happened between you two? And Ray — does he know you talked?”

“No,” he replied, walking back to his chair.

“Why did she kiss you?”

He looked at me the moment I finished asking.

“Oh, sorry. I was just curious.”

“She wants to come back.”

I couldn’t breathe for a second. “Come back where?”

“She wants to get back together with me,” he said, gripping the pen on his desk so tightly I almost felt sorry for it.

“That’s great, then! You don’t need to keep pretending — we don’t need to fake this anymore!” I could never be an actress; I really didn’t know how to act.

“No.” He looked at me as if I’d said something utterly absurd. “We’re continuing with the plan.” He gripped the poor pen even harder.

“But why continue, if she’s already ready to come back to you? Isn’t this the perfect opportunity to get what you wanted? You don’t need to—”

“No, Madi. We already agreed on the plan. How can I be sure she’s willing to leave her boyfriend over one kiss? I need to be certain of everything before I put an end to this.”

I was completely speechless, genuinely shocked by his answer. Still, I found myself praying for this whole damned plan to end soon, before I had to face whatever feeling was starting to take root inside me.

“Okay. Just tell me what the next step is,” I said, nodding along.

“On the weekend, we’re going to my parents’ house.”

“What?” His answer caught me completely off guard. Parents? His parents?

“Exactly. We already talked about this, remember? I’m going to introduce her as my girlfriend and propose to you, in front of them.”

“Yes, we’ve discussed it, but isn’t it too soon to propose?”

“Madi, I need to take every opportunity I can get — especially now that Stacey’s back.”

Chapter 648

“Okay. But why do you have to propose to me? Why do we still have to get married at all?”

“Madi, I’ve already explained all of this to you.”

“I know, but I need you to explain it again, because I still don’t understand. Why do we still have to get married? She’s already back in town and wants to reconnect with you. There’s no reason for us to—”

While my mind raced through all these questions, Gabriel rose from his seat and closed the distance between us.

“Wouldn’t all this staging be a waste of time? You’re going to spend—”

My sentence was cut off by his lips on mine. He held my face in his hands so I couldn't protest or pull away.

My eyes were still wide open when he finally stopped and stepped back.

"Gabri—" I couldn't even finish his name before he kissed me again, deeper this time. We were interrupted by a knock at the door, and I immediately shoved him away.

"Gabriel!" I stared at him, but he only smiled back.

"It's the only way to stop your rambling, my future Mrs. Wilsons."

Huh. His words left me speechless — it was the second time I'd heard that phrase; the first had been from Sandy.

"Come in!"

How dare he, I thought, wide-eyed all over again. But there was no time to argue with him or dwell on it — I needed to pull myself together before whoever was at the door saw me like this.

Gabriel returned to his seat behind the desk, a faint smile still playing on his lips, while I quickly tried to fix my hair. The door opened, and the financial manager stepped inside.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Wilsons. Mrs. Davis,” the manager greeted us warmly. I returned the smile at once. When I glanced back at Gabriel, comfortably settled into his chair, I saw he’d already slipped back into his usual cold, serious demeanor.

The manager’s arrival gave me the perfect excuse to leave and return to my office.

“Excuse me, sir. If there’s nothing else, I’ll head back to my desk. Is everything alright?”

“Certainly, Mrs. Davis,” he replied in his usual cold voice. Since the financial manager’s attention was on Gabriel rather than on me, I allowed myself to roll my eyes at my boss.

I smiled, knowing full well he couldn’t change his expression or say a word to me now — not without revealing to the manager exactly what was going on. So this time, there were no feigned smiles, no sharp comebacks in response. Someone from outside was watching, unaware they were looking at the boss’s most audacious side — the one who always kissed his assistant just to stop her from rambling.

“Madi!”

I heard someone calling my name. When I turned around, I found Troy waving at me, a broad smile spread across his face. I returned the smile, watching him approach.

“My God, Madi, why is he here?” Sandy asked, visibly irritated by our colleague’s presence. She and I were enjoying our thirty-minute coffee break in the cafeteria.

Chapter 649

I don’t usually take this second break of the day, but Sandy and I were there to have a quiet conversation. She’d told me she needed to discuss something important with me, so I hadn’t had much choice but to tag along.

“Because this is the company cafeteria, and his break happens to be at the same time as ours,” I replied, laughing at my friend’s sour expression.

“Hi, Madi.” Troy was already standing in front of us, and he sat in the empty chair without so much as asking permission.

“Hi, Troy. How are you?” I asked, smiling, though out of the corner of my eye I could see Sandy watching him with open hostility.

“All good. But now that I’m talking to you, things just got even better.” He even winked at me as he said it, which only made me smile more. Sandy muttered something under her breath, though I couldn’t make out the words.

“Hey, old-fashioned! Hello, I’m here too, even though I seem to be invisible.”

“Ah! Hi, Sandy.”

“Wow, you actually noticed me? Congratulations, seems like your eyesight’s still working,” she shot back, cheeky, with a smile that was anything but sincere. I had to kick her under the table to make her drop the sarcasm.

Troy just scratched the back of his neck, saying nothing.

“Troy, can I ask you a favor?” Sandy asked after a moment, her tone suddenly much friendlier.

“Of course! Ask me anything,” Troy replied, with no idea what he was about to walk into.

“Are you sure I can ask for anything?”

“Uh... sure, as long as it’s something I can actually do,” he said, scratching his neck again, suspicion creeping into his expression. I was fairly certain he was already wondering what kind of favor she’d ask — but by then, it was too late to back out.

“Okay. Could you, by any chance, sit at another table?”

“Huh?” He was left gaping in shock. I was sure this wasn’t the favor he’d expected. If he had known, he probably wouldn’t have agreed so easily to letting Sandy corner him like that.

“Sandy!” I scolded her, an elbow to her arm accompanying the reprimand, but she simply ignored me.

“It’s just that Madi and I have something rather important to discuss, and we need privacy. You know — feminine things. Women’s matters. Female issues.”

“Ahh, sorry! Alright,” he said, his shoulders slumping in clear disappointment.

“Thank you, Troy.”

“No problem.” He got up, grabbed his snack, but not before flashing me one more smile. “Madi, see you around.”

I just nodded, returning his smile, feeling more than a little embarrassed by my friend’s behavior.

Once he was out of earshot, Sandy let out a loud sigh.

“You can be a real piece of work when you want to be,” I complained, giving her a gentle punch on the arm.

“Well, don’t you think I should have asked him to leave? We came here so you could finally finish telling me your story — the one that keeps getting interrupted halfway through by a certain someone!”

“Alright, alright,” I said, shaking my head with a smile. It wasn’t an argument I could win.

“So, where were we?”

Chapter 650

“At the coffee shop,” I said playfully, laughing as she just stared at me. “Alright, alright, let’s go.” I raised my hands in mock surrender and began telling her everything — from the moment I first saw Stacey at the store, to what happened with Gabriel, to the coffee, to the kiss.

“And then, at night—”

“Stop right there. He — did he kiss you?” Sandy’s eyes couldn’t have gone wider.

I just nodded, without offering any further explanation.

“Wow, Madi! You lucky bitch!” she exclaimed, loud enough to draw the attention of a few nearby employees.

“Lower your voice, Sandy,” I hissed, somewhere between a whisper and a shout.

“I don’t believe it — the insensitive Mr. Wilsons kissed you?” she asked again, this time whispering his name. “You’re seriously lucky, my friend. I can’t even imagine how his fans would react — especially Jenny, queen of the bitches, and her sidekick Ailene — if they ever found out. Ha!”

We both burst out laughing, picturing the absurd reactions of his fan club. Once Sandy finally got her laughter under control, she went right back to interrogating me.

“So how did the ex react, when he kissed you right in front of her?”

“Well, her first reaction was disbelief — like she couldn’t accept that he was dating anyone at all, let alone me. She genuinely looked like she thought it was impossible.”

“Seriously? By the way, what does she look like? Pick one: A, pretty. B, beautiful. C, sophisticated. D, like a model. Or E, all of the above.”

“And?”

“And?”

“All of the above.”

“Ouch. My poor, beautiful Madi. Tsk, tsk.” Sandy leaned back in her chair, shaking her head as though genuinely disheartened on my behalf.

“And how does my name factor into this?” I asked, trying to follow the connection she was drawing.

“Ahh, because that might be exactly why your boyfriend—”

“Fake boyfriend.”

“—your ‘fake boyfriend,’ as you insist on calling him, still can’t let go of his beautiful ex-fiancée.”

“Huh? I highly doubt that’s the reason. You really think it’s just about looks?”

“If not that, then what other reason could he possibly have?”

“Because he still loves her. That’s the other reason.”

“Ahhh. Does it hurt a lot?” she asked, putting on an exaggeratedly sad face.

I couldn’t tell if Sandy was teasing me or being serious.

“What? What do you mean, does it hurt a lot?”

“If it’s true — that he’s still in love with his ex — does it hurt? A lot?”

“Hurt who?”

“You! Does it hurt you, deep down? Oh my God, why does it take you so long to catch on?” Sandy shot back, rolling her eyes. Only then did I realize she was talking about me.

“Oh, Sandy, what a question! Of course not. Where did you even get that from?” I felt my expression shift, without meaning to, from shock to unease. I was nervous — because I knew it was true, and because I could see in her face that she knew it too.

She didn’t answer. She just shrugged.

“So, what happened after that?” she asked, after a beat of silence.

“He picked me up, and we went to discuss some important matters at a restaurant.”