

A Favor 651

Chapter 651

“He actually came to pick you up? For a date?”

“It wasn’t a date, Sandy. It was just the first time we’d really talked — a conversation between an assistant and her boss. Nothing more.”

“Wow. Since when do we call it a ‘casual chat’ when the boss takes his assistant out to a restaurant, just the two of them, to discuss ‘topics’ that have absolutely nothing to do with work?”

“Hmm — we can call it a casual conversation,” I said, trying to defend my position.

“A casual conversation? Okay, sure, let’s say it was. But since when does a boss discussing engagement and marriage with his assistant count as casual conversation? Ha! That’s hilarious. Madi, you’re not a comedian, stop trying to make me laugh.” And then she laughed anyway.

“Ha ha, very funny,” I said, faking amusement with a laugh that was completely hollow. “Are you going to keep this up, or should I reconsider inviting you to live with me?” Now it was my turn to laugh, watching Sandy’s smile falter at my comment.

“See? You can be a very obedient girl when you want to be.”

“I hate you,” she huffed, crossing her arms over her chest like a sulking child.

We wrapped up our coffee break shortly after and headed back to our desks.

I'd decided to leave out certain details, keeping some things entirely to myself — I didn't want her to know just how confused I really was about my own feelings. Maybe someday, once I had a little more clarity myself, I'd be able to share the rest with her.

Madi's point of view

"Where are you going?"

"To the Marketing department," I answered Sandy's question when we bumped into each other in the elevator.

"Why?"

"I'm picking up some files."

"Okay. Shall we have lunch later?"

"Maybe."

I stepped into the elevator and quickly pressed the button for the Marketing department's floor. Some of the employees inside already knew me and smiled when they saw me. I smiled back briefly before turning again to face the imposing stainless steel doors.

After gathering the documents the boss had requested, I was ready to head back to the Executive floor.

While I waited for the elevator doors to open, someone from that floor called out to me.

"Madielyn Davis?"

I turned around and saw a very familiar man approaching, a huge, genuine smile on his face. When he was finally right in front of me, I managed to place his face.

"Greg? Greg Anderson!" I shouted in sheer excitement. He was my college classmate. "What are you doing here, kid?"

"I could ask you the same thing," he said, smiling, showing off the two cute dimples on his face.

"Let's just say... I'm working here. And you? Wow, it's been a long time — you've changed a lot!"

I could barely believe what I was seeing. He'd been a skinny, shy boy back in college, and now he was muscular and looked great. He'd been one of my best friends back then.

"I could say the same about you. Just look at you — you're so beautiful now."

"Oh, so you're saying I wasn't pretty before?" I winked at him, teasing.

"No, of course not! I just mean... now you look especially beautiful. Stunning, really."

I smiled, rolling my eyes slightly. "Ugh. Sweet words, Greg."

"I'm not just saying it — I'm serious," he laughed.

We were both smiling as we finally stepped into the elevator. A few other employees were already inside, and they smiled at us too.

"By the way, you still haven't answered me. What are you doing here?"

"I'm sorry — I came to meet my cousin. He works here too."

“Wow, seriously? Which department, which floor?”

“Uhm... the Executive department.”

“Cool! Sounds great!” I nudged his arm, and he just smiled again.

“And you? Which department are you in?”

“Same department as your cousin,” I answered, a touch of pride in my voice.

“Well, that’s what I’d call a big deal, Madi! My college friend, working at the biggest company in Chicago — and in the Executive department, no less!”

“Oh, of course,” I said, mock-proud. “I’m Madi. The always beautiful, always confident Madi. What did you expect?”

For the record, I really hoped the rest of the employees would get off the elevator soon.

“Oh my God, you haven’t changed one bit. Still the same Madi I met in college — proud and narcissistic as ever,” he said, laughing so hard he had to hold his stomach.

The elevator soon stopped on our floor, but before we got out, I took a moment to shoot him a mock glare.

"I hate you! I am not narcissistic. I'm just... me. Duh!" I tried not to let his laugh — contagious as ever — pull me into laughing too.

"Yeah, right. Of course you're not," he said, laughing again, until eventually I couldn't help but laugh along with him.

"Just one thing, Madi — if we studied Hospitality, how'd you end up working here, in the Executive department?"

"Ah, it's just that I also took a business course."

"I see. But what about your own business?"

I bit my lower lip as I turned to face him.

"Hmm... actually, Greg, no one here knows I have my own business. I didn't mention it when I applied."

"Right, but this industry's pretty competitive, Madi. How'd you even get hired?"

“Oh, come on! Don’t you trust that I have talent? I thought we were friends! I already told you—”

He pinched my cheek.

“Yes, yes, I already know what you’re about to say. That you’re just Madi, and blah, blah, blah,” he said, still smiling.

“By the way, what exactly do you do here?” he asked, once he’d finally stopped laughing.

“I work as a personal assistant. Personal assistant to the CEO.” I smiled, not even noticing at first that the man in front of me had frozen solid, like a statue.

“Hey! Why are you just standing there?”

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I turned to see him standing stock-still.

“You said assistant... personal assistant to the CEO?” he asked again, as if he’d misheard me.

“Yes, exactly. Why?”

“No reason. So... you’re the assistant to the famous Gabriel Wilsons?”

“Yes, I am,” I said, nodding.

“Well... he’s actually my cousin.”

“Huh?” My eyes went wide, and the documents slipped right out of my hands, scattering across the floor. Ah, how disastrous.

I immediately crouched down to pick up the papers, one by one. He crouched down too, helping me gather them off the floor.

“Look, Greg...” I bit my lip, staring at him intently. I didn’t even know how to begin the sentence, but deep down, I think he already knew what I was going to say.

“Don’t worry, Madi. You can trust me to keep your secret.” He gave me a warm smile and helped me to my feet.

“Thank you. Hmm — you said he’s your cousin, I mean Mr. Wilsons. So why...?”

“Why aren’t I working here?”

I nodded.

“Well, I guess this kind of work just isn’t for me. I took the same course as you, remember — the difference is I chose to run my own business instead of being an employee with a boss who has the cold, serious heart of Gabriel Wilsons.”

I couldn’t help but laugh at the way he described his own cousin.

“I don’t think I saw you around, last time I was here.”

“Ah, that’s because I only started two months ago. Two and a half, to be precise.”

“Got it. Well — speaking of which, I should get going. I need to talk to my cousin about something important.”

“Okay. Thanks, Greg.”

“No problem. Oh, one more thing, Madi — did you change your number?”

“No, I’m still using the old one,” I said, shaking my head.

“Great. So... can I call you sometime?”

“Of course. Hey, do you remember Noelle, and the others — George, Arielle? They’re my managers now.”

“Wow, hold on — managers? Does that mean...?”

“Yes. It means I have three restaurants now.”

“Wow, Madi, you’re really something. So can I get free dinners sometimes?” he asked, with a straight face, though I could tell it was a joke.

“Oh, of course. Just go to Noelle’s location — she’ll take good care of you.” I smiled, raising an eyebrow.

We’d always tried to pair the two of them up in college, but Greg seemed completely oblivious to her, right up until we graduated. Even so, they’d stayed friends — really good friends.

“Well — Madi, you still remember that?” he asked with a smile, though I could see something like disapproval flicker in his eyes.

“Yes. She had a huge crush on you back then. Why didn’t you ever reciprocate?”

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“Because, back then, I had a huge crush on someone else — but she kept insisting I go after her friend instead.” He bit his lower lip as his expression turned suddenly serious. “I had really strong feelings for that girl. But she always ignored me.”

“Ah... do I know her? I mean — what’s her name?”

I already knew very well who he meant. But like he’d said, back then I hadn’t been ready for a boyfriend, for any kind of relationship, so I’d just kept pushing him toward Noelle instead.

“Hmm, I’m not sure you’d know her. Her name’s Madi. Madielyn Davis. Ever heard that name?”

I burst out laughing when he finally said my full name.

“Madi... ohh! Hi, Mr. Greg.”

I let out a sigh of relief as Sandy stepped out of her office. Saved by Sandy, I thought.

“Hi, Sandy. Everything okay?” Greg returned the greeting.

“Yes, everything’s fine, sir. Um — are you here to see Mr. Wilsons?”

“Yes. I have something to discuss with him.”

“Okay, sure,” she said, nodding, though when she glanced at me, I could see a silent question in her eyes.

“Hmm — Madi, I have to go,” he said, turning to me with a smile. “I’ll text you later.”

“Sounds good,” I said, smiling back.

He gave Sandy’s arm a friendly pat before heading toward the CEO’s office. The moment he disappeared through the door, I could barely breathe before Sandy shoved me straight into my office.

“Hey—”

“You, yourself! How do you know Mr. Anderson?” she demanded, hands on her hips.

“Ah... Greg?”

“Wow, last names now, girl?” Her eyes went wide.

I just laughed at the suspicious look she was giving me, eyebrow raised.

“Wow, Madi. You’re sleeping with your boss, and now you’re flirting with his cousin too? Doesn’t that weigh on your conscience at all? You— ow!”

I’d slapped her arm, laughing at the ridiculous face she made.

“Excuse me, Mrs. Aguilar. I am not sleeping with my boss. The truth is, he’s the one screwing up my life. And Greg—”

“Wow, last name again?”

I shot her a playful look.

“Do you want me to slap you again? This time it’ll be powerful enough to reach your soul.”

“Ha, no thanks, my soul’s just fine where it is. You’re so tough!” Instead of straightening up, she just laughed even harder.

“He’s my classmate from college,” I said, walking around to sit behind my desk. I set the folder of papers down in front of me.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk. Nothing compares to you, Madi,” she teased again.

“What do you mean by that?”

“The CEO is your boyfriend—”

“Sandy! It’s fake!” I tossed a crumpled piece of paper at her from the corner of my desk.

“Fine, whatever you want to call it. But pay attention — the best part is, you’ve got connections with his cousin now too. Perfect!”

“Ugh, you’re a crazy fool. I already told you, he’s just my college classmate.”

“Right... which course?” She sat down in one of the chairs across from my desk.

“Hotel and restaurant management.”

“Ah — so he knows about your business too?”

“Yes.”

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“And what happens now? He’s the boss’s cousin — how are you going to keep your secret?”

“He said he’ll keep it from him, for me.”

“Uh-huh. Got it. I’m betting everything he had a crush on you.”

She raised an eyebrow at me.

How does she always know these things?

“You seem pretty confident about that.”

“It’s obvious! The way he looked at you. Tsk, tsk, tsk, Madi. So obvious. ‘I’ll text you.’”

I couldn't hold back my laughter as she mimicked his voice.

"You really are crazy. Get out of here now — you've been distracting me long enough."

"Oh my, who, me? I'm so shy. So, so shy." She laughed.

"Get out, Sandy. Now." I shot her another look.

She stood up immediately, and to my surprise, brushed her hand against my shoulder, all fake tenderness and mischief.

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Wilsons." She dashed for the door, her wicked laughter trailing behind her down the hallway.

"Sandy Aguilar, I'm going to kill you! Ugh!"

I tried throwing my pen at her back, but she was faster than me, and it clattered harmlessly to the floor.

What a woman. She must be out of her mind, I murmured to myself — though deep down, I was laughing too.

Gabriel's point of view

"What's up, man?"

I smiled when I saw the grin on Greg's face as he walked into my office and approached my desk.

"Greg." I stood up to hug him. "Hey there, bro." I gave him a few pats on the back.

"Still single, unlike you," he said, winking as he settled into one of the visitor chairs.

He's my cousin on my mom's side, and he's been my best friend since childhood. His family moved from Chicago to Florida after we graduated from the same high school, but our friendship never faded. We shared everything — no secrets between us, including what had happened in my previous relationship with Stacey, my plan to win her back, and to make her pay for what she'd done.

"You know it's not a real relationship," I said, shaking my head as I returned to my chair.

"Alright, alright — not a real relationship, I get it." He nodded. "By the way, guess who I bumped into on my way in?"

I furrowed my brow. "Who?"

"Your lovely assistant. What's her name again — ah, Madi. She's a nice person. And beautiful."

"Don't go near her again. Don't talk to her," I said, my tone serious.

"Wow, are you jealous? I thought it was just a fake relationship," he said, smiling.

"It is. That's exactly why. Still, I don't want you talking to her again." I avoided his gaze as he raised an eyebrow.

"But why? I don't want to hurt anyone, man. And don't worry, all I said was that she's beautiful."

"I know you too well, Greg," I said, leaning back in my seat.

"Ahh, right, Gabriel?" He leaned back too. "Tsk, tsk, tsk. Can I ask you something, man?" His expression turned serious.

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"Of course. What is it?" I asked, my eyes fixed on him.

“Why do you want to win Stacey back? Do you still love her?”

“Tss. What kind of question is that? I already told you the answer.”

“Yeah, but I want to know the real reason.”

“I told you — to punish her.”

“Alright...” He tapped his fingers against his chin, a habit of his whenever he was thinking something over seriously. “But you said she asked to get back together with you, didn’t she?”

“Yes.” I’d already told him about everything that had happened between Stacey and me recently.

“So why do you need to keep going with this plan, with your assistant tied up in it? She seems nice, man. Kind. Don’t you think it’s a little unfair to drag her into an arrangement like this?”

“She’s willing to help, Greg. I offered her money — she turned it down.”

“Maybe that’s because she already has her own money, and she doesn’t want to be treated like one of your charity cases.” He shrugged, and I frowned at him.

“What do you mean, she doesn’t want to be my charity case?”

“Well — she probably doesn’t want to be called ‘your whore’ just for taking money from you. Besides, what reason did she actually give for going along with this?”

“She said she loves a challenge.”

“Ah, right. A challenge. Strong woman, I get it. Still, that’s a pretty vague reason to agree to something this stupid. I hope she really thought it through,” he said, nodding.

“Greg, let me make something clear. Yes, whatever’s going on between Madi and me is just for show. That doesn’t mean I’m going to let you go mess around with her feelings. So drop whatever you’re thinking about her,” I said, my voice edged with warning.

He just laughed in my face.

“Ahh, Gabriel, Gabriel. I’m not some monster, man. And about that whole ‘messing with her feelings’ thing — are you sure you’re talking about me? Or about yourself?”

I clenched my fists, my eyes shooting daggers at him.

“Come on, man. What if she falls for you? Or you fall for her, somewhere along the way?”

I laughed at the question.

“That’s not going to happen, Greg. She’s not my type,” I said, looking away again.

“Sure, but sometimes the person you’re not even looking for — the one you’d never even consider — turns out to be exactly the one you fall for, when you least expect it.”

I don’t know why, but something about the way he said it made me stop.

“Wow. Didn’t know you’d become a poet, Greg.”

He let out a good-natured laugh.

“Yeah. Can I ask you something else? Actually, it’s not really a question — it’s a favor, this time.”

“Of course.”

“Can I date your assistant, once you’re done with your deal with her?”

I was thrown off by the question. I honestly didn't know what to say, or how to react.

"Greg—"

"I like her, man."

Chapter 657

"Go fuck yourself. You just met her, and now you're telling me you like her?" I couldn't help but raise my voice.

"Gabriel, I'm not asking for this now — I said after your arrangement with her is over. And why does it even matter to you? She's just your 'fake' girlfriend, remember, your words. She's still your assistant — just your assistant — even after you're married, since those were your exact words. Fake. Not real."

I didn't say anything. I just took a deep breath and clenched my fists under the desk. Honestly, the only reason I hadn't punched him — more than once — was because he happened to be my best friend as well as my cousin.

"Calm down, man, I know you too well. You don't seem jealous at all," he said, laughing as he leaned back in his chair again.

"I'm not jealous, Greg." I tried to steady myself. I'm not jealous, he's just annoying, that's all, I told myself. "Why are you even here?" I asked, more irritated than before.

"Honestly, just to ask you to introduce me to your assistant. But since I've already met her on my own, guess you don't have to bother." He gave me a wicked grin.

I'd be lying if I said that didn't annoy me even more.

"So, since you've already met her, what do you have to say?"

"She's perfect."

"I know," I said, with more pride than I meant to show.

"Perfect for me to date," he added, grinning.

"You'd better get out of this office before I forget you're my best friend," I said, my smile gone.

"Ahh—" He stood up immediately. "Man, I'm also your cousin."

“Yes, and you’d better leave now, before I forget that too.” I stood, looking straight at him.

He backed away, step by step.

“Wait — can I get her number?”

“No, you idiot. She’s going to be my wife. Drop it.”

“But you said it’s fake. She’s only going to be your fake wife. So — sorry, I’m still getting her number.”
He was already at the door, still grinning like an idiot.

“Go to hell, Greg. Screw you.”

I was genuinely starting to lose my patience with him, already regretting that I’d ever mentioned Madi at all.

“Gabriel, you’re getting way too possessive. Calm down. Take care of her — because someday, when this arrangement of yours ends, I’m going to be with her. Whether you like it or not. Whether you approve or not. But for now, take care of her. For me.”

And with that, he walked out of my office. I stood there, bewildered. Why did he sound like he already knew her — like he was so sure of himself, so certain he’d be with her someday?

I sighed and shook my head, trying to clear the thought from my mind.

Madi's point of view

Chapter 658

"Why did you have to come pick me up? I could have gone to the airport alone, no problem at all. I could've just taken a taxi like anyone else, you know?" I asked Gabriel for the third time that morning.

We were spending the weekend at his parents' house in Belleville — a four-hour, fifty-two-minute drive — but Gabriel had decided we'd take his private jet instead, to save over four hours of travel.

"You know, you should be thanking me instead of complaining. If we go together, at least we save time."

I just rolled my eyes, annoyed at his insistence. Do you know where he was at that moment? In my room. Can you imagine that — my own boss, invading his assistant's bedroom without a shred of shame, sitting right there on the edge of my bed?

"For God's sake, what are you doing in my room? Who gave you permission to come in here?" I asked, planting my hands on my hips to make my displeasure clear.

“You did,” he said, pointing an accusatory finger at me. “You’re the one who opened the door and let me in. Hey, love — I’m here to pick up your things.” He let out a hearty laugh and flopped back onto the bed, just to provoke me further.

“Oh, almost forgot, my love. Thank you so much.” I couldn’t help but roll my eyes again. He was unbearable. Since he was already there for my things, I pushed my suitcase toward him.

“All set, love. We can go.”

The moment I finished speaking, he stood up, grabbed the suitcase handle, but didn’t move toward the door. Instead, he turned to me.

“What’s even in this thing? It’s way too light.”

“Oh, darling, you should thank me instead of complaining.” I smiled, savoring the small pleasure of throwing his own words back at him. Of course the suitcase rolled easily — it had four wheels. Huh, I muttered, quiet enough that he wouldn’t feel too stupid.

“I know it has four wheels — I can see that. But I also know how to tell when a suitcase is heavy or not.”

To my complete surprise, he set it down and opened it without asking permission.

“What are you doing?” I tried to stop him.

“Checking what you packed. What else would I be doing?” he said, as if the answer were painfully obvious, as if I were foolish for even asking.

“That’s my suitcase — my personal things!”

“I’m not taking anything, I’m just checking, okay? How else would I know if it’s this light because you only packed bikinis and lingerie?” he said, sifting through my things one by one.

To his disappointment, all he found were a few shorts, t-shirts, dresses, some feminine items, and a handful of accessories. I’d tucked all my lingerie beneath the rest of the clothes, so he’d only find it if he dug all the way to the bottom — which, thankfully, put me a little more at ease.

“Wow, very well organized. You’re approved, darling,” Gabriel said, smiling as he glanced around the room.

Chapter 659

“Of course — you’re talking about Mad—” I caught myself just before saying Madi knows how to organize her own things, one of my favorite phrases among friends, before remembering he wasn’t one of them, and didn’t know this bolder side of me.

Good thing I managed to catch it before he noticed.

“I’m not just talking about the suitcase — I mean your whole room.”

“I’m a grown woman, Mr. Wilsons. A woman my age should know how to keep her things clean and organized before letting anyone else see them.”

“Wow. I never took you for that kind of woman. Where’d you learn to be like this?” he asked, clearly amused by the discovery.

“I learned it at home, from my dear mother. Satisfied? Then you can close my suitcase now,” I said, narrowing my eyes and frowning, as if genuinely annoyed.

“Hmm. A little aggressive, aren’t we, Mrs. Wilsons?” he said, smiling as he zipped the suitcase shut.

“Why do you keep calling me that?” My heart pounded every time he said it.

He just laughed, pulling my suitcase toward the door.

“Because that’ll be your title in two weeks, love,” he finally said, opening the door.

I followed him out, doing my best not to smile, even though I knew he was just teasing.

“Do your parents know we’re arriving today?” I asked once we’d finally settled into his jet. He sat across from me, and with his long legs, our knees nearly touched every time either of us shifted.

“There are plenty of seats on this jet — did you have to sit right across from me? I can’t even move my legs,” I complained, as his leg brushed against my right knee for the fourth time.

He laughed and shifted into a more comfortable position.

“Seriously? That’s the question you’re asking?”

“Want me to answer that first?” he said, a smile on his lips.

I rolled my eyes, feigning impatience — though honestly, I’d love to see this playful, unguarded side of him shown to his employees, to everyone around him, more often.

“The second one,” I said, crossing my arms.

“You sure?”

“God, give me patience. Yes, I’m sure.”

“I wanted to sit here so I could watch you drool while you sleep,” he said, bursting into laughter.

The joke caught me completely off guard, leaving me staring at him, mouth open.

Huh? Did he just make a joke? “Hey—”

“I’m kidding.”

My mouth fell open even wider.

Wow. He just— Remembering how fast his mood could shift depending on what I said, I decided to change course. “...did you say drool?”

“That’s right.”

“I don’t drool!”

“How would you even know what you do while you’re asleep?”

“I just know!”

“Uh-huh. We’ll see about that.”

“Huh? No way, I’m not sleeping — the flight’s too short for that. Less than an hour. I’ll just be on my phone.”

Chapter 660

He let out an easy laugh. I found myself wondering what had gotten into this man — smiling and laughing all morning, clearly in an excellent mood. I was dying to ask why, but I held myself back. Since he could swing moods so suddenly, I didn’t want to risk one wrong question flipping the switch and spending the rest of the trip across from a grumpy man. That was the last thing I wanted.

“Now, answer my first question. Do your parents know we’re arriving today?”

“They do. I already told them. Honestly, they’re pretty excited to meet you, so be ready for some questions — especially from my sister.”

“You have a sister?”

“I do. Younger than me. She works at a detective agency.”

My eyes widened at that.

“Wow. If she works at a detective agency, she might—”

“No, my love. You can relax, okay? Let’s just play our roles properly and answer whatever she and my mother ask, so nobody suspects a thing.”

I sighed and sank back into my seat, letting myself relax a little.

“Which is why I’m going to need you to start calling me darling from now on,” he added, still smiling.

“Ha,” I said, teasing, rolling my eyes as I brushed a strand of hair off my forehead.

We’d already gone over how we’d play our little charade back in the car — he’d left it up to me to decide how I wanted to run the act during our stay at his parents’ house. A daring thought began forming in my mind, and a mischievous smile crept onto my lips as I looked at him.

I think he caught on to what I was thinking, because his brow furrowed — but he didn’t say a word.

“Get ready, my love.”

Madi’s point of view

We hadn't even stepped out of the car yet, and already we were surrounded by his relatives.

"Stay here," he said, just before opening his door.

"Huh?" I didn't understand.

"I told you, stay here. I'll open your door."

"Ahh... alright," I said, nodding. Slowly, I murmured to myself.

But the moment he stepped out, he was swarmed — pulled into hugs by five boys and four girls, plus a cute little girl and boy who I guessed were siblings, tucked into the mix.

I waited for him to open my door, but he was too busy trading stories with the boys, and the girls seemed content to wait right along with him.

Alright, let's start this game, Madi. Inhale, exhale. You can do this. You are Madi — beautiful, confident, strong Madi, I told myself, before finally pushing the door open on my own.

Every eye in the driveway turned toward me instantly. I smiled, deliberately ignoring the weight of Gabriel's gaze.

"Hello," I said, letting my eyes move across each of them, one by one.

"Oh, God, you're absolutely gorgeous, sweetheart." Before I could even react, they were all standing in front of me.

I guessed the woman holding me tightly was his mother — same eye color, same shape to her lips.

"Come on, Gabriel, introduce us to your wonderful woman here," she called out, though her eyes stayed fixed entirely on me.

He stepped up beside me then, resting a hand lightly against my back.