

A Favor 661

Chapter 661

“Didn’t I say to stay put, that I’d open your door?” he whispered in my ear, sending a shiver cascading down my spine. I clung to his jacket, still managing to keep my gentlest smile in place.

“Mom, Dad, this is Madi. My girlfriend,” he said, smiling warmly at everyone. Sometimes I hate that I can read people so easily — that I can tell, without even trying, whether he’s lying, whether that smile is real or not.

“Love, this is my mother, Beth, and that’s my father, Jonas.”

“Don’t forget about me!”

“And this is my sister, Nancy,” he said, gesturing to a woman in her twenties.

“Finally, brother! Did you actually find someone more beautiful than your ex’s bitchy self?” she said with a grin, pulling me into a hug.

A few heads turned at that, some visibly stunned.

“Oops, sorry! I’m just excited you’ve finally moved on.”

“Nancy!” Her mother shot her a look.

Awkward.

“Forgive me, okay?” She flashed a peace sign. “Anyway, Madi, I’m so thrilled to finally meet you. My brother hasn’t shut up about you for the past two months.” She took my hands, clearly delighted, and I could already tell we’d get along — she had that same kind of cheerful energy.

“I’ve been looking forward to this too,” I said, smiling.

“Madi, I’m so glad you’ve come into my son’s life. He’s changed so much since he started talking about you.” Mr. Wilsons pulled me out of Gabriel’s arms and into a hug of his own.

I wanted to laugh. Yes, your son’s changed a lot — ever since he asked me to pretend to be his girlfriend to win back his ex.

“Does he really talk about me that much?” I asked, raising an eyebrow at my “boyfriend.”

“Oh, a lot—”

“Nancy!” Gabriel cut her off with a look, and she fell silent immediately. “Um, anyway, love — this is my Uncle James and his wife, Aunt Morgan. And the couple over there, that’s Uncle John and his wife, Aunt Cindy.”

I went around greeting each of them with a kiss on the cheek. They all looked at me like I was some kind of novelty — not in a bad way, more like they couldn’t quite believe their nephew had actually moved on. Tsk, tsk, tsk. If only they knew.

“In case you’re wondering, love — my dad and both my uncles have names that start with J. They’re all brothers. My two aunts are sisters too — except for my mom, obviously.”

“Ah, I see,” I said, nodding.

“And these are my cousins, Philip and Justine — James’s kids.” He crouched down to greet the two children. “And these two little troublemakers are Savahna and Christian. Twins — fraternal. Cindy and John’s.”

“Hello, Sav. Hello, Chris. How are you both?” I asked, and each of them planted a quick kiss on my cheek.

“We’re good,” Chris said, flashing a toothy grin.

“Madi, are you gonna marry Gabi too? But don’t leave him like that other lady did, okay?”

My eyes went wide, and I swallowed hard at Savahna's words.

Chapter 662

Every head in the group snapped toward Nancy. I couldn't help but laugh at her expression as she stared back at the kids.

"What? Why's everyone looking at me? I didn't do anything!" she protested.

"Sav, sweetheart, don't say that again. It's not a nice thing to say, okay?" Aunt Cindy took Sav's hands gently.

"But it's true, Mom. We saw that lady slap Gabi!"

We all nearly choked at Chris's contribution. He was determined to back up his sister.

"My God, Nancy, what have you been putting in these children's heads?" Mrs. Wilsons pinched her daughter's arm.

"Mom, I told you, I didn't do anything," Nancy said, rubbing the spot.

"Alright, everyone, let's take this inside. I'm sure Gabriel and Madi are exhausted from the trip."

“Yes, and lunch is already prepared, so Gabriel — show Madi her room, then come straight down to the kitchen so we can eat.”

“Yes, Mom.” He took my hand. “Come on, darling.”

“Wait — our luggage!” I stopped walking.

“Darling, don’t worry about that, the maids will take it up to our room.” He tugged at my hand again.

“Which room?” I asked, confused.

“My room. Well — now, ours.” He winked at me.

My face must have gone pale with horror.

“No! Show me my own room!” I hissed at him in a low whisper.

“Sorry, darling, but I think all the guest rooms are already taken — my aunts, uncles, and let’s not forget the cousins.”

We stepped into a room done up in black, gray, cream, and blue.

“This is my room, darling.”

I know, I thought. The colors suit him perfectly — cold and serious, I murmured to myself.

I glanced around and my eyes landed on a photo frame sitting on the bedside table. A strange, unexplainable ache settled in my chest the moment I recognized who was in it.

It was him and his ex, Stacey, kissing, a beautiful sunset behind them.

I looked away, but not fast enough — he’d already followed my gaze.

“I’m sorry, love. I haven’t slept here in over a year, I didn’t even realize that photo was still up.” He grabbed the frame and dropped it straight into a trash bin near the door.

I gave him a small, sheepish smile and shook my head.

“You don’t have to explain yourself, Gab. It’s your room, your life, your decision. Anyway — I’ll be sleeping on the couch.” I pointed toward the L-shaped sofa across from a fifty-, maybe fifty-five-inch TV mounted on the wall.

“No, what are you talking about? You’re not sleeping there. You’re sleeping with me.”

“Huh, no way!” I headed straight for the door. Talking with his family, even his sister, suddenly sounded far more appealing than being alone in a room with this mischievous side of him.

He followed me out. His room was the first down the hall, right where the staircase came into view.

“Hey, only one of us is thinking about mischief here, darling. Relax, I won’t touch you unless you ask me to.”

He laughed, that easy, careless laugh of his.

Chapter 663

“Pervert!” We’d reached the top of the long, steep staircase by then.

“I’m not sleeping next to you. If you want, you sleep on the couch, and I’ll take the bed,” I said, eyebrows raised. We started down the stairs, too busy arguing over sleeping arrangements to notice the amused faces watching from below.

“No way, love. You said it yourself — your room, your life, your decision. So I’ve decided you’re sleeping right next to me.” He started laughing again.

“No.” I glared at him.

“Yes, love.”

“No.”

“Yes, love.”

“No, you—” I didn’t even get to finish. The moment we hit the bottom step, he pulled me in and kissed me.

Neither of us noticed the people in the living room, all watching, waiting to head to the kitchen — their faces caught somewhere between shock and pure delight.

Nancy’s point of view

“I’m planning to have a family picnic...”

We all turned to look at my mother when she suddenly stopped mid-sentence.

“Did you all hear that?” she asked.

At first, none of us understood what she meant — until a second later, we did.

“No way, love! You said it yourself, it’s my room, my life, my decision, so I’ve decided you’re sleeping right next to me.”

We all heard Gabriel laughing. Every head turned toward the sound at once. There they were, at the top of the stairs, caught in a small argument as they made their way down.

“No! It’s Madi!”

“Yes, my love.”

“No!”

“Yes, my love.”

He laughed again.

“Oh my God, darling, can you see that?” my mother asked my father, tears already welling in her eyes.

I understood exactly where those tears were coming from, because I was feeling the exact same thing, listening to my brother laugh like that.

He seemed so genuinely happy, teasing his girlfriend.

“It’s been ages since we heard him laugh like that,” Dad said, smiling.

“Yes. It’s been so long since he let himself be this carefree,” Mom agreed, nodding.

A smile spread across my own face. Well, thank you, Madi. You brought my brother back.

We all just stood there, watching them trade playful jabs and touches — until every one of our eyes went wide as Gabriel pulled Madi close and kissed her, right on the lips. Aunt Cindy and Aunt Morgan immediately clapped their hands over Chris and Sav’s eyes.

Since when did my brother turn into someone affectionate — someone who actually does PDA? Honestly, I’d never once seen him kiss Stacey on the mouth, let alone in front of the whole family.

“Ugh, why do you always do this?” Madi asked, irritated, giving his arm a punch.

My brother had clearly noticed us by then — Madi, apparently, had not.

“Because you keep arguing with me,” he said, laughing, taking her hand.

“No, because you won’t listen!”

“Ahh, darling — no matter what you say, we’re sleeping in my bed.”

I raised an eyebrow at the way he stressed my.

“No! I’m sleeping on the couch.”

Chapter 664

“Fine, we can both sleep on the couch.” He shrugged.

“Hey, you two — seriously, are we really discussing sleeping arrangements right now?”

I watched Madi’s face flush red.

“Madi, if you want, you can share my bed. I’ve got a queen in my room.”

Her face lit up.

“No,” Gabriel said immediately.

“Why not? It’s just one night. Can’t I borrow your girlfriend for a single night?”

“No, Nancy. You’ll go and put ideas in her head.”

I sighed. “Wow, now I’m a planter, apparently. Except I don’t even know how to plant a single rose.”

Everyone burst out laughing at that, even Madi — everyone except my brother, who just watched me.

“And what exactly do you think I’m going to put in her head? She’s not a child, Gabriel.”

“I said no, Nancy.”

He pulled Madi to his side and kept his eyes locked on me. I just raised an eyebrow back. As if I were about to steal her away from him. I was about to fire something back, but our mother cut in first.

“Kids, kids — enough with these ridiculous arguments. And please, stop with the staring contest, both of you. You’re not children anymore. Let Madi decide for herself where she wants to sleep. And Gabriel, you shouldn’t be forcing her into your room, your bed, or anything else.”

“Mom?”

I laughed at Gabriel’s protest. Our mother had always leaned conservative.

“What? You two aren’t even married yet.” She narrowed her eyes at him.

Gabriel let out a soft chuckle and scratched the back of his neck.

“Mom. We’re living in the twenty-first century. And I’m going to marry her soon.”

That left all of us speechless for a moment. But as much as I wanted to back him up, I turned to face Mom instead, just to needle him a little.

“Mom’s got a point, Gabi. Madi — I’ll have the maids bring your things straight to my room.” I winked at her.

“No! Stop it, Nancy, you’re not winning this one.” He turned to Madi. “Fine, love. I’ll take the couch. Just stay in my room.” He said it through gritted teeth, thoroughly annoyed, but still leaned down to kiss her forehead.

Madi’s point of view

After lunch, all the girls settled into the living room while the boys headed straight for the mini-fridge tucked beside the kitchen.

Nancy sat down next to me.

They started sharing pieces of Gabriel’s childhood with me — his school days, the first time he got hurt playing softball, the story of his first trophy, his first crush — until the conversation came to a sudden stop the moment someone mentioned Stacey’s name. I could feel how tender that subject still was for all of them.

I made a mental note to ask Gabriel about her, sometime soon.

I was still listening to their stories when Aunt Cindy suddenly turned to me.

“So, Madi — how did you meet our Gabriel?”

Chapter 665

I glanced around and found every pair of eyes in the room fixed on me, waiting.

Where are you, Gabriel? You said you'd help me with this.

I smiled and took a breath.

"Well, we first met at a café near his office building. I remember he was placing his order at the counter while I was picking up my favorite cake and coffee. Then — well, it's an ordinary story, really. I bumped into him, and his coffee spilled all over his coat. And to my surprise, he shouted at me, even though I'd already apologized." I laughed nervously. "He was so angry about it. But obviously, I wasn't about to let that slide — I shouted right back, which only made him angrier. He said he wouldn't forget my face. I just laughed in his. I said, 'So what? I won't forget your ugly face either, idiot!' I swear, if looks could kill, I'd have been six feet under right there on the spot."

I bit my lip as the room erupted in laughter.

"Ahh, Madi, that's not an ordinary story at all. You're amazing," Mrs. Wilsons said, still chuckling.

"I agree with Mom, little sister." I glanced at Nancy at the word little sister. "You know, it takes guts to shout at Gabriel like that. Now I understand why he loves you."

I swallowed hard at her words.

“But seriously, back to the story — that fits perfectly. Explains exactly why my brother used to be such a complete idiot, and cold as ice, back then.”

Madi’s Point of View

“Hey! Who’s cold and idiotic?”

Nancy’s eyes went wide, and she froze in her seat. We all turned toward the voice. It was Gabriel, with the rest of the boys trailing behind him, all heading straight for our seats.

Ha. The king himself has arrived.

I smiled inwardly. Be ready, love — Madi’s got this.

“Nancy, I heard you. Who’s this cold, idiotic guy you were just talking about?”

Nancy’s face went pale.

“Ahhh — the idiot? No one! We were just talking about Madi’s favorite movie, which happens to be my favorite too. Isn’t that right, Madi?” She shot me a smile, her eyes silently begging.

I laughed, then nodded.

“Hmm. The movie.” Gabriel nodded and turned to me.

“Hi, love.” He kissed my forehead, and I smiled.

“Excuse me, Nancy — mind if I sit with my girlfriend?”

“Ugh, I hate you!” Nancy stomped her feet and marched over toward Mrs. Wilsons, but her father cut her off.

“Hey — little girl, where do you think you’re going? That’s my spot.” Mr. Wilsons slid into the empty seat beside his wife.

We all laughed as Nancy pouted like a child.

“Ugh! Dad? Mom?”

“What?” her mother replied, all innocence.

“You two don’t love me anymore!” She pouted again and dropped down beside Aunt Morgan instead.

Tsk, tsk.

I saw Gabriel just shake his head at the scene.

“Now, back to the story,” Aunt Morgan said, clapping her hands to bring our attention back. “What happened next, Madi?”

Chapter 666

Gabriel looked at me, waiting to hear his aunt’s question answered. I gave him a sweet smile before continuing.

“And then — we ran into each other again, a month later, at a business conference where he was one of the speakers. Except this time, the roles reversed — he was the one who spilled wine on my dress.” I glanced at Gabriel, catching the frown already forming on his face. “And guess what — he didn’t apologize. He just gave me this mischievous little smile.”

I shook my head, letting the act sink in.

“What?” the girls asked in unison, as Gabriel’s eyes went wide.

“Yes. He didn’t say a single word of apology. Tsk, tsk.”

“He didn’t apologize?” Nancy stared, disbelieving.

I shook my head. “He did not.”

“Wow, Madi.”

“Oh my God, Gabriel! How shameful! We didn’t raise you to be rude and arrogant!” Mrs. Wilsons scolded her son.

“Huh? What?” He stood there, mouth open, completely lost as to what we were even talking about.

I bit my lip to keep from laughing. The confusion and disapproval written across his face were priceless.

“Yes, love. You never apologized for spilling your drink on my dress.”

“I — I didn’t apologize?”

“No,” I said, doing my best to look wounded and disappointed.

“Gabriel, you apologize to Madi. Right now,” Mrs. Wilsons said, narrowing her eyes at him.

“Mom?”

“I said, apologize to your girlfriend!”

He looked at me, and I gave him a small smile.

“It’s okay, love. I know you were just exhausted from work—”

His father cut me off.

“No, Madi. Let Gabriel own up to his behavior. Being CEO doesn’t give him the right to be rude to people.”

“It’s fine, Mr. Wilsons, that’s all in the past.”

“It’s fine now. But next time, don’t let him get away with it again.”

I just nodded and smiled — not knowing that the man sitting beside me, holding my hand, had already been plotting his own secret move against me.

He lifted my hands to his lips and kissed each one.

“I’m deeply sorry, my love, for being rude to you the first time we met.” I smiled triumphantly. “And I promise not to be that jerk again — even at the office.”

My breath caught at his last words, especially with his parents and relatives all sitting right there.

He flashed me a mischievous grin at my reaction.

“I love you—”

He didn’t let me finish. He kissed me, right in front of everyone. We both heard the collective, startled intake of breath around us, but he ignored it completely and kept right on kissing me.

Caught off guard, I froze in my seat, not moving, not even responding to the kiss.

But the fool had a plan of his own. He bit down gently on my lower lip until I gasped, then slipped his tongue into my mouth.

Chapter 667

I could feel my bones practically melting, overwhelmed by everything rising up inside me. Embarrassed, I grabbed his shirt and tried to push him back, but he only tightened his grip around my waist and the back of my neck, deepening the kiss.

My God, this man is going to be the death of me.

He only let go once we were both out of breath.

I wanted to shoot him a look, but with his whole family watching, I settled for a sweet smile instead.

He ran his thumb over my lips, wiping away a smudge of lipstick, grinning like he'd just won the lottery.

"I love you, darling." He kissed my forehead.

I'd thought I was giving the performance of a lifetime — but I was wrong, because if there's a word better than great, better than the best, it belonged to him.

"I love you too," I managed, unable to look him in the eyes afterward.

Somehow, all of this was starting to get to me — for real.

“Sorry, everyone. I just can’t help myself sometimes,” he said.

I rolled my eyes at that.

“Mind if I borrow my girlfriend for a bit? I just want to show her around the house.” He stood, pulling me up with him.

“Where are we going?” I asked, confused.

“Let’s take a tour of the house.” I swallowed hard at the wink that followed.

“Gabriel — around the house, and nowhere near your bedroom!” Mrs. Wilsons shot him a sharp look.

I blushed and held tighter to his hand, but he only laughed at his mother.

“Mom, relax. We’re not doing that in my room. We’re doing it outside.”

“Gabriel Wilsons!” Mrs. Wilsons looked utterly horrified, while her husband, on the other hand, joined the rest of the men in a round of laughter.

“Darling, they’re grown adults now. Let them do what they want,” he said, wrapping an arm around his wife’s shoulders.

“Fine, then! On one condition — I want a grandchild out of this before the year’s over!”

“Ahhh — oh my!”

I barely managed to catch my own jaw before it hit the floor.

“Mother! Just like that? What do you think Madi’s uterus is, some kind of miracle machine?” Nancy’s face was a shade no painter in all of Belleville could have captured.

“Why not? Since they’ve already started down that road, might as well let them finish it. You have my blessing to share a room — just don’t forget my condition!”

“Wonderful! Nice work, Gabriel!”

I just smiled at them all, while deep down, all I truly wanted was to strangle the man currently holding my hand.

Oh my God, somebody help me.

Madi's point of view

We walked off, hands still intertwined. He led me through the kitchen, out the back door, to a massive mango-shaped pool.

"Wow, it's so beautiful," I said, taking in the pool area.

We stopped by a bench near the edge.

"What did you tell them?" That was the first thing he said once we sat down. I couldn't tell if he was upset, but his expression was dead serious.

Chapter 668

"You caught the last part of what I said, right? So why do you want to hear it again?" I replied, not quite finding the courage to meet his eyes. Instead, I kept my gaze on the small all-glass greenhouse across the pool.

“Why did you say I never apologized to you, and that we met at a business conference?”

“Didn’t you tell me I could decide which story to tell? You handed me the baton, I ran the race. What’s the problem?”

“The problem is, I never attended any business conference, and my father’s going to find out you were lying!” He whispered it, though it came out closer to a hiss, dragging a hand through his hair.

Ugh. What a blunder.

I swallowed hard, but quickly pulled myself together.

“And that’s my problem how, exactly? You left me alone with your mother and aunts, and they asked how we met. What was I supposed to say — that we met three months ago at work, because I’m your personal assistant?”

“You could’ve made up literally any other excuse. Just not a business conference!”

“Then tell me what I should have said, Gabriel! How am I supposed to know all these little details about your family and your life, when you’ve never told me anything about yourself?”

“You could’ve at least asked me first!”

“Wow — so I should’ve run to you mid-conversation to ask how to respond when they got curious about us? Is that what you’re saying?” My voice dripped with sarcasm.

He didn’t answer, just clenched his fists.

“Come on, Gabi—”

“Don’t call me that.”

I was genuinely startled by how sharp his voice came out.

What is wrong with this man?

“Why are you yelling? I just called you Gabi—”

“I just told you not to call me that.” The look he gave me sent a shiver straight down my spine.

Why is he so angry?

“What’s wrong with the nickname? I’ve heard your mother and Nancy call you that all the time.”

“Don’t call me that, Madi. Call me anything else — just not that.”

“What the hell, Gabriel?” I stepped back, stomping my foot, and it finally clicked why he hated the nickname so much — it reminded him of Stacey. I remembered her using it, back when we’d followed them into the restaurant that day.

“Madi, where are you going?” I heard him call after me.

“I’m taking a walk through the garden. Alone. Go find someone else to talk to.”

“Madi, let’s just go back inside, please.”

I ignored him. Then go back by yourself, I muttered under my breath, circling the pool until I reached the little greenhouse. He followed, calling my name over and over.

“Madi!”

Wow. I stopped in front of the small glass structure. Flowers surrounded the outside, and inside sat a long bench.

“This is my mother’s favorite spot — especially when she’s restless indoors. She loves tending her plants, planting new flowers whenever she isn’t in the mood to cook.”

Chapter 669

“Hmm,” I nodded. I caught his smile out of the corner of my eye and found myself smiling too. I was a little surprised, honestly, at the softness in how he spoke about her — maybe it was his own quiet way of showing how much she meant to him.

“Can I ask you something?” I said, after a moment of silence.

He let out a long breath before agreeing.

“Why is Stacey’s name off-limits around your family?”

I watched his whole body tense the second the question left my mouth.

“Ask me anything else. I can’t answer that one.”

His jaw tightened as he delivered that non-answer.

“Huh? You can’t answer, or you just don’t want to?” I pressed. “Because ‘can’t’ means you’re actually unable to — you don’t know, or something’s stopping you. ‘Don’t want to’ means it’s a choice, that you know the answer and you’re just refusing to give it. So which is it?”

“Madi, just drop it.”

There he went, raising his voice again.

“Fine. So why don’t you want me calling you Gabi?”

Being this persistent probably wasn’t wise — it could easily backfire.

I could see it in his eyes. If a look could swallow a person whole, it would’ve been the one he gave me right then. I was fairly sure they’d find my body, fully intact, somewhere inside my future husband.

Still, he chose silence again. Jaw clenched, fists clenched, every part of him wound tight.

“Is it really that hard to answer?” I muttered to myself, forgetting, apparently, that the man had ears like a fox.

“It’s not hard. I just don’t want to.”

“Ahh. So you don’t want to,” I said, a little deflated.

“You just can’t let things go, can you, Madi? You talk way too much.”

“Excuse me?” I pointed a finger at my own chest. “Me? I talk too much? Well, if that’s what you think, we can always discuss it — just let me know.” I raised an eyebrow, dripping sarcasm. “Oh, and before I forget — I also talk to myself sometimes, especially when I need advice from a real expert.” I rolled my eyes, doing my best to needle him further.

“You remember what parents usually teach their kids, when they’re little?”

I turned to face him, genuinely curious now.

“What?”

“Parents spend the first couple years of a kid’s life teaching them to walk and talk. Then, the second they finally manage both — parents spend the rest of the time telling them to sit down and shut up.”

“Excuse me!” My eyes went wide, jaw dropping at how rude — and how completely out of nowhere — that was.

“You might want to close that mouth of yours, or a fly’s going to fly right in, and then I’ll never kiss you again.”

I snapped my mouth shut, swallowing hard. This man never stopped surprising me. I hadn’t even noticed his eyes darken until I ran my tongue over my suddenly dry lips.

“Let’s head back inside.” He took my hand and started pulling me toward the house.

“You know what?” He stopped, turning to look at me as I said it. “I’d rather fill my mouth with flies than let you touch me.”

Chapter 670

He raised an eyebrow, a crooked smile tugging at his mouth.

“Okay. Since you said that, I’m going to kiss you even more — just to shut you up.”

“Gabriel!” My eyes went wide again.

He just laughed in my face. “Madi, if you don’t close that pretty mouth of yours, I swear I’ll kiss you right here, right now. And worse — I won’t stop until you’re the one begging me to.”

At that, I decided keeping my mouth shut was the wiser move. I could tell how much he was enjoying all of this, but I stayed quiet the rest of the way, until we reached the back door and found Nancy waiting in the kitchen.

“Madi, try this. I made a chocolate cake.”

Nancy held out a piece to me.

“Wow, you know how to bake?” I asked, smiling.

She was about to answer, but her brother beat her to it.

“Yes, she can bake. That’s about the only thing she can do in a kitchen — she doesn’t even know how to fry an egg.”

“Ugh, I hate you, Gabriel! Get out of here!” she shrieked, at the top of her lungs. “If you can’t say anything nice, just leave!”

“Ahh, but I was just telling the truth. You can’t even boil water in a kettle.” He laughed his usual carefree laugh, and I could see Nancy practically melting at the sound.

I got the feeling seeing her brother this lighthearted still caught her off guard, even now. She glanced at me and smiled.

“You know what, I’ve changed my mind. You can stay, brother. Have some cake too, if you want.”

I bit my lip as Gabriel looked at her, brow furrowed.

“No thanks, Nancy, I’m not falling for that.”

“B-but—”

“Let’s go, my love.” He reached for my hand again.

“No, love, I’ll stay here with Nancy. I’ll help her out.” I smiled, giving his cheek a gentle pat.

“Love—”

“I’m fine, love, don’t worry about me. Go hang out with the boys.”

“Are you sure?”

“For God’s sake, she’s not a child! I’m not going to eat your precious ‘love,’ Gab,” Nancy shot back, rolling her eyes and mimicking his tone.

“I’m not even talking to you, Nancy — and I’m warning you, don’t you dare ask her anything ridiculous.” He turned back to me. “Love, just call if Nancy tries anything stupid.”

“Wow, Gabriel, she’s staying in the kitchen! My God, I’m not some kind of animal!”

He ignored her completely, turning back to me.

“Love?”

“Alright, alright, I’ll call you,” I said, smiling. I grabbed his collar and leaned in to whisper against his ear. “Don’t worry, love. I won’t ask Nancy anything about you.”

“Love!”

I laughed at how flustered he looked.

“I love you,” I said, smiling — and I have no idea where I found the nerve, but I kissed him quickly on the lips. I caught the surprise on his face and used it to my advantage, pushing him gently away.

