

Mr. Edwards' Unraveled Life

Chapter 681

"He's nobody, Cooper. Don't worry about him. Your dad and I will take care of it," Norah said, pulling her son close. He was just a kid—he didn't need to be weighed down by adult problems.

But Cooper didn't see it that way. "We're a family, right? There's gotta be something I can do to help."

"Taking care of yourself is the best help you can give," Norah said, giving his cheek a playful pinch. "We'll keep you safe."

She would protect her children. Kevin would handle the man in black.

"Let's go home," she said.

"I know you and Dad can handle it!" Cooper grinned as he buckled his seatbelt.

Kevin drove them home.

Labrie Family

After her parents visited her at the hotel, Ophelia had moved back home.

Paloma hovered over the nanny. "Make sure Ophelia gets nutritious meals. She needs to recover."

"Mom, I'm okay," Ophelia said, though her heart felt heavier than ever. Her parents loved her more than anyone ever could. She'd been foolish to fight them over Kian.

"You've lost so much weight," Paloma said, squeezing her hand. "I've been through this. If you don't take care of yourself after a miscarriage, the aftereffects linger. We have the resources—why not use them to help you heal?"

The Labries were wealthy, and they had plenty of medicinal herbs stashed away just for moments like this. Who else would they save them for?

"Thanks, Mom," Ophelia said, unable to turn down her mother's care.

“Don’t thank me,” Paloma said. “If you really care about us, think about Emilio. He’s a good man.”

Ophelia sighed. Her mother jumped topics like flipping pages. She hadn’t even officially divorced Kian yet. She was still in her recovery period after the miscarriage. How could they already be pushing someone new?

“I know you’re worried, but you promised me time—to heal and figure things out with Kian,” Ophelia said firmly.

“You do need to heal,” Paloma agreed, but her concern was obvious. “But what’s there to figure out? Don’t fall for him again. I’ve done my homework—he’s not right for you.”

It wasn’t just about money. Ophelia was raised in privilege, educated in elite schools, and heir to the Labrie name. She could join the family business or start her own with their backing. Kian? Sure, he came from a decent family and had clawed his way up from assistant to entrepreneur—but only because of Kevin. If Kevin cut him off? Worse—what if Kian was using Ophelia, and once he made it, he’d leave?

Paloma’s concerns weren’t without reason, but Ophelia had loved Kian too deeply to see them before. Now, everything was crashing down, and Paloma’s suspicions felt validated.

“I’m not going back,” Ophelia said, shaking her head. “I saw him with another woman. Going back now would make me a joke.”

Paloma’s expression darkened. “He’s already with someone else? If he’s this bold now, imagine how bad it’ll get once he really makes it. Divorce him. Tomorrow. Get it done.”

Ophelia nodded. She checked the calendar—tomorrow was Saturday. The Civil Affairs Bureau was closed on weekends. Monday it was.

She texted Kian: **[Meet me at the Civil Affairs Bureau Monday.]**

He _____ replied _____ instantly:
[Why the Civil Affairs Bureau?]

Of course he knew. He just didn’t want to face it.

[Let’s talk first. This is a misunderstanding. Even if you want a divorce, at least clear things up.]

[We’ve talked enough. I asked you to meet me before and you never showed. If you don’t show Monday, I’ll find you myself. I’m done dragging this out.]

She hit send, dropped her phone, and collapsed onto the bed, her mind going completely blank.

She never thought their marriage would fall apart this fast. Turns out, love wasn't enough to survive reality.

Neither of them slept that night. They lay awake, haunted by memories of better times.

The next morning, Ophelia got up, washed her face, and heard a knock.

It was Emilio.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Visiting you," he said with a grin. "We're putting on a show for our parents, right? Gotta make it believable."

He peeked into her cozy room, tempted. "Mind if I come in for tea?"

"Let's go to the living room," she said quickly. "I didn't make the bed. It's a mess."

Her bedroom was her private space. She didn't want him in it.

Emilio nodded. Anywhere with her was fine.

Chapter 682

Downstairs, Paloma was lounging on the sofa, watching TV.

"Aunt," Emilio greeted her warmly.

Paloma lit up at the sight of him—her ideal son-in-law. But she gave Ophelia a disapproving look. "You didn't have those dark circles yesterday. Didn't sleep, did you?"

Ophelia had loved Kian. The divorce would hurt—but a clean break was better than dragging things out. Paloma wasn't going to let her daughter fall into that mess again.

"I forgot to close my window," Ophelia lied. "It got cold. I couldn't sleep."

Paloma didn't believe her, but she let it go. "It's the weekend. You two should go out. I'm out of skincare stuff—grab some for me."

"Sure," Emilio said easily, charming Paloma with a single smile.

She glanced at the clock. "Don't just stand there—go enjoy yourselves. You young people have your own things to talk about."

Ophelia couldn't refuse. Her mother had been visibly worried since she came home. She wasn't being a great daughter right now. If Emilio could lift her mom's mood, even just a bit, she wouldn't ruin it.

“We’ll be back for dinner, Mom.”

“No need,” Paloma said. “Your dad and I haven’t had time to ourselves in a while. Stay out tonight—make a day of it. Everyone wins.”

Paloma and Brody’s marriage had started as a business deal but turned into real love. She wanted the same for her daughter.

“Let’s go,” Emilio said, grabbing Ophelia’s hand. “Morning traffic’s light.”

They walked out hand-in-hand in front of Paloma. Once they were outside, Ophelia quickly dropped his hand.

Emilio’s expression faltered, but he said nothing. He just opened the passenger door. “What brand does your mom use?”

“I know it,” Ophelia said. “She’s been loyal to it forever.” She almost went for the back seat, but since he’d already opened the front, she didn’t want to make a scene.

As she climbed in, Emilio leaned over to buckle her seatbelt.

“I’ve got it,” she said, startled. “I’m not a child.”

“Sorry,” Emilio chuckled. “I’ve been helping out with my cousin’s kid lately—muscle memory.”

Ophelia stared down, silent. She’d loved kids too. When she found out she was pregnant, she was over the moon. Now the baby was gone. Kian too. All of it—gone.

“I’m sorry,” Emilio said, flustered. “I didn’t mean to bring that up.”

“It’s okay,” she said gently, stopping him from smacking himself. “It’s not your fault.”

She couldn’t expect the whole world to walk on eggshells around her.

“If you’re feeling upset, take it out on me,” Emilio offered. “Seriously—yell, cry, whatever you need. I can take it.”

Ophelia pulled out her phone to check the time but was greeted by a wall of messages from Kian. She didn’t read them—just deleted them all.

Emilio caught a glimpse. He couldn’t see the words, but he knew. Only Kian would message her like that.

Between the pain of losing her baby and the mess Kian’s mother stirred up, Emilio knew Kian didn’t stand a chance.

“Let’s get going,” Emilio said, stepping on the gas. “We’ll have a good day.”

Kian's Side

Kian couldn't stop checking his phone. Ophelia wasn't replying. Every message disappeared into silence.

"Quit staring at that thing," Emilia snapped, snatching his phone. "Your mom's sick and stuck in this ward, and you're obsessed with your phone?"

Everyone knew exactly who had him so distracted—Ophelia.

"Give it back," Kian said, scowling.

"Nope," Emilia said, hiding it behind her back. "You're still chasing that ungrateful woman? After everything she's done? Pathetic."

"You're such a simp," she muttered. "Post this online, and people would laugh their heads off. You'd be a meme."

Kian's face turned cold.

Chapter 683

"Ophelia and I loved each other. We sacrificed for each other," Kian said sharply. "Don't compare us to some cartoon romance."

He turned to the hospital bed, locking eyes with his mother. "And you? Only *you* would drug your own son."

He was choking on pain and helplessness. He couldn't forgive her. But she was sick, and he couldn't just abandon her either.

Emilia, completely unaware of the drugging, looked between them in shock.

Mrs. Paterson coughed hard. Teresa rushed to help. "Auntie, calm down. The doctor said no stress."

"I'm lying here quietly, and I still get pushed to the edge," Mrs. Paterson rasped, glaring at Kian.

"If seeing me makes you worse, I'll leave," Kian said. Being here just tore him apart. Why did he have parents like this?

"Go ahead!" she snapped, eyes red. "I raised you. Now I'm old and sick, and I'm nothing but a burden. Don't come back. If I die, I won't call you. Do whatever you want—just don't pretend to care."

Her words dripped with guilt and emotional blackmail. “I’m a disgrace. A teacher who couldn’t even raise a decent, respectful son.”

Emilia squirmed uncomfortably. The manipulation was thick.

She wanted to side with Kian, but she remembered the red envelope—and Ophelia was supposed to be her future sister-in-law. “Kian, don’t fight with someone who’s sick,” she muttered. “Just do what she wants until she gets better.”

Kian’s eyes welled up. He thought of how hard he had tried—facing Brody’s contempt and Paloma’s skepticism—all to prove he could give Ophelia a good life. He could provide everything but couldn’t fix his own family.

“Fine,” Mrs. Paterson said, catching her breath. “Emilia came all the way here. Show some gratitude. Take Teresa and buy her something.”

She wasn’t done. “She’s your age. She’ll like what you like. Sorry to trouble you, Teresa.”

“No trouble at all,” Teresa said, practically glowing. Any excuse to be with Kian thrilled her.

Emilia forced a smile. “Yeah, we’re the same age. Same taste.”

Kian didn’t respond. He walked out in silence. If he said no, he’d be branded unfilial, and his mother might refuse treatment. He didn’t care about the title—but he did care if she got worse.

Teresa trailed after him, chattering nonstop. Kian ignored her, just going through the motions.

At the makeup counter, Teresa held up two lipsticks. “Which one do you like better?”

“They’re the same,” he said flatly.

“No, this one’s tomato red. That one’s true red. Totally different.”

“It’s all red,” he snapped, already out of patience.

She gave up on lipsticks and moved to foundation. Just then, she looked up—and spotted Ophelia.

With a man.

Her eyes lit up. Jackpot. Ophelia was moving on, and Teresa could use that.

She grabbed Kian’s arm. “This store’s no good. Let’s check the next one.”

“This is exhausting,” Kian muttered, brushing her off.

She followed, grabbing his hand just as Ophelia looked over. Kian shook her off immediately. “Don’t touch me.”

Then he saw Ophelia—and everything else faded. His eyes turned red. He rushed over. “Ophelia, we need to talk.”

“Mr. Paterson,” Emilio said, smirking. “You’ve got your date. I’ve got mine. Why leave yours to bother mine?”

“We’re still married,” Kian shot back.

Emilio shrugged. “Not for long. Monday’s the Civil Affairs Bureau, right? One month’s cooling-off after that. I can wait.”

“Enough, both of you,” Ophelia said, frowning. “I’m not a trophy. I don’t want to be part of this.”

She turned to walk away. Emilio started to follow, but Kian grabbed her wrist.

“My mom drugged me that day,” he said, eyes locked on hers. “What you saw—it wasn’t real.”

Chapter 684

Ophelia froze, staring at Kian, disbelief clouding her eyes. “Your mom drugged you? That kind of drug?”

“Yes,” Kian said, nodding, shame heavy in his voice. He had to clear the air—divorce or not, he couldn’t let Ophelia believe he was just some heartless player.

“I... I don’t believe this,” Ophelia stammered, tears spilling over. Suddenly, everything clicked—her miscarriage, sudden and unexplained, right after Mrs. Paterson’s so-called care. She’d suspected something but dismissed it as paranoia. Who would believe a grandmother could hurt her own grandchild?

Now, hearing this from Kian, she felt stupid. If Mrs. Paterson could drug her own son just to break them up, sabotaging a pregnancy wasn’t a stretch. She didn’t need more proof.

She jerked her hand away from his. “Even if she drugged you, so what? I saw you two together. Don’t tell me nothing happened. Maybe not that night—but what about afterward?”

“Ophelia, don’t you trust me?” Kian’s voice cracked, pain flashing in his eyes.

“It’s not about you,” she said, shaking her head. “It’s your mom. My mom warned me—love is between two people, but marriage? That’s between families. I didn’t get it then. I do now.”

No amount of love could withstand Mrs. Paterson’s constant attacks. Even while she was pregnant, Ophelia hadn’t been spared—she and the baby were always targets.

Why had her life unraveled like this? She wasn't perfect, but she didn't deserve this pain. The answer was obvious: she'd chosen the wrong man.

"It's not fair to punish me for what my mom did," Kian said, desperate.

"You're right," Ophelia said quietly. "But staying with you, letting her torment me over and over—that's not fair to me. Let's just end this, Kian. Clean and simple. Monday. Civil Affairs Bureau."

Emilio watched from the side, relieved. He'd worried Ophelia might falter, but she stood firm.

He gave Kian a smug look. "Mr. Paterson, you're a CEO now. Don't cause a scene. It'd be a bad look."

Kian didn't care about appearances. He'd built his company for Ophelia, to give her a better life. But pushing her now would only hurt her more. He couldn't be that selfish.

"I'm tired," Ophelia said, giving Kian one last glance. Her love for him hadn't vanished, but she wouldn't let Emilio mock him either. "Let's get my mom's skincare and go."

Emilio grabbed her hand. "Forget the shopping. Let's eat and rest first. We've got time."

Teresa clung to Kian's arm, raising her voice just enough for Ophelia to hear. "Let's eat too, Kian. I got some new lipsticks—ask your sister which ones she likes."

"This isn't a soap opera," Kian said, shaking her off. "Quit acting."

Even if Ophelia was with Emilio now, Kian wasn't about to play games with Teresa. This wasn't about revenge. He just wanted Ophelia to be okay, even if he could only watch from the sidelines.

"Kian, I'm trying to help you!" Teresa insisted, pointing at Ophelia's retreating figure. "She's with another guy before your divorce is even final. She's not worth it. Your mom was right—she's flaky."

Smack!

Teresa held her cheek, stunned. "You... hit me?"

In the middle of a packed mall, Kian's slap echoed. "Sorry," he said flatly, not an ounce of regret. "I love Ophelia. Divorce or not, she's still my wife. You insult her, you insult me."

He couldn't slap his mother, but Teresa? She crossed the line.

Tears streamed down Teresa's face. "You call her your wife, but does she even see you as her husband? If she trusted you, would she be making a scene like this?"

“That’s between me and her,” Kian said coldly. He could handle Ophelia’s doubts—he’d explain when the time came. But her distrust of his mother? He had nothing to defend there.

“I’m the daughter-in-law your mom wants,” Teresa whispered fiercely. “I don’t care what happened before. I just want a future with you.”

Chapter 685

Kian didn’t bother answering. Instead, he asked, “Remember what you just said about Ophelia?”

“Of course,” Teresa said confidently. “She’s seeing another man before the divorce is done. That says everything. I know it’s tough, but you’ve got to stop lying to yourself.”

She added, “If your mom knew, she’d lose it.”

“Ophelia and I aren’t divorced yet,” Kian shot back. “And neither are you and I married. So if you’re chasing a married man, what does that make you? A mistress?”

The color drained from Teresa’s face. The word hit like a slap. “We haven’t done anything! How can you—”

“Ophelia and Emilio didn’t hug, didn’t sneak off half-dressed. And her mom would never drug her own kid.”

His mother’s betrayal ran deep. Even strangers treated their pets better than she treated him.

Teresa scrambled. “Your mom hates Ophelia for a reason. It has to be her fault their relationship’s a mess.”

Classic victim-blaming.

“I don’t like you,” Kian said coldly. “So by your logic, that’s your fault too. Go home. Think about that. And stay away from me.”

Speechless, Teresa wiped her tears, then tried a last-ditch move. “Your mom’s in the hospital. Her only wish is for us to be close. You’re gonna let her health get worse over this?”

Kian’s frustration spiked. He’d check with the doctor himself—no more taking his mom’s word. He was done swallowing rage and living a lie. What kind of life was that?

He checked his watch. “I’ve got work. You’ve got thirty minutes. If you need Emilia’s input, call her. I’m not waiting.”

“Got it,” Teresa said quickly, hurrying to catch up.

Grilled Fish Restaurant, Third Floor

Emilio fussed, pouring water and wiping down an already clean table.

“Emilio, stop,” Ophelia said. “That’s the staff’s job.”

He was clearly trying to impress her, but it was a bit much.

He tossed the napkin aside. “I just don’t want you to feel like you’re settling, Ophelia.”

“Settling?” she laughed. Seeing Kian again hadn’t broken her. She was moving on. Her happiness wasn’t tied to a man.

“I wanted to take you somewhere fancier,” Emilio admitted. “But you were hungry, so we settled for a spot in the mall. You never had to deal with this when you were a Labrie.”

He was implying Kian had held her back. The Labries had wealth, security, luxury. With Kian, everything had been tight—wedding, home, business. But she hadn’t cared then, and she didn’t now.

“The fish here’s fresh. And it’s packed, which says a lot. I like switching things up. I even eat street food.”

Back when she and Kian were broke and overworked, they’d grab cheap food on the go. And those moments? They were some of the happiest. No regrets.

“Street food?” Emilio’s eyes reddened. “Marry me, Ophelia. I’d never let you stoop to that. You’d be Mrs. Fletcher—people would envy you.”

A waiter arrived with steaming grilled fish. “Enjoy,” she said, setting cutlery on the table.

Ophelia tried it. “It’s good. You should have some.”

Emilio tasted it and frowned. “It’s mediocre. Freshwater fish can’t compare to ocean fish. And the service? Terrible.”

He’d been about to confess his feelings when the waiter interrupted. The timing felt too convenient.

“What’d you say?” Ophelia asked, wiping her mouth. “It’s loud in here.”

“Nothing,” Emilio said, shaking his head. “Let’s just eat.”

He still had time. If today wasn’t the moment, he’d find another.

Chapter 686

After the meal, Emilio suggested they check out the first floor, but Ophelia looked worn out. “I barely slept last night,” she said. “I need to rest.”

Her dark circles were impossible to miss. Emilio nodded reluctantly. “I’ll drive you back.”

They skipped the skincare section, but Emilio still bought every set fit for Paloma’s age—including some pricey serums. The salesperson smiled. “Sir, that’s generous. Three people couldn’t use all this.”

“It’s for my aunt,” Emilio said, eyes on Ophelia. “I don’t know what she likes, so I’ll let her try them all.”

The staff caught the hint—future mother-in-law. “Your fiancé’s amazing,” one told Ophelia. “My husband complains if I bring anything home to my parents.”

“He’s not my fiancé,” Ophelia corrected. “Use my card.”

It was for her mom, and Emilio wasn’t her suitor—she wouldn’t let him pay.

The salesperson blinked, sensing unrequited feelings, but swiped Ophelia’s card. Money was money.

Emilio, packing the boxes, glanced at the receipt. “Why’d you pay?”

“It’s for my mom,” Ophelia said. “It’s six figures. You shouldn’t cover that.” She handed him a box. “Help me carry this.”

She walked off. Emilio caught up. “How much was it? I’ll transfer the money. I said I’d get your mom a gift—you shouldn’t have paid.”

“Why are you buying her gifts?” Ophelia stopped. “In my mom’s eyes, you’re her future son-in-law. That’s normal for a suitor, but we’re just acting. I can’t spend your money.”

She’d drawn a clear line—no entanglements.

Emilio hesitated. He’d suggested the “acting” idea himself—backtracking would look weak. “We’re both wealthy,” he said with a thin smile. “No need to nickel-and-dime.”

“Even brothers settle accounts,” she said. “Money doesn’t justify taking advantage. Let’s go—this is heavy.”

In the underground garage, Kian’s voice echoed. “I rear-ended you. I’ve got photos—I’ll file insurance.”

“No way,” the other man barked. “Insurance? I don’t have time. This is a luxury car—50,000 cash, now.” He turned to Teresa. “You two rushing to get hitched or reborn? Driving like that?”

“I’ll own my mistake,” Kian said, holding back anger. “But watch your words.”

Ophelia's chest tightened watching him. She remembered Kian's early startup days—late nights, schmoozing clients, swallowing his pride. He was doing it now, enduring insults.

Her mom was wrong—Kian never used her as a stepping stone. If he had, he'd lean on the Labries, not grovel to clients.

"You hit my car, and I can't talk?" the man sneered. "You and your wife are precious, huh?"

"We're not married," Kian said.

"Lovers, then. Arm in arm, probably sharing a bed every night," the man yelled, drawing eyes.

Kian reached for his phone to call the police when the man spotted Emilio. His tone flipped. "Mr. Fletcher! What brings you here?"

"Shopping with a friend," Emilio said, eyeing the cars. He smirked at Kian and pulled out a bank card. "I'll cover him. This card's got enough for repairs—or a new car. Let it go."

"Since Mr. Fletcher says so, I'm good," the man said, giving a thumbs up. "Some people, though—there's a bigger gap than dogs and humans."

"How much is on the card?" Kian said coldly. "I'll pay you back."

He'd cover the fair damages, but the guy's insults deserved a fight. Emilio's interference made Kian look broke and desperate.

That was Emilio's goal. "No need," Emilio said, scanning Kian. "He's my employee. Startups are tight, Mr. Paterson—save your cash."

Leaning in, Emilio whispered, "Stop taking women to street stalls. It's tacky."

Chapter 687

"Emilio, what were you two talking about?" Ophelia asked, approaching.

"Nothing," Emilio said, stepping away from Kian with a smile. "Let's go. I'll drive you back. We got so many gifts—Auntie will love them."

Kian watched them leave, his chest tight with the urge to follow. But he held back. Until he fixed his family mess, he wouldn't drag Ophelia into it.

"You saw that, right?" Teresa said, seizing the moment. "Your mom and I warned you about her, but you didn't listen. Now they're flaunting it right in front of us." She tentatively touched Kian's arm.

He sidestepped. "Get in the car. I'm taking you to the hospital."

“Fine,” Teresa said, relenting. “Auntie and Emilia are waiting. We shouldn’t be late.” She climbed into the passenger seat.

Kian frowned. “Sit in the back.”

“I’m already buckled in,” Teresa said, eyes flashing with defiance. “It’s a short drive. Does it matter?”

Kian’s strict boundaries stung her. If only she’d pushed Mrs. Paterson to drug him harder—knock him out cold. She could’ve spun any story then. Regret gnawed at her, but she schemed. How could she make Kian ditch Ophelia for good?

At the hospital, Kian strode to the ward, ignoring Teresa trailing behind. He handed Emilia a bag. “Your gift.”

“Thanks, Kian,” Emilia said, peeking inside. “I love these. Teresa and I have the same taste—same foundation shade too.”

Kian ignored her.

Emilia’s chatter fizzled out.

Mrs. Paterson turned to Teresa. “Everything go smoothly shopping? Run into anyone... troublesome?”

She believed Kian was a catch. If he and Ophelia split, Ophelia would be the loser, probably clinging to him. She feared Kian would soften.

“We met... friends,” Teresa said, glancing at Kian. “A little drama, but I’m fine. Kian, though—he’s upset.” With Kian off consulting the doctor, she spun a wild version of the mall encounter.

The ward buzzed with outrage. Mrs. Paterson clutched her chest, gasping. “She’s shameless!”

“Aunt, you okay?” Emilia asked, offering water. “Rest if you’re feeling off.”

“I’m fine,” Mrs. Paterson snapped. “I’m not sick—just faking it for Kian. If I didn’t, that woman would’ve brainwashed him.” She brushed off the concern. Pretending wouldn’t make her ill.

Her focus was Kian. “Wanting, please, make him move on. Don’t let her keep pulling his strings. I got rid of that child to break them for good.”

Emilia froze, eyeing the gift bag, swallowing her unease.

“I know, Auntie,” Teresa said confidently. “Men can’t resist care when they’re vulnerable. With Ophelia moving on, we’ll make sure they’re done.” She’d clocked Emilio’s cunning instantly—green tea recognizes green tea.

Mrs. Paterson nodded, pleased.

Outside, Kian handed his mother's records to the doctor. "How is she?"

"Serious," the doctor said, sighing. "Her heart's weak. A stent surgery's risky—she might not survive it." He patted Kian's shoulder. "Be filial. Don't upset her, or it's the ICU. Regret's too late then."

Kian nodded, stunned. He hadn't realized how bad it was. Guilt hit—he'd doubted her illness over her betrayal of Ophelia. He had to separate the two.

"Don't thank me," the doctor said. "It's my duty." He'd known Mrs. Paterson since college. After losing big in stocks and facing divorce, her loan saved him. Now, he'd repay her.

As Kian left, the doctor texted Mrs. Paterson: [Old classmate, your son asked about you. I sold it—he's guilty. He'll do whatever you want.]

Mrs. Paterson smirked. She had Kian in her grip.

Chapter 688

Mrs. Paterson and Teresa kept trashing Ophelia, the ward alive with their constant chatter.

Kian burst in, furious. "What are you doing? Why?"

Why couldn't they leave Ophelia alone? Every word revolved around her, spinning lies and venom.

"Kian, your mom's sick," Teresa said, playing meek. "Don't shout—it's bad for her." She grabbed his hand. "If you don't like this topic, we'll drop it."

"Your acting's pathetic," Kian snapped, yanking free. He'd overheard their duet—his mother and Teresa, perfectly in sync, like stage performers.

He'd vowed to be kinder to his mother, but reality slapped him awake. Foolish.

"Kian, storming in like this?" Mrs. Paterson said, leaning on the doctor's text. "Keep that attitude, and don't come back. I won't need you, even if I die."

She expected him to cave, guilt-ridden.

"Your stay's 2,000 a day," Kian said coldly. "I've paid a month ahead. I'll hire a caregiver. I've got urgent business—I'm leaving."

"What's more important than your mother?" Teresa cut in. "Not even your company matters more."

Without Kian around, her plan to win him stalled. She'd checked his company's financials—strong, poised for an IPO. His wealth would soar, and she wanted her share.

"Last time I went home for Rhodiola, there was something in my tea," Kian said, expressionless. "It's still on the coffee table."

Mrs. Paterson's heart raced. She'd spiked the Rhodiola with safflower residue—harmless normally, but deadly for pregnant women. If Kian tested it, he'd know. Their bond would shatter.

She signaled Mr. Paterson, who stepped in. "It's just tea, Kian. I tossed it. Want more? I'll have a friend send a box."

"You two cherished that tea for Ophelia," Kian said, smirking. "Now you toss it?"

Their lies were flimsy. They thought blood ties let them do no wrong—any pushback was unfilial. Kian was done with that.

"Ophelia's a Labrie," he said. "Marrying me didn't make her lesser. You don't get to treat her like garbage."

Mrs. Paterson's own mother-in-law had tormented her in their rural days. Moving to the city split them, easing the strain. She couldn't handle her mother-in-law, but Ophelia could fight back.

"Whose son are you?" Mrs. Paterson snapped. "Turning on me for an outsider?"

"My wife and I are family," Kian said. "You're a wife too—why call yourself an outsider to the Patersons?"

Her outdated views sickened him. He saw now how much Ophelia had endured. He'd been too focused on work, blind to his mother's cruelty, while Ophelia stayed silent.

"You—" Mrs. Paterson's face flushed, chest aching.

As Kian turned to leave, she hissed at her husband, "Back door, now. Get home, ditch the Rhodiola. Beat Kian to it—no evidence."

Suspicion was one thing; proof was another. If Kian found it, she'd lose him forever.

Emilia frowned. "Aunt, I'll get the doctor—your classmate. He'll check you."

"No," Mrs. Paterson said. "Chase Kian. Stall him. I'm fine—healthy as ever."

Chapter
Norah's side

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"How about a garden walk with Mommy?" Norah said, sitting by Cooper.

At six, he was bursting with energy. Locking him indoors wasn't ideal, but safety came first. If those men grabbed him, his youth wouldn't save him.

"Okay," Cooper said, dropping his blocks. He glanced at Reina, asleep in her rocker. "I wish she'd grow up faster. Then she could play with me."

She just cried, laughed, or slept.

"When Dad catches the bad guys, you'll play with friends again," Norah said. "Reina will grow, bit by bit."

She took his hand, leaving Reina with Aunt Wang, and headed to the garden. Flowers bloomed vibrantly, a swing nearby. Cooper played for two hours, only stopping when exhausted.

"Mom, I saw a pretty flower," he said. "I'll snap a pic, paint it, and hang it in my room."

Norah smiled. These moments built joy.

Back in the living room, Cooper's chatter parched him. Aunt Wang brought soup. "Moisten your throat, Young Master."

"Thanks, Aunt Wang," he said politely.

Norah's phone rang. To avoid waking Reina, she stepped aside. "Kevin, any leads on those people?"

"I've got the organization's name, but not their base," Kevin said softly. "I'm in a meeting and need a document from home—blue folder, study drawer. Can you bring it?"

Norah didn't ask details. If Kevin called, it mattered. She grabbed the folder, confirmed it with a photo, and changed into sportswear. "Aunt Wang, I'm out for a bit. Watch the kids."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Cooper, want anything?" Norah asked. "I'll grab it."

"KFC," he said. "Burgers, egg tarts, mashed potatoes."

Norah usually limited fast food—picky eating hurt health—but Cooper was cooped up. She'd indulge him. "Deal. Be good. I'll be back soon."

She drove to Kevin's company, not noticing a car tailing her at the intersection. The receptionist greeted her warmly. Norah waved her off, took the executive elevator, and handed Kevin the folder. A shared glance spoke volumes—no words needed.

Leaving, she nodded to Kevin's new assistant, then hit a mall with a KFC. It was packed—weekend crowds, kids everywhere. The food line lagged.

“Egg tarts are sold out,” the waiter said. “Twenty-minute wait. Okay?”

Cooper loved KFC’s tarts. “I’ll wait,” Norah said.

She sat, scrolling international news. A stare prickled her neck. Glancing up, she saw only noisy kids—no threats. Her gut, honed by her work, screamed danger, but the crowd felt safe. She kept scrolling.

When the tarts were ready, she grabbed the order and left, senses sharp. In the rearview mirror, she spotted the tailing car. To protect home, she took a detour. The car stuck close.

At an alley, it sped up. Another car appeared ahead, boxing her in. Norah stopped but stayed locked in.

Men in black piled out, surrounding her. The leader barked, “Mrs. Edwards, get out, or we make you. Road’s blocked—you’re trapped.”

Wings wouldn’t save her now. A collision wouldn’t break through.

Chapter 690

“Who sent you?” Norah asked, scanning the five men, sizing up their combat skills.

She could take them.

The alley was a short sprint—less than a hundred meters south—to a police station. Even if she couldn’t win, reaching it meant safety.

The lead man in black smirked, assuming fear kept her in the car. A fragile woman facing five burly men? She must be terrified, her calm face a bluff.

Resistance? Laughable. Men outmatched women in strength, and five-on-one sealed it. Norah had no shot.

“Don’t ask questions,” he sneered, eyeing her through the window. “Get out nice and easy. We’ll be gentle. Or else...” His gaze lingered, crude.

Her figure, still sharp after two kids, was tempting. Night had fallen, the alley empty. They could do anything.

“Boss, we get a turn after?” one lackey asked.

The boss laughed. “Sure, I go first. Then you lot can play—just keep her breathing. The organization needs her alive for drug tests.”

Their faces tightened at “organization,” a flicker Norah caught. This group wasn’t some ragtag crew—it had weight, enough to spook them.

“Drug testing” sparked a memory: Sophia. Same outfit. They’d sent a kid to poison Reina; now they wanted her. Good thing she hadn’t driven home—she’d have led them straight to her family.

“Get out!” the boss barked, rapping the window. “Or we drag you out.”

“Comfy seats in that car,” another jeered. “Beg us, maybe we’ll let you stay inside.”

Norah flung the door open, slamming it into one man’s nose. Blood sprayed as he howled. She spun, kicking another in the chin, dropping him instantly.

Two down, three left.

The boss’s smirk vanished. “You dare hit us?” he growled. “You’re dead. I was gonna go easy, but now—”

Norah’s fist flew. Villains talk too much. She needed to end this and get home with Cooper’s KFC. He’d be starving.

The boss dodged, quick. He sized her up—she wasn’t some frail target. “Together!” he ordered the others.

Three-on-one should’ve been enough.

It wasn’t.

Norah grabbed the boss’s arm, twisted behind him, and drove her foot into his waist. He crumpled, gasping, pinned. “Let go, or I’ll dose you with our strongest shit,” he spat. “You’ll beg like a dog.”

That drug was rare, even for their group. Norah ignored him. Begging wouldn’t make these thugs her pals—they’d marked her for testing. Fighting was her only shot; crying meant a fate worse than death.

She kicked his backside, sending him crashing into the second man, who reflexively punched his boss’s face.

“Idiot!” the boss roared. Teammates dumber than enemies were the real threat. He cursed his crew choice.

“Sorry, boss!” the second stammered. “You flew at me—I just reacted!”

Their organization ran tight. The boss, a low-tier leader, held their lives in his grip. One word, and they’d vanish.

“Useless,” he hissed.

No time for blame. Humiliated, he needed to make Norah pay—worse than a stray dog.

The two flanked her, while the third circled behind, brick in hand for a sneak attack. As he swung, Norah's heel smashed between his legs. He screamed, dropping the brick on his foot, collapsing in agony.

The boss and second fell fast. All five sprawled, groaning, as fierce as they'd been minutes ago.

Norah didn't ease up, landing extra hits on the less-injured pair. Certain they couldn't rise, she dusted her hands.