

His Kickass 131

Chapter 131

Abby

I'm seated on a lounge chair in the back lawn, soaking in the sun and the chirping of birds as a soothing backdrop. The air smells of freshly cut grass, and I'm surrounded by the vibrant colors of the garden—reds, yellows, and blues.. It's peaceful, almost idyllic, but my mind is elsewhere.

I keep thinking about Karl's words yesterday, how he never made an official announcement about my fidelity. All morning, I've been getting strange looks from members of the staff—aside from Elsie, who has never been anything but pleasant.

Part of me wants to announce it myself to set the record straight, but something tells me that most of the staff who are unabashedly loyal to Karl wouldn't believe me. And besides, he should do it himself. He should be the one who admits to his shortcomings, not me.

Suddenly, my phone rings, breaking me out of my reverie. I glance down and let out a soft sigh. Ethan's name is flashing on the screen.

"Hey Ethan, what's up?" I answer, my voice casual, but inside I'm wondering if something went wrong after all. Perhaps the restaurant went up in flames, or that food critic came back for another bad experience, or the place got robbed. Maybe all three.

"Abby, sorry to bother you on your time off. Quick question—how would you like us to handle the supplier transition for next week? The new seafood vendor is offering different

I open my mouth to dive into a detailed explanation, logistics dancing at the forefront of my mind, when I remember Karl's words about taking time off. A moment of conflict grips me, but I decide to heed his

"Um, go ahead and negotiate the best terms possible but keep it in line with our usual arrangements. And if you could, save any future questions for when I'm back. I'm supposed to be taking

“Ah, right. I apologize for interrupting your vacation. Where’d you wind up going anyway, if you don’t mind

“I’m... visiting family,” I lie smoothly, guilt settling somewhere in my stomach. I can’t tell Ethan—or anyone, for that matter—that I’m visiting my old home with

Just then, the phone rustles, and a new voice bursts through. “Abby! It’s Chloe. Are you

My cheeks flush involuntarily at her abrupt, and astute, question. “Chloe, what—”

“Cut the crap. You and Karl taking time off simultaneously? Very suspicious, Abby.”

I let out a nervous laugh. “It’s just a coincidence, Chloe.”

“Yeah, right,” she snorts. “Listen, Karl’s been gaining brownie points lately in my book and yours, but don’t be stupid. No hooking up. Got it?”

“Chloe, I assure you, I’m not with Karl.”

“Mm-hmm, whatever you say. Just be

I sigh as I hang up the phone, Chloe’s words ringing all too clearly in my head. She’s right; it would be stupid. Really, really stupid. Which is why it hasn’t even crossed

Okay, maybe it has crossed my mind. But that was just last night, after dinner and too much wine. I only thought about what it would be like to invite Karl back to my bed, to reignite our old passions, for the briefest of moments. I won’t act on those fantasies. I

Before I can dwell on it further, I notice Gerald standing in the doorway that leads to the back lawn. He’s holding a tray with a glass of iced tea. His face is impassive as he

“Miss Abby, your iced tea,” he says, but his voice is laced with a tone that I can't quite place. It's terse, almost cold. The butler never was the warmest with me, but this is

“Thank you so much, Gerald,” I respond kindly, taking the glass from

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Truthfully, I can't be angry with Gerald. He's worked with Karl's adoptive family for decades, literally watched Karl grow up once he was taken in here. He's steadfastly loyal, and clearly angry with me. But his anger is founded on mistruths.

The sooner that Karl makes his official announcement, the better. If I'm going to become friends with him and make trips to visit, then I need to confront him.

And if he doesn't come clean, then it's high time that I set the record straight. The whispers, the suspicious glances, the underlying tension—they have to stop. And they will, even if I have to be the one to stop them.

I look back at the glass of iced tea, its contents shimmering in the afternoon light. I take a sip, letting the cold liquid quench my thirst, but not my need for rectification. As I set the glass down, I make up my mind.

When Karl gets home, we're going to have to talk. And this time, there'll be no room for waiting. He needs to make this announcement today, or I'm leaving. And I won't be coming back.

...

The moment Karl walks through the door, I can almost feel the air shift. I've been preparing for this all afternoon, practicing in my head what I'll say

But just as I'm opening my mouth to talk to him, he

“Sorry for the short notice, Abby, but I'm hosting an Alpha dinner tonight at our place,” he announces, hanging his jacket on the hook beside the

An Alpha dinner. I feel a sudden jolt of excitement that momentarily overpowers my need to confront Karl; it's been so long since I had the chance to prepare a feast for the Alphas. My fingers already itch to chop, saute, and

"Oh, that sounds fantastic. What's the

"Mainly council matters, and a few other things," he replies, but there's a pause that tells me he's not giving me the full story. "I'd like you to attend as

His words take me by surprise. "Your date?"

He nods, his eyes searching my face. "Yes, you don't need to worry about the food. Just be there with me."

There's a gravity to his words, as though he's trying to bridge a chasm between us with this single dinner. But I'm not ready to play the perfect Alpha's wife. Those days have come and gone. That's not me anymore, and we're not together.

"So, all of your old dresses are still in the wardrobe, or I can take you out shopping if you—"

"Sorry," I interrupt, shaking my head. "That won't be necessary. I won't be your date, Karl."

His face falls for a split second. He looks disappointed, thoroughly sol. But I won't back down on this. I expect him to throw a tantrum, or at the very least to make a complaint. And yet, somehow, he regains his composure without a hint of anger.

"Alright," he says, though I can hear the hint of disappointment still threaded through his voice. "But you don't have to cook, Abby. I can have the staff

"No," I interrupt again, my voice firm. "I want to cook. Just get me the ingredients, and I'll handle

He hesitates, his gaze locked onto mine, as if weighing whether to argue or give in. Finally, he sighs.
“Okay. What do you

I rattle off a list of ingredients for dishes I’ve already begun to visualize in my head: seared salmon, roasted vegetables, a decadent chocolate torte for dessert. He nods, committing it all to memory, but there’s a lingering pause, a space filled with all the things we’re not saying to each

“Alright, I’ll get everything you need,” he says at last, breaking

“Thank you.”

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Abby

I’m in the kitchen organizing my thoughts, sketching out a mental roadmap for tonight’s three-course extravaganza as I mumble under my breath.

“Sauvignon Blanc with the salmon... Hmm... Maybe I should prepare cappuccinos with the torte for dessert...”

Just then, the door swings open, and in walks Karl, bags of groceries in hand. Gianna, his ever-present secretary, trails closely behind him.

My heart does a little dance at the sight of Karl, a knee-jerk reaction I’ve never been able to fully quell. Even with my wolf being asleep, the presence he creates when he walks into a room always makes her lurch in my mind, as though she can always sense him in her sleep.

In a way, it’s frustrating. I want to yell at my wolf for leaving me alone and then momentarily reappearing every time the man who broke my heart walks into the room, but I know it won’t do any good.

“I’m not jealous,” I insist, although her words make me feel unexpectedly warm. “Karl and I are just friends. I have no interest

Elsie gives me a look that says she knows better, but she doesn't push it. Instead, she helps me unpack the groceries, laying out the fresh salmon, vibrant vegetables, and a variety of spices

My hands reach for the ingredients, eager to transform them into

...

The kitchen is a lively mixture of scents and spices as I work with meticulous

"Else, can you hand me the Herbes

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"Dammit," I mutter under my breath, reaching for a fresh piece of salmon. I'm about to season it when I overhear voices filtering from the dining room.

"Well, you should have seen the look on her face, trying so hard to impress everyone with her little cooking skills. As if we've forgotten that our ex-Luna has turned into nothing more than a pathetic housemaid."

I recognize that voice: Gianna. I can see the back of her head, her perfectly curled hair and tight dress, as she saunters past the kitchen door. Heat surges up my neck and into my cheeks. A pathetic housemaid? Really?

That's it.

With sudden clarity, I remember that the wardrobe upstairs still houses my former life—gowns and dresses, a collection of silk and sequins. A cunning plan starts to take shape.

"Elsie, could you please watch the stove? Take the salmon off in five minutes and let Karl know that dinner

"Erm, Abby...?" she starts, but I'm already ripping off my apron and dashing out of the kitchen and up the back steps two at a

A line of designer gowns greets me as I slide open the wardrobe doors. My fingers hover over the clothes for a moment before settling on a dress that I had once loved dearly—a stunning deep-red gown that fits like a dream, even now,

I take a glance in the mirror before deciding to change my hairstyle. A few minutes later, the neat bun I was wearing before is now elegantly curled, cascading down my back. I don't need much makeup; just some mascara, a hint of eyeshadow, and a bold red lip to match

As I get ready, I can't help but wonder why I'm doing this. Is it really just to prove something to Gianna and her judgmental friends, or is it... something else?

Am I, perhaps, trying to reclaim my spot as Luna?

Minutes later, I look into the mirror and see a transformation. Makeup done to perfection, hair cascading down like a silken waterfall, and a dress that reminds me of a time when I was the epitome of poise and grace.

A time when Gianna would've bitten her tongue before dismissing me.

"Perfect," I whisper to my reflection.

Just as I'm touching up my lipstick, I hear Karl's voice ring out from downstairs. "Everyone, let's make our way to the dining room. Dinner is

I wait at the top of the stairs, letting the murmur of voices fill the air before making my entrance. Taking a deep breath to steady myself, I step onto

The moment I do, the room falls silent. Every eye turns in my

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Abby

Stepping off the last stair, the whispers and murmurs reach a crescendo before falling into hushed silence. My gaze lands on Karl, and I revel in the astonishment flickering in his eyes.

There's a moment of silence as we gaze at each other. For a moment, things are like they used to be: I'm the Luna, Karl's wife, revered by the people around me.

In my shimmering red dress, I feel like a glimmer of my old self, plus or minus a few things. I feel more mature now, but that's how I prefer it. And as Karl gazes at me, taking me in, I think he prefers it this way, too.

But why am I doing all of this, really? Am I really doing this as a knee jerk reaction toward Gianna's comments, to prove her wrong? Or is it something else?

"Ladies and gentlemen," hKarl begins, seemingly regaining his composure, "I'd like to reintroduce Abby. As you may know, she's prepared tonight's meal for us. Please, join us for dinner."

A ripple of confusion sweeps across the room, but nobody dares to question Karl's decision, not in front of their

I gracefully move towards the dining table, feeling the weight of dozens of eyes on me. Some are bewildered, others are intrigued, but most are just stunned.

But as I approach, I can already sense an invisible barricade forming. Gianna is seated in my old chair, situated right next to where Karl would sit. The spot I used to occupy as his Luna, the seat that I thought would be mine forever in a strange

Our eyes meet, and Gianna sends a sneer my way, a message loud and clear. "This is my territory now," her expression seems to say.

I could argue, could cause a scene, but I decide against it. Tonight isn't about claiming old territory; it's about breaking ground and proving people wrong. I begin to veer towards another chair, one a respectful distance away from Karl and his secretary.

But just as I'm about to take a seat, Karl's voice slices through the air, tinged with authority. "Gianna, would you please move? Abby should sit there. It's the Luna's chair."

A collective intake of breath sucks the air out of the room. All eyes swivel between Gianna, Karl, and me.

"But... Abby isn't the Luna anymore. She's the ex-Luna," Gianna retorts, barely masking her indignance.

Karl locks eyes with her, unyielding. "It doesn't matter. Abby is my special guest for this evening. She's gone to a lot of trouble to prepare the entire meal for us, so she deserves her old chair."

Gianna's face tightens, but she stands, moving her plate and glass to another seat with an air of begrudging compliance. As I take my place beside Karl, I lean in to whisper, "You didn't have to do that."

He turns to me, his eyes earnest. "I wanted to."

Then, suddenly, Karl rises from his chair, his gaze sweeping over the room filled with pack members and allies, some of whom were my friends once. "Ladies and gentlemen, if I could have your attention, there's something I'd like to say before we begin our meal."

The room falls silent. Even Gianna, still sulking at her relocated seat, can't seem to hide her curiosity.

"I know I've misled many of you," Karl starts, his voice filled with something that sounds like regret. "I made it public that Abby was cheating on me during our time together. And during that time, I believed it to be the truth."

"But recent tests and investigations have revealed that it was all a grave misunderstanding," he continues, his eyes meeting mine. "Abby never had any acts of infidelity."

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For a few seconds, it's as if we're the only two people in the room. Words fail me. My mind is a thicket of emotions, feelings too intricate and tangled to put into coherent thought.

When Karl finally sits back down, a part of me wants to run away, to escape this newfound reality where the lines between past and present blur. But I stay put, because running would mean letting go, and letting go means losing a piece of myself that I've just rediscovered.

"Now," Karl says, raising his glass. "Let's enjoy this delicious dinner prepared by a renowned chef."

The room comes alive as plates are set and glasses are filled. The aroma of the three-course meal I've painstakingly prepared fills the air, and the murmurs return with time.

"The food smells incredible," remarks one of the Betas, breaking the ice. Others nod, murmuring their agreement.

"Yes, it's delicious, too," Karl adds, casting me a meaningful look from across the table.

Except for Gianna. Oh, I catch her alright, barely taking a bite, making faces like she's ingesting poison. She doesn't speak throughout the entire dinner, and when plates are taken away, hers is still full. She refuses the dessert and the cappuccinos, resorting instead to swirling her wine around in her glass with a deathly stare on her face.

My insides coil with irritation, but I let it pass. I don't need her approval, not when I see the look of pure satisfaction on the faces of everyone else in the

"Would anyone like to dance?" Karl announces once the plates are cleared.

A buzz fills the air as couples pair off, leaving Karl and me in a widening circle of emptiness. Then he extends his hand towards me, a silent request that sends an unexpected thrill up my

"Would you do me the honor?" he

"I... I shouldn't," I murmur.

But Karl's eyes are stern. "Dance with me. Please."

My heart races as I take his hand, letting him lead me to the makeshift dance floor. For a moment, it feels like old times. His body is pressed close to mine, his hand is resting on the small of my back, and the scent of his cologne overwhelms me. It's all I can do to keep my gaze averted and keep myself from blushing.

But when I glance up finally, I notice that the expression on Karl's face has shifted. His eyes lock onto mine, holding a depth of emotion that I can't quite decipher.

"I thought you didn't want to attend the dinner," he says quietly. "What changed?"

I look up at him, our eyes meeting briefly before I find myself having to look away again. I can't lie to him, not when he's holding me like this. "I wanted to prove someone wrong," I murmur, staring down at our feet. "To prove that I'm not a pathetic housemaid."

Karl's eyes deepen, narrowing slightly. "Who told you that you were just a pathetic

My eyes flick towards Gianna, who stands isolated, observing us with a face like a storm cloud. I furrow my brow for a moment as I see the butler lean toward her, murmuring something ever so briefly, before he whisks away, leaving Gianna with an almost smug look on her face in his wake. It was a subtle interaction, almost imperceptible, but I saw it. I don't know what it means, though.

I swallow, returning my attention toward Karl. "Your secretary has some strong opinions about me."

His jaw clenches. "I see. I'll handle

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Karl

As I pull Gianna into the dimly lit study, the atmosphere is filled with a tension that's been brewing for weeks now, maybe even longer. The door clicks shut behind us, sealing us off from the guests, the judgment, and the murmurs.

For a moment, we are suspended in a bubble of silence, and I finally address what's been gnawing at me.

"A pathetic housemaid?" I ask.

Gianna shoots me a quizzical look, but I can see the gears turning in her head. She's trying not to display emotion, which is just a dead giveaway. "A... what?" she asks, taking a step back.

I take another step toward her, closing the gap once again. "Don't play dumb," I growl. "Is that really what you

"Called who?" Gianna's voice begins to rise ever so

"Abby, of course," I say, folding my arms across

For a few moments, Gianna is silent. Then, mustering a tense smile, she cocks her head to the side. "I'm sorry, Karl, but I have no clue what you're talking

I feel exasperated. Here I am, caught between my so-called 'loyal' secretary and the woman who I want to win back. In the back of my mind, I can feel my wolf, urging me to go with my gut and take Abby's

"Gianna, what exactly is your issue with Abby?" The question spills out of my mouth before I can stop it, like a tidal wave of annoyance and anger.

She avoids eye contact, feigning a look of innocence that I know is far from the truth. "Issue? Karl, I have no idea what you're talking about. You must be mistaken."

I lock my gaze onto hers, narrowing my eyes. "Don't lie, Gianna. It doesn't suit you. Do you honestly think I didn't notice your little performance tonight? Trying to take her seat? Making faces? Refusing to touch the food?"

She meets my gaze for a moment, her eyes twinkling with a hint of defiance before looking away. “I don’t have a ‘problem’ with Abby. I’m simply cautious, that’s all. Isn’t that what you pay me for? To be vigilant for you?”

My arms fold across my chest. “Vigilant? Is that what you call it? It seems more like you’re just indignant and petty.”

She tilts her head, allowing a slight smirk to cross her face. “Indignant is a

“Perhaps, but it’s accurate,” I growl. “You’ve been throwing shade at Abby all evening, and I can’t help but wonder why. Abby has been nothing but polite and courteous, yet you treat her like she’s beneath you. Why is

Gianna hesitates for a moment, her eyes darting away from mine as though she’s searching for a way out of this conversation. “Well, can you blame me?” she finally blurts out. “She must be hiding something. No one is

I step closer, my Alpha aura amplifying, letting her know that her half-baked excuses won’t work with me. “That’s a dangerous assumption to make, Gianna. Now, be honest with me: What’s really going

Gianna shifts her weight uncomfortably, and I can almost hear the cogs in her mind whirring as she decides how much to reveal. Finally, she relents, sighing in a defeated manner. “Alright, fine. I don’t want you getting back together with her, okay? Is that what you want to

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Her words throw me off. How long has this been going on? How long had Gianna secretly been wishing that Abby wasn’t in the picture? And how many lengths has she attempted to go to in order to ensure that Abby can’t be in the picture?

I lean in, my voice tinged with both annoyance and incredulity. “My choices, especially about who I choose as my Luna, are not up for debate or discussion. Not by you, not by anyone. I intend to bring Abby back into my life. She deserves that spot, and nothing you say or do will change that. Do you understand?”

But then, just as I think I have a handle on the situation, Gianna's next words hit me like a tidal wave. "Fine," she says, huffing. "You're a man, you can make your own decisions. But Karl, there's something else."

I sigh. "What is it?"

Gianna pauses for a few moments. The silence feels almost too heavy, but as she utters her next words, I wish that she hadn't. "It's not just that I think you can do better. I...I have feelings for you, Karl."

My eyes widen, my mouth agape as I process her revelation. "What? Is

She looks away momentarily, her face flushed. "Yes. It's been true for a long time, actually.

"Years?" I find myself incredulous and bewildered. "Why am I hearing about this now? How come I

She laughs bitterly. "Why would you? You had everything you wanted. You had Abby, you had your pack. Where did I fit into that grand scheme of things? I was just your secretary, someone who took care of your schedules, meetings, and paperwork. So, I kept it hidden. My feelings, my longing,

I fall silent, my mind racing to make sense of this sudden and complex twist. My hand involuntarily goes up to rub my temples as I try to process her words, to sift through the layers of emotional and ethical dilemmas they present.

Seizing the momentary pause, Gianna suddenly rushes toward me, arms outstretched, as if attempting a hug. "Karl, all I want is to be with you. And I've seen the way you look at me. I know you have those feelings for me, too."

But she's dead wrong. As her arms wrap around me, I react without thinking. Startled, my reflexes kick in, and I find myself shoving her away. "Have you gone mad?" I nearly shout.

However, she stumbles, her ridiculously high heels teetering dangerously as she almost crashes to the ground. Instinctively, I reach out and grab her arm, steadying her before she falls. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to—"

“Karl—”

She looks up, and for a fleeting moment, our faces are dangerously close. As though she feels emboldened, or perhaps just desperate, she leans in, tilting her

Before I can stop her, her lips meet mine. I’m suddenly caught in a tangle that I didn’t mean to be a part of, and I’m too stunned to even pull away, which makes her seem to believe that I wanted this. Her kiss grows more

And to make matters worse, the door bursts open before I have a chance to come to my senses and push her

Gerald, my loyal butler, steps in. I manage to shove Gianna away, causing her to fall backwards on my desk, sending papers scattering across the

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Abby

I stand by the long table, the air thick with the scent of gourmet hors d'oeuvres and sparkling wine. Idly, I pick up a tiny pastry, turning it this way and that before setting it back on the plate.

As if to steel my nerves and try not to think about what Karl is saying to Gianna in the other room, I’m arranging the treats into some semblance of symmetry when a familiar voice that I haven’t heard in years suddenly pulls me away from my thoughts.

“Abby, darling! It’s so good to see you again!”

I turn to find Rebecca, the wife of one of the Betas, her face glowing with genuine delight. I flash a smile, the corners of my lips straining just a bit.

“Sarah, it’s been too long! How have you been?”

She glides over, her high heels clicking against the polished floor. “Oh, you know, busy with pack life, community events, all that jazz. But never mind me; look at you! You’re stunning as

I chuckle, trying to deflect the attention. “Thank you. You look absolutely fabulous

We share a few pleasantries, talking about fashion and the unusually mild weather we’ve been experiencing. But the conversation takes a turn when Sarah skillfully steers it into more personal

“So, Abby,” she says, her eyes twinkling, “I couldn’t help but notice how cozy you and Karl have been tonight. Is there a chance for reconciliation? The pack could really use a union like that,

My cheeks flush. “Sarah, I’m flattered, but no. We’re friends, and I prefer it that way. So yes, I suppose we’ve reconciled in that regard, but not in a

Sarah looks a bit disappointed, but understanding at the same time. “Ah, I see. Well, either way, I’m glad he made that announcement tonight. I’ll admit, I was a bit worried when I saw you—thinking that our Alpha was getting back with a cheater and all that—but to find out that it was all just a mistake…”

Caught off guard, I hesitate before answering. “Yes, it was a mistake. I hope that the word gets out.”

Sarah’s eyes light up. “Oh, of course,” she says, smirking. “You know me; I’ll make sure all of my girlfriends hear about it. I’m sure a lot of people will be relieved. You two were always the golden couple, after all. Lots of hearts were broken when the marriage ended.”

I shift uncomfortably, unsure of how to respond. Yes, I’m sure a lot of hearts were broken. Especially mine.

“Well,” she beams before I have to come up with an answer, “I should mingle. But really, it was nice seeing you. And the food was delightful.”

“Thank you,” I say, relieved. “You should come visit my

“I might have to do just

With that, she gives me a quick hug, her perfume wafting around me like a cloud, and then moves on to mingle with other guests, leaving me to my plate of hors

Despite the surface-level cheeriness of our conversation, I feel drained now. I didn’t expect to field questions about Karl and me so openly, so

My fingers lightly touch the edge of the table, steadying myself. Each word from our conversation echoes in my head, their implications adding weight to the heavy thoughts already occupying

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That’s when I spot it—the door to Karl’s private office, slightly ajar, a sliver of light spilling out into the dim corridor. I push it open, and the sight that greets me is comfortably familiar.

Bookshelves lining the walls, a leather armchair, and Karl’s sleek, darkwood desk hosting his laptop.

Except, the laptop screen is glowing, wide open. Karl must’ve forgotten to shut it down.

A voice at the back of my head tells me to leave it alone, to walk away. But another, louder voice—perhaps fueled by my concealed desire to know more about what Karl has been up to all these years—prompts me to step closer. I rationalize it by telling myself that I’m just turning it off for him.

As I move the mouse to wake the screen from its screensaver, an open email catches my eye. I know I shouldn’t read it, but I can’t tear my eyes away. It mentions rare ingredients and specialized supplies. Normally, I’d ignore something like this, figuring it’s just some work that Karl is doing in his spare time, something for the pack.

But it’s the name that makes my eyes glue to the

“Hey, Karl,” the email reads, “I hate to say this, but I’ve already run out of those rare ingredients. I don’t suppose you’d be willing to share the name of your supplier so I can order more? I’d really appreciate it. Thanks.

Adam, as in my ex-fiancee. Adam, who came out as gay and broke up

Why would he be in contact with Karl about rare ingredients? When did Karl supply him with any in the first place, and why? More than anything, why didn't I know about this before? The questions rush through my mind like a torrent, each more confusing than

And then, the atmosphere changes. I sense it before I see it—the room suddenly feels smaller, more confined. I whip around, and there he is—Gerald, Karl's loyal butler, his eyes narrowed into slits.

"What do we have here?" he sneers, a look of disdain curling his lips.

Caught red-handed, I stammer, my voice shaky. "I was just—I thought Karl left this on. I was going to shut it down."

His eyes scan me, sizing me up, then land on the laptop screen. "Oh, of course. How altruistic of you, Abby. Or should I say, how cunning?"

"Gerald, you've got it all wrong. I wasn't—"

"Save it," he interrupts, gripping my arm in a vice-like hold. "You're coming with

My heart pounds in my chest as he drags me back through the hallways. The tension in the air is palpable as he finally pushes me into the study, the room where I had once shared so many private moments with

Except now, Karl is there, and so is Gianna, his secretary. Their faces are inches apart, a swirl of emotions that I can't quite decipher. But Karl's eyes meet mine, widening in confusion, surprise, and something I can't quite

"Gerald? What is this about?" Karl demands, his eyes still locked onto mine but his words aimed at