

His kiss 1051

Chapter 1051

Maura stood there in the night air, her hair pulled into twin ponytails, wearing a floral dress. Though the dress looked a little old-fashioned, the youthful glow on her face gave her a certain charm of her own.

Rodrigo, Leo's assistant, froze for a moment, staring for several seconds before Maura got closer. Then he snapped back to himself and stepped forward quickly to block her path.

"Stop right there. Who are you?"

"And who are you?" Maura shot back, glaring at him. "Do you even know who I am? How dare you talk to me like that!"

Rodrigo opened his mouth to explain, but Leo cut in calmly. "Rodrigo, go bring the car around."

"Yes, sir."

As Rodrigo walked off with the keys, Maura slid up beside Leo and tugged playfully at his sleeve.

"Brother Leo, is that guy one of your people? He's so rude. You should get rid of him!"

Leo's brow creased slightly.

He'd never thought much of Maura, but he kept his tone even. He gently pulled his sleeve free of her grip and changed the subject instead. "It's late. What are you doing in the city?"

"I came to see you!"

Maura gazed up at the grand hotel entrance, her eyes wistful. "Didn't we agree last time to date for a while before getting married? And then you just left without a word."

"If dating feels like too much trouble, we could just get married outright."

Leo's frown deepened. "Wasn't I clear enough? I told you I'm not getting married for years yet."

"No, you weren't clear at all," Maura said, flustered. "Your girlfriend is so difficult and headstrong. Why do you still think about her?"

"Brother Leo, I didn't know who you really were before, that's why I spoke to you the way I did. Why don't we just get married now, so you don't have to go back to your ex-girlfriend!"

It was a jumble of nonsense.

Leo said, evenly, “I’m sorry if I wasn’t clear the first time. Let me say it again: I don’t have feelings for you, and I have no interest in marriage. Also, I don’t have a girlfriend.”

If he had a girlfriend, he wouldn’t have gone on a blind date in the first place.

It was a matter of principle.

“No girlfriend?” Maura seized on that single line out of everything he’d said. “Brother Leo, did you and your ex fight again?”

If she married Leo, she told herself, she’d be nothing but agreeable — she’d never argue with him.

Leo wasn’t sure whether his parents had put strange ideas in Maura’s head, or if this was simply how her mind worked.

He explained again, patiently. “I said I don’t have a girlfriend, or an ex-girlfriend, and I have no interest in getting married.”

“I understand.” Maura ducked her head shyly. “I won’t bring up girlfriends in front of you again.”

There was simply no getting through to her.

Leo felt a headache coming on. "I have a lot to do. If there's nothing else, I'll be going."

Chapter 1052

"Wait." Maura grabbed his sleeve again. "Brother Leo, I'm just a girl alone in a big city, lost in a place I don't know. Are you really going to just leave me here?"

Leo sighed. "Where are you staying? I'll have someone take you back."

"I came straight from the village to find you, so I haven't found anywhere yet."

Surely, Maura thought, Leo would have to take her home with him now, wouldn't he?

If she could stay with him, what chance would that unhinged ex-girlfriend of his have?

Just then, Rodrigo pulled up with the car.

Leo called him over.

"Miss Maura hasn't found anywhere to stay. Take her into the hotel and book her a room."

They were already right outside the Veale Grand Hotel, so there was no need to look any further.

“Yes, sir.” Maura’s expression soured. “Brother Leo, I don’t want to stay in a hotel.”

Erik had told her Leo owned a villa in Xamfield.

She wanted to stay in a luxury villa, not some hotel room.

Leo ignored her protest entirely, said only “Goodbye,” and got into his car and drove off.

Maura was so annoyed she stomped her foot.

But the moment Rodrigo checked her in and she saw the suite, her irritation melted into excitement.

Rodrigo said politely, “Miss Maura, remember to bring your room key whenever you go out. When you’re ready to check out, just call me and I’ll take care of everything.”

He handed her his business card as he said it.

Maura took the card, her chest fluttering with delight. She felt, for a moment, like a woman of real wealth and status.

She asked, with a note of self-importance, “So what exactly is your position with Leo?”

“I’m the boss’s personal assistant,” Rodrigo replied courteously. “If there’s nothing else, I’ll take my leave.”

“Fine, go ahead,” Maura said, waving him off.

Once he was gone, she jumped onto the soft white bed, bouncing on it a few times.

The mattress was plush and comfortable, carrying a faint, pleasant fragrance.

Satisfied, Maura wandered out onto the balcony.

The suite was fitted with high-end technology throughout — even the balcony curtains opened automatically — radiating quiet luxury at every turn.

She was completely captivated.

Was this what it was like to be rich? If she married Brother Leo, could she live like this every single day?

That night, Maura swore to herself that no matter what it took, she would become Leo's wife.

While Maura lay awake dreaming of grandeur, Leo was already on his way back to Okburg through the night.

Despite his exhaustion, he arrived right on time at the Howard family's venue the next day.

The recognition banquet was held at Grace Robuchon.

By the time Leo arrived, the place was already lined with luxury cars.

It was, after all, a banquet hosted by Matthew himself — nearly every influential figure in Okburg had turned out to pay their respects.

Guests clustered together in small groups, chatting.

Everyone was curious about the illegitimate daughter the Howard family was formally recognizing.

Chapter 1053

“It’s surprising, isn’t it? Gabriela’s being acknowledged, and the legitimate daughter isn’t kicking up a fuss. Even the wife’s taking it quietly?”

“What choice does she have? Matthew’s in the middle of a divorce lawsuit with her — it’s already public knowledge across Okburg. Even if she made a scene, it wouldn’t change a thing.”

“What surprises me most is that Beverley agreed to this at all.”

People murmured among themselves, glancing over toward Beverley as they spoke.

She sat in the seat of honor, dressed in traditional formal wear, with a steady stream of guests coming over to greet her.

Her expression stayed largely unreadable, though she responded now and then.

Beverley hadn’t shown up to an event like this in years — but she’d made an exception for Gabriela, a clear sign of how much she’d come to approve of her granddaughter.

When Leo made his entrance, he drew plenty of stares. Those who recognized him reacted with a mix of envy and disbelief.

Gabriela really was fortunate.

The heir to the Moss family was already expected to show up in support of her — and now, on top of that, the notoriously elusive fashion mogul Leo had come in person.

Unbothered by the attention, Leo made his way in, intent on finding Gabriela.

Stewart approached him slowly, a glass of wine in each hand.

...a dog.

Stewart offered Leo a glass of wine, the kind of gesture that stood for camaraderie and respect in circles like these.

“Leo, you got here early.”

After the fashion show, Leo had faced no shortage of social obligations, not to mention Maura running off to cause trouble.

He’d assumed he wouldn’t be able to break free in time, and yet here he was.

It seemed Leo genuinely valued Gabriela.

Leo accepted the glass of red wine with a smile. “Weren’t you feeling unwell? How’d you end up here so early too?”

“Fred’s medicine worked wonders. I’m feeling much better now...”

The two of them — one a towering name in fashion, the other a rising tycoon in business — couldn’t hide their presence even tucked away in a corner, chatting.

Plenty of guests kept glancing their way, including the group around Tessa.

Aubrey, for her part, was openly starstruck, swept up in the glamour of it all.

“I know Mr. Williams — he’s visited our company a few times. But the one next to him, is that Leo? I heard he founded SK Elite Boutique. I didn’t expect him to be so young, and so handsome!”

Nina cut in. “Aubrey, that’s enough. People are looking at us.”

Aubrey quickly reined in her starry-eyed gaze.

The last time she'd seen him, during Gabriela's live embroidery stream, he hadn't looked quite this striking.

In person, he was even more impressive than he'd been on camera.

Aubrey whispered, half-envious, "Gabriela's so lucky. She's finally found her happiness after everything she's been through."

Chapter 1054

Being acknowledged as an illegitimate child of the Howard family had already exceeded anything Aubrey had imagined for Gabriela — she certainly hadn't expected the family to welcome her back with an event this grand.

Gabriela had even invited all of them personally — Tessa, Nina, and Cali included.

Tessa and Nina were used to occasions like this, but for Aubrey and Cali, it was their first time at such a high-end party, and they were dazzled by everything around them.

If Tessa hadn't been keeping a close eye on her, Aubrey might already have wandered off chasing autographs from whichever celebrities she recognized.

Where Aubrey's reaction was curiosity mixed with envy, Cali was simply nervous. She barely spoke, sticking close behind Tessa and Nina, not even daring to help herself to the food.

Some of the socialites nearby watched the scene with poorly hidden disdain.

“Are those Gabriela’s friends? They look like they’ve never set foot anywhere like this — completely out of place.”

“What kind of respectable friends could someone like Gabriela have, coming from where she does? Look at their outfits, they might as well be street vendors.”

“Honestly, I don’t understand what Mr. Howard is thinking, acknowledging an illegitimate child with this much fanfare. Isn’t he worried about losing face?”

These women, all close to Rebecca, naturally took her side.

“Speaking of which, where is Rebecca?”

“Probably at home licking her wounds. So much has happened lately, she’s likely still reeling from it all. Let’s go see her later.”

“An outsider to the family, and Rebecca still couldn’t outmaneuver her. It just goes to show how naive Rebecca really is.”

“Rebecca was raised with everything handed to her — why would she need to be clever? It’s only someone like Gabriela, coming from nothing, who has to scheme just to survive...”

While they quietly pitied Rebecca’s situation, none of them knew that at that very moment, Rebecca was breaking out in a cold sweat, gripped by guilt.

Lauren had planned to wear the earrings Matthew had given her to the event, but she couldn’t find them anywhere. With time running short, she’d had to settle for a different pair.

On the way to the venue, Lauren kept murmuring to herself. “It’s strange. I know I left them in the drawer. How could they just vanish? Did I remember wrong?”

She refused to believe anyone would dare steal from her own room.

After all, the Howard family’s staff had all been carefully vetted and trained.

It had to be her memory playing tricks on her, she decided.

Watching her mother’s persistent confusion, Rebecca felt a pang of guilt.

She finally understood Gabriela’s plan — to unsettle Lauren by taking something she treasured.

Seeing how much it was bothering her mother, Rebecca steeled herself and confessed.

Lauren stared at her in shock.

“Are you out of your mind? She told you to steal, and you just did it?”

“Mom, Gabriela said she’d leave me alone if I stole your earrings for her. I didn’t want to kneel at Alanna’s grave, so I didn’t have a choice.”

Lauren pressed her fingers to her forehead, exasperated.

Chapter 1055

“You fool. Even if you had to steal something, you could have told me first. Why the earrings, of all things?”

Rebecca had let herself be led around by Gabriela, and though it stung to admit it, she’d had no other option.

Irritated by her mother’s scolding, Rebecca snapped back, “It’s just a pair of earrings. I already took them, what more do you want from me?”

Besides, Gabriela had kept her word. In exchange for the earrings, she'd not only spared Rebecca the humiliation of the livestream but had also turned her failing project into a profitable one.

At least the online mockery calling her a foolish heiress had finally stopped.

A pair of earrings in exchange for some peace felt like a fair trade to her.

"Fine," Lauren sighed, thinking of everything Rebecca had been through lately. "Next time, talk to me first, understand?"

"Earrings worth millions — if that greedy, illegitimate child wants them so badly, let her have them. Consider it charity."

Seeing that her mother wasn't truly angry, Rebecca felt a wave of relief, and a touch of smugness crept in.

Gabriela had thought this petty scheme would rattle her — she'd clearly underestimated how much her mother loved her.

But Rebecca's smugness didn't last long. It shattered the moment she spotted Gabriela outside the venue.

Just as Lauren arrived at Grace Robuchon, Gabriela was stepping out of her car.

At the same time, Rebecca's aunts, Ariadne and Debby, arrived as well.

Lauren brightened in pleasant surprise. "Ariadne, Debby, you're here too?"

Ariadne and Debby, who ran businesses overseas, had flown back for the occasion — clearly to show their support for Rebecca.

As Gabriela approached, Ariadne stepped directly into her path.

"Stop right there!"

Gabriela halted and turned to look at her. "Ariadne, of the McCoy family. What can I do for you?"

Ariadne didn't so much as glance at her properly, her sharp eyes sweeping over Gabriela with a cold sense of superiority.

"You're the child of a mistress. By the customs of respectable families, you're to enter an event like this through the side door."

She gestured toward a smaller door beside the main entrance, evidently set up just for the occasion.

The McCoy family clearly had enough influence to get the Vista Hotel to open up a side entrance on short notice.

Ariadne clapped her hands, and at once someone hung several pairs of pants over the small doorway.

She looked at Gabriela coolly. “Now, you may enter.”

The pants belonged to Lauren, Rebecca, and a few of the Howard family elders — and the intent was clear: Gabriela was meant to crawl beneath them as a form of humiliation.

Gabriela had expected some kind of trouble from Rebecca’s side today, but she hadn’t anticipated something this crude, this childish.

Childish enough that if she simply ignored it, the whole insult would fall flat on its own.

“And if I refuse to crawl?”

Gabriela’s tone was cool, her expression just as unreadable. Next to Lauren’s rigid composure, she carried herself with a quiet, steady authority.

Chapter 1056

Lauren's family held real power, and even mid-divorce, she felt confident enough to go toe-to-toe with the Howards.

She looked at Gabriela with contempt. "Refuse, and you can forget about ever returning to the Howard family — today or any other day. And you can give up any dream of sharing in Rebecca's inheritance."

Just then, the commotion outside drew a crowd from the party, everyone eager to watch the spectacle unfold.

Once word spread that Gabriela was expected to crawl under a row of pants to get inside, several guests covered their mouths, laughing, curious to see how long she'd hold out.

"The Howards, a family with such a storied legacy, making this big a fuss over acknowledging a mistress's daughter — it's honestly absurd. Lauren should have dealt with this a long time ago."

"If a mistress's child wants to be part of the Howard family, she should learn to bow down like a dog first."

Watching Gabriela stand there in the middle of the crowd, the target of everyone's scorn, Lauren felt a flicker of satisfaction.

Ariadne sneered. "Gabriela, are you so frightened you've lost the ability to speak? Just standing there like a fool, waiting for your wonderful father to swoop in and save you?"

Before Gabriela could answer, Debby cut in. "If you had any sense of filial duty, you'd walk away in shame right now and spare your father the public embarrassment."

Watching the exchange, the crowd's contempt only deepened.

"Gabriela was so fierce and relentless with Rebecca. Now that she's actually facing something, she's hiding behind her daddy like a child."

"Shameless. With a mother like that, what else would you expect her to turn out like?"

Lauren straightened her back as she took it all in.

Ever since Gabriela had come into the picture, Lauren's life had been nothing but upheaval.

Gabriela was the reason for her imprisonment, and for her divorce.

The perfect marriage Lauren had so carefully arranged for her daughter had been ruined and stolen out from under her. Rebecca, once the proud eldest daughter of the Howard family, now faced ridicule from ignorant strangers online over a lost bet.

Today, Lauren intended to pay Gabriela back for every bit of humiliation she'd endured.

"Gabriela, I'll say it here and now — even if Matthew comes running to your defense today, you're still walking away in shame."

Despite all the contemptuous stares, Gabriela stayed perfectly at ease, as though none of it touched her. She glanced at Lauren, her chin lifting slightly.

That look—

Off in the crowd, Jasper felt his brow twitch, just barely.

He had a strong feeling that Lauren and her daughter weren't going to get anything out of this confrontation with Gabriela.

As the standoff dragged on, more guests spilled out from the venue.

Stewart and Leo pushed into the crowd, and once they understood what was happening, immediately positioned themselves beside Gabriela.

Chapter 1057

Leo's brow furrowed. "Mrs. Howard, this banquet was arranged by Mr. Howard, and Mrs. Howard senior is still inside. Setting up a side door on your own authority is a direct slight to your elders' wishes."

Lauren shot Leo a cold look. "Mr. Dewitt of SK Elite Boutique. Our family's affairs are our own to handle. No matter how prestigious your standing is, surely you know better than to interfere in someone else's family business?"

"Besides, Gabriela belongs to Wesley. Why is an outsider like you making a scene on her behalf?"

"Or is it, Mr. Dewitt, that you're the male version of a homewrecker? Is that why you're so eager to defend a homewrecker's daughter?"

The insult was aimed squarely at Leo, painting him as someone trying to steal another man's woman.

The crowd drew a sharp collective breath.

Could it be that the founder of SK Elite Boutique had feelings for Gabriela too?

Leo had meant to keep things calm and reasonable, but her words tested even his patience.

"Mrs. Howard, do you not understand the meaning of discretion? Or do the words just come out before they reach your brain? Perhaps you simply lack the capacity to speak like a rational adult?"

Lauren's face went pale at the retort.

The two McCoy aunts bristled and stepped forward at once.

Known for their sharp tongues — Ariadne especially, given her intimidating background — crossing them wasn't something to take lightly; they had ways of retaliating that weren't always aboveboard.

Gabriela quickly stepped in to stop Leo. "Leo, don't let it get to you. I can handle this myself."

But what could she actually do?

As things stood, unless she genuinely walked away in shame, even Matthew's arrival wouldn't resolve anything.

Leo murmured, low and reassuring, "Don't worry. The McCoy family doesn't scare me."

Warmth spread through Gabriela's chest.

She hadn't expected Leo, despite having known him only a short while, to stand behind her so firmly.

“Enough of this,” Ariadne said impatiently, looking at Gabriela. “No need to keep discussing it. If you’re too ashamed to walk away on your own, I can give you a push.”

She waved her hand, and two burly bodyguards moved in to seize Gabriela from both sides.

Leo and Stewart tried to step in, but several more bodyguards blocked them.

Thanks to her connections abroad, Ariadne had arranged for more than ten bodyguards to be stationed outside beforehand, ready for exactly this kind of situation.

Aubrey and the others, the last to come out of the venue, rushed forward the instant they saw what was happening, without a second’s hesitation.

But Ariadne’s bodyguards were well-trained professionals, and even with her black belt in taekwondo, Aubrey was no more than a mosquito against an elephant — utterly outmatched.

Worried for her friends’ safety, Gabriela urged them back. “Don’t get involved. I can handle this myself.”

Earlier, the moment she’d spotted the two McCoy aunts, Gabriela had already quietly told Alissa to call for backup.

By her estimate, help should be arriving any moment now.

Faced with the women's sudden intervention, Ariadne's expression darkened, her voice turning to ice.
"Anyone not involved, step back — or face the consequences."

Chapter 1058

Aubrey and her friends refused to budge.

"Gabriela, we're like sisters. We're not abandoning you!"

Driven by sheer determination, they clawed and pulled at the bodyguards, managing to cause at least some disruption.

Stewart and Leo were still struggling to break free of the men holding them.

The whole scene dissolved into chaos.

Jaw tight, Ariadne gave a signal to the rest of the bodyguards.

Within moments, the chaos was brought under control, and Gabriela was pinned in place.

Rebecca watched with quiet satisfaction as Gabriela was about to be forced into a walk of shame, her heart brimming with glee.

She looked over at Gabriela, smug.

The onlookers held their breath.

If Gabriela really was forced to walk away in disgrace, the label of “homewrecker’s daughter” would follow her for the rest of her life.

Leo’s eyes burned with frustration, but every attempt he made to move was immediately blocked by the bodyguards.

Stewart wasn’t faring any better, trying meanwhile to get backup on the phone.

Then, a voice cut through the air, cold as ice.

“Let her go.”

Everyone turned toward the sound.

The crowd, which had closed in tightly around Gabriela, parted at once, revealing Wesley striding forward.

Every eye fixed on him, and the gloating whispers that had filled the air a moment ago cut off instantly, as if someone had hit mute. No one dared say a word.

Wesley's reputation already carried weight on its own — but now, having returned to take the helm of the Moss Group, he stood as the undisputed heir of the Moss family.

His presence alone was enough to command the room.

Wesley walked straight to Gabriela, fixing the two bodyguards with a cold stare. "Let her go."

The bodyguards, under Ariadne's orders, looked to her for direction.

A pang of regret shot through Ariadne.

She'd been so close.

If Wesley had arrived just a few minutes later, Gabriela would have been trapped with nowhere to go.

In all of Okburg, there was almost no one Ariadne feared — not even the Howard family. But the Moss family was another matter entirely.

Wesley had already been named by Roger as the sole heir to the Moss Group. He was untouchable.

Jaw clenched, she gave the signal. “Stand down.”

At the order, the bodyguards withdrew like a tide pulling back out to sea.

Wesley gently smoothed Gabriela’s slightly disheveled hair, then pulled her into a firm embrace.

“I’m sorry I was late.”

Wrapped in Wesley’s embrace — both a relief and a reassurance — Gabriela instinctively drew in a deep breath.

“No, you got here right on time.”

She’d been a little afraid moments earlier, though she’d kept her composure the whole time.

Still, she was grateful he'd come.

The hug lasted only a few seconds before Wesley let her go and held out an exquisite gift box.

"Gabriela, this is for you. Congratulations on finding your family."

Gabriela accepted the box gratefully. "Thank you."

Chapter 1059

Wesley looked down at her. "Go on, open it and see if you like it."

She did as he suggested.

The moment she lifted the lid, the crowd around them seemed to catch a flash of dazzling light.

Inside sat a necklace known by name.

"It's the Heart of the Ocean!" someone in the crowd blurted out in shock.

Just yesterday, at a prestigious auction in Okburg, this very piece — the Heart of the Ocean — had gone for an astronomical sum, the most expensive item sold that day.

Reportedly crafted by a celebrated royal designer in the early twentieth century, its starting bid alone had been staggering.

But it wasn't just the price that captivated people — it was the story behind it.

Wesley had been late precisely because he'd been waiting on this necklace. The moment the paperwork was finalized, he'd rushed straight here with it.

He asked, a hint of hope in his voice, "Do you like it?"

With every eye on her, Gabriela nodded warmly. "Yes. I like it very much. Thank you."

"May I put it on you?" he asked.

Gabriela hesitated for a moment.

Remembering the sense of safety she'd felt in his arms just minutes ago, she found herself letting her guard down, little by little.

She nodded. "All right."

Wesley already knew exactly what kind of woman she was — carefree, fond of money — and yet he'd chosen to pursue her anyway. She decided to give this one more chance.

If this moment of softness led her right back into disaster, so be it.

Delighted, Wesley lifted the necklace at once and set about fastening it around her neck.

Meanwhile, someone in the crowd began recounting the story behind the piece in a hushed voice.

"Back in the 1990s, a nobleman fell for a commoner — like something out of a fairy tale. But their love ran straight into the wall of society. Because of the gap in their status, the royal family refused to allow the marriage, and the nobleman was forced into a political match with a noblewoman of equal standing."

"That woman was domineering, and when she learned about the commoner, jealousy consumed her. She sent people to torment the girl and spread rumors that she was nothing but a gold-digging mistress willing to sell herself."

"The nobleman never knew any of it was happening. The commoner lived in fear and despair, and before long, she died of a broken heart."

“By the time the nobleman learned she was gone, years had already passed. Consumed by guilt, he commissioned a designer to create the Heart of the Ocean.”

“Not long after, he took his own life, the necklace still in his hand...”

Once the story finished, someone murmured, unable to help themselves, “Mr. Moss really did pour his whole heart into choosing something this meaningful.”

The gift didn’t just impress the crowd — it restored Gabriela’s dignity in one stroke.

Chapter 1060

Leo hadn’t expected Wesley to come up with something this significant; it made his own carefully chosen gift feel suddenly small by comparison.

Wesley finished clasping the necklace around Gabriela’s neck.

Cowed by his commanding presence, Ariadne and Debby no longer dared to cause Gabriela any more trouble.

Only Rebecca stood glaring at the Heart of the Ocean, eaten alive by jealousy.

“Wesley, giving Gabriela this necklace — are you trying to make a fool of yourself? Do you even know that Mr. Lu’s been dying to swoop in and take your place?”

Lauren had only needled at things earlier, but now Rebecca was laying it all out in the open. The crowd gasped, practically giddy at hearing gossip this juicy.

Rebecca had just managed to offend three people at once.

As her words hung in the air, Wesley’s expression darkened visibly.

“Rebecca. Are you trying to bring trouble down on yourself?”

But her jealousy burned hot enough to withstand even his glare, and she turned instead to Leo. “Mr. Lu, do you dare admit you’re secretly in love with Gabriela?”

Leo’s expression shifted slightly.

He wasn’t afraid to admit his feelings, but he didn’t want to drag Gabriela’s reputation down with him, so he answered carefully. “I’ve only known Gabriela a short while. We’ve met three or four times, at most. There’s been no time for feelings to develop between us — nothing improper has happened. Mr. Moss, please don’t misunderstand.”

Wesley let out a cold snort. "No need to explain yourself. Just keep your distance from Gabriela going forward."

A flicker of bitterness crossed Leo's face, but he sighed and agreed. "You have my word."

Watching Leo concede so readily, Stewart frowned slightly.

Given who Leo was, he shouldn't have had any reason to back down from Wesley.

Maybe, Stewart thought, Leo's feelings for Gabriela weren't as deep as he'd assumed.

Wesley offered Gabriela his arm. "Let me walk you in."

She took it. "All right."

Just then, Matthew arrived, breathless and sweating from the rush to get there.

He looked Gabriela over carefully to make sure she was unharmed, then let out a breath of relief.

Turning to see the row of pants strung up over the small side gate, his expression darkened as he looked at Lauren.

“Lauren. I got held up by an accident on the road here. Is this your doing?”

He’d always been gentle with his family, but now his gaze was hard, unyielding. “Get these taken down. Now.”

Faced with his sternness, Lauren’s eyes welled up with tears as she launched into her complaints.

“Matthew, when the Howard family was on the decline, no one wanted anything to do with you. I went against my own parents’ wishes to marry you, and I saved this family.”

“Now that the Howards have risen above even the McCoy family, even if you won’t do anything to support my side of things, you shouldn’t be treating me like this.”