

His kiss 1121

Chapter 1121

Who would ever guess that the same man, gripping her waist half the night before, had been quite that wild?

Muttering “jerk” silently to herself, Gabriela got up to wash.

Today, she was heading back to Everglow Group.

Her father had already cleared things with the board, so once the shareholders’ meeting convened, she’d be officially inducted onto the board.

Today marked Everglow Group’s fifth shareholders’ meeting of the year — the kind of meeting that carried real weight in corporate life, shaping strategic direction and leadership going forward.

Gabriela chose a light gray business dress, paired it with five-centimeter heels, and styled her hair carefully, aiming for a look that was both mature and capable.

Then she began applying powder along her neck.

Fortunately, after her protest the night before, Wesley had spared her neck, leaving barely any marks there.

Her waist had taken the brunt of it instead.

Wesley woke a while later, wrapping his arms around her from behind. “Up so early?”

“I’m heading back to Everglow today.”

Expecting a tough fight ahead, she’d risen early, wanting to get a feel for the company environment before things started.

“I’ll take you,” Wesley offered.

She shook her head. “No need. I’ll go with Dad.”

She wasn’t ready to make her relationship with Wesley public just yet — she didn’t want people writing her off as some woman coasting on a man’s coattails.

She meant to take down Rebecca, and that so-called devoted brother Jasper, entirely on her own merit, and win over the old board members in the process.

After that, she planned to see both of them properly removed from the board, through legitimate means.

She would make sure Rebecca left Everglow in complete disgrace — and make Lauren watch her daughter fall into ruin.

Lauren would answer for every wrong she'd ever done. One by one.

Wesley respected her wishes and didn't push the matter of driving her.

At eight-thirty that morning, Gabriela and Matthew arrived at Everglow Group headquarters.

The building rose sixty-six stories into the sky, looking from a distance like a sharpened blade cutting through the clouds.

Even before stepping through the doors, one could feel the weight of its imposing, almost overwhelming presence.

Gabriela tilted her head back to look up at the corporate logo.

Catching the morning light, the words "Everglow Group" seemed to glint with a cold, metallic edge.

Thinking she must be nervous, Matthew gave her shoulder a gentle pat. “Don’t be afraid. Whatever happens, I’ll be right here beside you.”

“Okay.”

She followed him inside.

Jasper was already waiting at the entrance. Spotting them, he offered a few polite pleasantries before turning to Gabriela with a smile. “Welcome, Ms. Lu.”

Gabriela glanced up at him.

Tall, sharp-featured, carrying himself with a cool, unbothered air — she’d never seen him standing beside Wesley before, but she guessed the two were roughly the same height.

She smiled back. “Mr. Jiang.”

Jasper gave a small nod and fell into step beside Matthew, seemingly guiding the way for Gabriela.

Chapter 1122

As they crossed the lobby, the receptionists addressed Matthew respectfully as “Mr. Howard” and Jasper as “Mr. Jiang.”

Jasper introduced her generously. “This is Ms. Lu.”

The two receptionists exchanged a glance before greeting her with equal respect. “Ms. Lu.”

Gabriela nodded back. “Hello.”

Being her first day back, moments like this were only to be expected.

For the first half hour or so, Gabriela mostly followed Matthew around, getting a feel for the company’s layout.

The building had sixty-six floors in total, with employee salaries generally rising along with the floor number.

The boardroom sat on the sixty-sixth floor.

Jasper’s office was on the sixty-fifth, and Rebecca’s on the sixty-third — each with their own private space.

Jasper led Gabriela up to the sixty-third floor and stopped in front of an office that looked freshly arranged.

He smiled. “Knowing you’d be coming back, I had this office set up for you ahead of time. If it’s not to your liking, just let me know anytime.”

Gabriela raised an eyebrow.

It was her first day back, and yet Rebecca was nowhere in sight, as if she’d simply vanished. Staying away instead of showing up to make trouble wasn’t like her at all.

And Jasper, for all his gentle, courteous manner, was already carrying himself as though Everglow Group belonged to him — every gesture toward Gabriela carrying the faint edge of treating her like a visitor, rather than family.

Still, given how “friendly” he was being, she offered a grateful smile. “Thank you, Mr. Jiang.”

Jasper added, with a note of feigned helplessness, “Gabriela, Rebecca usually calls me brother. Since Uncle already held a family recognition banquet for you, that makes you my sister too, in a sense. Feel free to call me brother, if you’d like.”

There was a clear undertone of forced intimacy in the offer.

But Gabriela had crossed paths with Jasper before, in ways both open and subtle, and she knew perfectly well what kind of man lay beneath that composed exterior — cunning, and ruthless when it counted.

She smiled, giving nothing away. “Thank you, brother. But this is a workplace. Better to keep things professional.”

The smile on Jasper’s lips thinned, just slightly.

He exchanged a few more polite words with her before saying, “The shareholders’ meeting starts at nine-thirty. I’ll see you shortly.”

While the two of them talked, the employees at their cubicles outside kept sneaking glances their way.

Word had already spread that this new Ms. Lu was someone to be reckoned with. At the recognition banquet, she’d reportedly humiliated several of the Jiang family’s most respected elders in public, without a shred of mercy.

But seeing how lovely and unassuming she seemed now, most of them figured the rumors had to be exaggerated.

Especially with Mr. Jiang being this warm toward her today.

Surely the two of them wouldn't come to blows the way people said, would they?

Gabriela had no idea any of this speculation was even happening.

At that very moment, she was locked in the restroom.

Chapter 1123

She stared at the bolted stall door, her brow creasing slightly.

So this was the opening move.

It made perfect sense, really — after the recognition banquet, there was no way Rebecca would simply let Gabriela slide onto the board without some kind of resistance.

But locking someone in a bathroom stall? Wasn't that a little juvenile?

Still, with the meeting bearing down fast, however childish the tactic, it was working with brutal efficiency.

Showing up late to her very first shareholders' meeting would leave a terrible impression, and make it that much harder to establish herself on the board afterward.

Gabriela called out a few times, but no one answered.

Just then, her phone rang. Rebecca.

“Dear sister, the meeting’s about to start. Why aren’t you here yet?”

Catching the mockery in her voice, Gabriela let out a soft laugh. “Rebecca. I’m going to count to ten. You’d better come open this door right now.”

On the other end, Rebecca seethed with frustration.

She despised how composed Gabriela always sounded, even at a clear disadvantage — as though nothing and no one could truly touch her.

But this was Everglow Group.

“Gabriela, what makes you think you get to be this arrogant? Believe it or not, if I don’t say the word, you can sit in there all day.”

She'd been at the company for years before Gabriela ever showed up, and with Jasper's indulgence, the sixty-third floor was hers. Who did Gabriela think she was, strutting around like she owned the place?

"And don't even think about calling Dad," Rebecca added. "He's getting an earful from Caspien right now."

When an elder like Caspien was lecturing someone, even Matthew had no choice but to sit quietly with his phone silenced.

Not bothering to waste more words on her, Gabriela simply started counting. "One... two..."

A darker malice churned in Rebecca's eyes.

She'd already arranged for no employee — not even the cleaning staff — to come anywhere near this floor's restrooms today.

Jasper, too, had chosen to look the other way. She refused to believe Gabriela could turn this around all on her own.

If Gabriela called someone outside the company for help, it would only make her a laughingstock.

Trapped in a restroom on her first day back, missing the shareholders' meeting entirely — how unwelcome would that make her look?

However the story eventually got out, Gabriela would be the one left with egg on her face.

While Rebecca weighed the satisfaction of it all, Gabriela finished her count.

“Rebecca,” she said, slow and deliberate, “from here on out, I’m not coming out unless you come and ask me yourself.”

Rebecca bristled at her tone.

“Before you go acting tough with me, you’d better figure out who exactly you’re planning to call to get out of there.”

She didn’t believe for a second that Gabriela would actually call Wesley.

Who would want to look that pathetic in front of the man they loved?

Without waiting for her to finish, Gabriela hung up and dialed Beverley instead.

Chapter 1124

She got straight to the point. “Grandma, I told you before — out of respect for you, I’d always weigh the company’s reputation before doing anything.”

“But today, Rebecca locked me in the restroom, and the shareholders’ meeting starts in ten minutes. If she wants to play these cheap tricks to intimidate me, you can’t blame me for not playing along.”

A dull throb started at Beverley’s temples as she listened.

She was getting far too old to deal with these squabbling children.

“Gabriela, don’t worry. I’ll have someone sent over right now to let you out.”

“Grandma,” Gabriela said, “I already gave Rebecca an ultimatum. I told her if she didn’t open the door within ten seconds, she’d have to come and ask me out herself.”

Beverley’s eye twitched.

That foolish girl, Rebecca. Beverley had warned her, just yesterday, not to provoke Gabriela.

Why could she never listen?

Beverley cursed Rebecca silently in her head.

Then, softening her tone, she tried a different approach. “Gabriela, it’s your first day back at the company. You should always leave yourself some room to maneuver. Whatever’s going on between you and Rebecca, you can’t let things get too ugly in front of outsiders.”

The words sounded gentle enough, but knowing her grandmother, Gabriela understood exactly what lay beneath them — a warning.

She kept her own voice equally soft. “Grandma, have you considered that Jasper might be behind all of this?”

Of course Beverley had considered it.

In the years since Rebecca had returned to the company, she’d leaned entirely on Jasper’s favoritism, doing as she pleased and embarrassing herself more times than Beverley cared to count.

This time, locking Gabriela in the bathroom — even if it hadn’t been Jasper’s direct order — he’d almost certainly given his silent approval.

The foolish girl still didn’t realize she was nothing more than a foil, making Jasper look better by comparison ever since her return. She actually believed he genuinely doted on her.

Gabriela pressed on. “Grandma, if I don’t make a scene over this, Jasper will genuinely believe I’m afraid of him.”

Beverley remained unconvinced.

“This is the business world, not some children’s playground. It isn’t about who’s afraid of whom.”

The corporate world was a battlefield — and power belonged to whoever proved most capable.

Gabriela stopped dancing around the point. “I called you out of respect, just so you’d know what was happening. Besides, even if I wanted to let this slide now, it’s already too late for that.”

A wave of unease washed over Beverley. “Gabriela. What exactly have you done?”

“I haven’t done anything,” Gabriela said, her voice mild. “If Rebecca hadn’t decided to mess with me in the first place, none of this would even be happening.”

Beverley hung up and immediately called the main office, ordering someone to go open the door for Gabriela.

But Rebecca had already stationed people outside the restroom with strict instructions to keep everyone away, so no one could reach the door to free her.

The clock kept ticking.

The Everglow Group shareholder meeting was about to begin.

Chapter 1125

At Moss Group headquarters, on the seventy-sixth floor, Wesley stood waiting, watching the time.

Billy approached to deliver an update. "Mr. Moss, Mr. Song has already arrived at Everglow Group."

"Have someone keep close watch," Wesley said coolly. "If Gabriela can't handle things herself, have Mason step in and back her up."

"Yes, sir."

This shareholder meeting centered on the Seaside Resort project.

Rebecca had originally won the bid for that stretch of coastline, only to be blindsided by new environmental regulations, forcing her to absorb the loss in silence.

Then Gabriela had proposed expanding the project's scope further out. The plan was sound, but the required startup capital tripled almost overnight.

To fund it, they'd brought Mason on board.

He'd had no interest in getting entangled in the whole mess, but out of consideration for Gabriela, he'd invested twenty percent, making him the project's second-largest shareholder.

Once other investors saw Mason commit, they followed suit, and together their contributions covered roughly half the project's funding.

Naturally, that entitled Mason to attend today's Everglow shareholder meeting.

A few of the other recent investors had joined him.

One of them murmured to Mason, "Mr. Garner, you said Gabriela would definitely be here today. Why haven't we seen her yet?"

Mason smiled. "I asked one of the staff earlier. She arrived very early. Probably still tied up with preparations."

That answer put the others at ease, for the moment.

But as the minutes ticked by, with only five left before the meeting began, there was still no sign of Gabriela.

Matthew, having just weathered a lecture from Caspien, stepped into the conference room only to find her missing.

The other Everglow shareholders were already murmuring among themselves, their displeasure with Gabriela plain to see.

Sensing trouble brewing, Matthew spoke up quickly. "It's Gabriela's first day. She's probably still getting used to the layout. Let me call her and check where she is."

He stepped out to make the call.

Expressions around the room soured further. Several began to quietly wonder whether this supposed heir apparent was really up to the job.

Rebecca could barely contain her smugness.

Locking Gabriela in the restroom had been a crude move, sure, but as long as it derailed her, that was all that mattered.

Caught up in her satisfaction, she couldn't resist glancing over at Jasper.

But he didn't meet her eyes. He sat ramrod straight in the head seat, his expression stern.

With no one to share in her small victory, the pleasure of it curdled into something hollow.

She let her imagination fill the gap instead, picturing how bedraggled and pitiful Gabriela must look right now, trapped in that bathroom. Even once someone finally let her out, she'd stumble back into the meeting looking like something the cat dragged in.

And when someone asked her where she'd been? Locked in a restroom.

She'd be the laughingstock of the entire board.

The thought alone was enough to bring a small, satisfied smile to Rebecca's lips.

Nine-thirty sharp. Time for the meeting to begin.

Chapter 1126

Just as Jasper rose to announce the agenda, the conference room doors burst open.

A stern-faced man strode in, an assistant trailing behind him.

The room recognized him at once.

It was the man in charge of the outer-ring bidding for the eco-friendly coastal zone.

Everyone rose to their feet.

“It’s Mr. Song.”

Out of courtesy, Jasper stood as well, greeting him politely. “Mr. Song, what brings you here today?”

Technically, since the meeting concerned the launch of the outer coastal project, Mr. Song had every right to attend as an observer.

But under normal circumstances, with the bid already awarded to Everglow, there’d have been little reason for him to show up again.

Mr. Song scanned the room, his brow furrowed. “Where is Gabriela?”

Rebecca still hadn't caught on to what was unfolding, but Jasper felt his stomach drop.

He asked carefully, "Mr. Song, is there something you need from Gabriela?"

Mr. Song explained, "Everglow won the bid for the outer coastal zone. However, there's a separate supplementary contract that needs to be signed with Gabriela."

That supplementary contract had been something Gabriela herself had negotiated when the deal was finalized, establishing her as the lead on this project.

Beverley and Mason both knew about it already.

"Gabriela arranged to sign it with me here, at today's shareholder meeting, in front of the full board."

Every piece clicked into place for Jasper.

There was no way Gabriela would show up on her first day back completely unprepared. No way she'd be careless enough to get locked in a bathroom for over ten minutes.

She wasn't the type to slip up like that.

Realizing this, he offered quickly, “It’s Gabriela’s first day back — she may still be finding her way around the building. I’m not sure which floor she’s ended up on. I’ll send someone to find her right away.”

Mr. Song’s frown deepened.

“Everglow held priority bidding rights thanks to the policy changes, but the terms we offered were still generous. When I negotiated with Gabriela, we agreed verbally that if she failed to show and sign today, the bid would be void.”

It had been a verbal agreement, yes — but with legal counsel from both sides present at the time, it carried full legal weight.

And right now, Gabriela was, without question, nowhere to be found.

Even someone as slow as Rebecca finally understood what was happening.

Mr. Song was saying that if Gabriela didn’t show up to sign today, the entire new project could be scrapped.

And just fifteen minutes earlier, Rebecca had personally locked her in that bathroom.

Recalling Gabriela's unbothered tone over the phone, Rebecca clenched her fists so hard they trembled with rage.

No way.

Rebecca flatly refused to go and free Gabriela herself, her defiance plain for anyone to see.

Once Mr. Song had finished explaining, he glanced around the room.

"Today is the final deadline. If Gabriela doesn't come sign in person, don't blame me, Mr. Howard, for withdrawing the contract."

Chapter 1127

Once withdrawn, Mr. Song would be free to reopen the bidding process entirely.

Given all the recent chaos surrounding Everglow Group online, that stretch of coastline had grown considerably more valuable. A higher asking price the second time around would only work in his favor.

The implication landed on everyone in the room at once.

A flicker crossed Jasper's eyes.

If the deal genuinely collapsed, it would be a serious loss for Everglow Group.

But for him personally, it might be exactly the opening he needed to chip away at Gabriela's standing.

While Jasper quietly weighed his options, someone spoke up. "Mr. Howard, isn't Gabriela already somewhere in the building? Shouldn't we send someone to find her right away?"

Jasper snapped back to attention.

Of course — Gabriela was already at the company. If she failed to show up and sign, plenty of suspicious eyes would land on him and Rebecca both.

He knew perfectly well Gabriela wasn't the type to leave an opening this glaring for anyone to exploit.

Realizing the danger of the situation, he broke into a cold sweat and immediately sent his assistant off to track her down.

Just as Luther slipped out of the room, Matthew walked back in.

He'd just gotten off the phone with Beverley and already knew what was happening. The moment he entered, his eyes went straight to Rebecca. "Step outside. We need to talk."

He pulled her out into the hallway and studied her for a long moment before speaking. "Do you understand what it would cost this company if that contract falls through?"

"What does that have to do with me?" Rebecca shot back. "It's obviously Gabriela's own trap. If the contract fails, that's on her."

"You took advantage of her stepping into the restroom to lock the door on her from outside," Matthew said, each word deliberate. "Rebecca, this isn't the moment to argue the point — you need to go apologize properly and bring her back into that room."

Rebecca's eyes burned red with anger. "I'm not going."

"You're not going? You were the one responsible for this project. If word gets out that the deal collapsed, you're the one who'll be humiliated first." Matthew's disappointment was plain, and he didn't soften it. "And beyond that, the other board members will vote to have you removed."

Removal from the board would make any future return nearly impossible.

The color drained from Rebecca's face.

She'd held her ground at headquarters for years, and yet Gabriela's return had, with almost no effort, pushed her toward losing her seat entirely.

It was utterly humiliating.

At last, pale and furious, Rebecca walked over and unlocked the restroom door herself.

Inside, Gabriela stood in the stall, phone in hand, apparently absorbed in something. At the sound of the door, she glanced up, her gaze settling coolly on Rebecca.

Seeing how composed she looked only made Rebecca want to bite through her own lip in frustration.

"Gabriela. Come out."

Chapter 1128

Gabriela shook her head with a small smile. "Rebecca, when you locked me in here, did you really think I'd just walk right out the moment you showed up?"

Rebecca glared at her, venomous. "I came and opened the door myself. What more do you want?"

“An apology.” Gabriela’s expression stayed perfectly even. “Even kindergartners know to admit when they’ve done something wrong. You’re plenty old enough to know that too — do I really need to spell it out for you?”

Gabriela was calling her old, now?

Fury lit up Rebecca’s eyes.

“Gabriela, don’t push your luck. I only had you locked in there for less than half an hour. Just be reasonable and come out already.”

“Is apologizing really that hard?” Gabriela studied her. “Saying ‘I’m sorry’ should be a lot easier than sneaking around locking a bathroom door, wouldn’t you think? Or does wrongdoing come naturally to you, while an apology feels like pulling teeth?”

Rebecca’s eyes went wide with outrage.

“Gabriela! Enough!”

Gabriela stayed perfectly calm. “I’ll count to three. If you haven’t apologized by then, I won’t sign the contract today. It’s not as though I need a seat on the board that badly.”

She hadn’t come back to climb any corporate ladder — she’d come back to stir things up.

Hearing the casual ease in her voice, panic flared in Rebecca.

Gabriela had already threatened to count to ten before making her open the door personally. Now she was cutting it down to three if there was no apology.

Genuinely afraid of her now, Rebecca gritted her teeth. "I'm sorry."

Gabriela smirked. "Your tone makes it sound like I'm the one who owes you an apology."

Resentment burned through Rebecca, deep and real.

But terrified Gabriela might actually refuse to sign, she forced herself to hold her composure, keeping her expression from twisting, and lowered her head. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have locked you in the restroom today."

Only then did Gabriela seem satisfied, her smile easing. "You'll admit it was a childish thing to do, won't you?"

Rebecca ground her teeth. "Yes."

“We’re both our father’s daughters,” Gabriela went on, “and yet our personalities couldn’t be more different. Seems like somewhere along the way, your upbringing skipped over teaching you any wisdom, or kindness.”

“What does my mother have to do with any of this?” Rebecca’s head snapped up, eyes flashing. “Don’t you dare talk about my mother like that.”

Gabriela kept smiling, patient. “Just answer me. Is it true or not?”

Though the restroom had been cleared out, with no one daring to witness her humiliation, Rebecca felt as though a thousand eyes were watching and laughing at her all the same. She just wanted this conversation over, and Gabriela back in that meeting room.

She ground out, “Yes.”

“Yes to what, exactly?” Gabriela asked.

“Yes — my mother raised me poorly, and that’s why I turned out foolish and wicked!” Rebecca’s face contorted with fury. “Gabriela, does that satisfy you?”

Satisfied at last, Gabriela tucked her phone away and smiled. “Let’s go back to the meeting.”

Back in the conference room, Gabriela signed the contract with Mr. Song without delay, shaking his hand and exchanging smiles in front of the assembled shareholders.

With some idea of why she'd been delayed, Mr. Song chuckled. "Miss Gabriela, your sharp thinking is impressive. I look forward to working together again in the future."

"You flatter me, Mr. Song."

Having successfully closed the contract, Gabriela had not only embarrassed Rebecca but made an unmistakable impression of her own.

The company's leadership found themselves seeing her in an entirely new light.

They'd assumed, at first, that she was simply clever — but by the time she'd pitched the seaside resort plan, she'd already laid every piece of groundwork in advance.

If her return to the company went smoothly, fine, it would be uneventful.

But if anyone dared to plot against her, she was fully prepared to take Everglow Group down right along with them.

This young woman, evidently, was sharp — and calculating in a way that demanded caution.

With that foundation set, Matthew easily pushed through Gabriela's induction onto the board, and not a single elder dared to object.

And since she was his biological daughter, securing her the role of director of the planning department followed as a natural next step.

By the end of that single day, Gabriela had gone from "Miss Gabriela" to Everglow Group's "Director Gabriela."

When Wesley heard the news, he couldn't help but laugh.

His woman really was fearless — he wondered if there was anything at all she wouldn't take on.

Bold as ever, Gabriela was walking out of Everglow Group headquarters beside Matthew, her pace notably slow.

He glanced over, catching the hesitation on her face. "Something else on your mind?"

Today, Gabriela had left the entire shareholders' meeting stunned — even Jasper had started speaking to her with newfound wariness.

This was Jasper, who had spent years running Everglow like his own private domain. Gabriela's return had, unexpectedly, planted a real seed of threat in him.

Matthew looked at his daughter's face, so strikingly like Alanna's, and felt a quiet warmth settle over him.

Their daughter had turned out remarkable. Alanna, wherever she was, would surely be proud, watching her now.

"Dad," Gabriela said, "I want to add Lauren on WhatsApp."

Matthew blinked, caught off guard.

Given the friction already between Gabriela and Lauren, wanting to reach out to her on WhatsApp now surely meant something was in the works.

"Gabriela, whatever you need, let me handle it, all right?"

Being too aggressive wasn't always the wisest move.

She'd already stolen the spotlight today with the supplementary contract with Mr. Song. He worried that provoking Lauren on top of that might invite unnecessary trouble.

"This is something I need to do myself." Gabriela stepped closer and looped her arm through his, her voice softening as she pleaded. "Dad, please. Just send me her contact."

She rarely acted this way with him, and before he quite realized what he was doing, he'd already sent it over.

He gave her hair a helpless ruffle. "You really should learn some restraint."

Chapter 1130

The McCoy family might not carry the same weight as the Howards, but their lineage was still respectable — not to mention Ariadne's connections with the mafia abroad.

Lauren was no simple opponent; if she were, Matthew wouldn't have struggled this long trying to secure a divorce.

"I understand," Gabriela said, already adding the contact.

At first, Lauren refused the request outright. But once Gabriela attached a message — Would you like to see what your daughter foolishly admitted to? — the request was accepted almost instantly.

Once connected, Gabriela skipped any greeting and sent the video straight away.

It was the clip from earlier, of Rebecca admitting to being foolish.

Having sent it, Gabriela felt a wave of satisfaction and turned to Matthew. “Dad, want to come by for dinner tonight? I’ll cook.”

His eyes lit up. “If Gabriela’s cooking, I’m definitely coming.”

He’d get to see his adorable grandson, too.

Father and daughter walked on, laughing together, neither noticing Rebecca standing behind a pillar not far off, watching them with eyes full of resentment.

Her father seemed so warm with Gabriela.

They laughed and talked like real family.

But thinking back over the years, her own father had always been cold toward her — never once speaking to her with that kind of ease or warmth.

Nails nearly digging grooves into the column, Rebecca finally heard Jasper speak beside her. "Let's go. I'll take you home."

Still in a foul mood, she said nothing.

Jasper patted her shoulder gently, offering comfort. "Don't let it get to you. As far as I'm concerned, you're still my only sister."

In truth, given how favored Gabriela had become, Jasper should have been working to win her over instead.

Rumor already had it that Matthew intended to hand over a substantial share of the company to her.

But it was plain Gabriela wasn't on his side, so he had no choice but to settle for second best and work on Rebecca instead.

After all, the McCoy family standing behind her carried real weight, and could prove useful when it mattered most.

Hearing the gentleness in Jasper's voice, Rebecca found a measure of comfort in it.

Whatever Gabriela accomplished, Jasper would never truly claim her as a stepsister.

What Rebecca didn't know was that even as she found some small comfort, her mother was seething with rage.

The video Gabriela had sent showed Rebecca admitting that her mother had raised her poorly — foolish and wicked, in her own words.

It was practically an outright confession that she was inferior to Alanna.

Lauren had lived a comfortable, privileged life, and Alanna had been the thorn lodged permanently in her side, the source of endless discomfort.

She'd been a constant irritation — souring meals, ruining conversations, robbing Lauren of sleep for years.

And now, her most precious daughter had gone and admitted to Gabriela that she was somehow lesser than Alanna.

Fury swept through Lauren, and she cleared everything off the table in one violent motion, smashing the cups on the nearby coffee table to the floor.

The butler and maids kept their distance, not daring to step closer.

