

His kiss 1161

Chapter 1161

“Because of me?” Aubrey was floored. “What does that have to do with me?”

“They’re asking for an 880,000-yuan dowry — around \$120,000. How are we supposed to come up with that? Old Zhang’s son next door was interested in you, you know, and he was willing to pay 880,000 as a marriage settlement, but you turned him down. All that wasted time, when you could’ve helped your brother out...”

A headache was already building behind Aubrey’s eyes.

She was grateful to her parents for giving her life, for putting her through school — but none of that meant she was willing to be treated like something to be sold off.

“Mom, I didn’t like him. I have a boyfriend.”

“You mean Kevin?” Her mother’s face twisted with distaste at the name. “That penniless nobody? He couldn’t scrape together 880,000, let alone 88,000! Let me be clear — your father and I are completely against you being with him.”

“That’s not your decision to make.”

Aubrey rarely pushed back against her mother, but where Kevin was concerned, she refused to yield.

Hearing her daughter raise her voice, her mother froze for a second before exploding.

“You ungrateful child! I risked my life bringing you into this world! How dare you raise your voice at your own mother!”

With that, she reached out and grabbed Aubrey’s ear.

“Think you’re so independent now, do you? Just wait until your father gets our things up here. We’ll see how he handles you!”

“Mom, let go! Stop pulling my ear!” Aubrey cried out, her face twisting in pain. “You’re hurting my eye!”

The ear her mother had grabbed sat right beside her injured eye, and the tugging dragged straight across the wound, the pain suddenly unbearable.

Her mother, consumed by anger, didn’t let up.

“You ungrateful wretch! We sacrificed everything to put you through college. And now you’ve graduated, worked a few years, and suddenly you’re too good for us? You’d raise your voice at your own mother?”

“Mom, it hurts! Please, let go...”

Tears streamed down Aubrey’s face as the pain became unbearable.

Sensing something had gone badly wrong, one of the caregivers rushed in to pull her mother away.

That was when Aubrey’s father arrived. Taking in the chaos, he didn’t bother asking a single question before wading straight into it.

The hospital room dissolved into shouting and scuffling.

It wasn’t until hospital security arrived to pull everyone apart that things finally settled.

Aubrey’s injured eye throbbed with pain. She wanted to cover it with her hand but didn’t dare touch it. Overwhelmed, she cried out, “My eye hurts so much!”

One of the caregivers dashed off to find a doctor.

Meanwhile, her mother kept right on complaining. “Making such a fuss over a little injury! Do you have any idea how much money you’re wasting, sitting in this hospital? That money could go toward your brother’s car instead!”

Everyone in the room stared at her, speechless.

Even Aubrey's father, catching the looks from the people around them, finally muttered, "Enough. That's enough talking."

Chapter 1162

Only then did her mother go quiet.

The moment Wesley heard what had happened, he rushed back at once.

Pulling Aubrey's hand aside, he found the bandage over her injured eye soaked through with blood — a genuinely alarming sight.

Alarmed, the caregivers called Gabriela right away.

Since she was the one who'd hired them, reporting anything urgent to her first was second nature.

By the time Gabriela arrived, Aubrey was already back in surgery, with Wesley assisting in repairing the damage to her eye.

The caregivers recounted everything that had happened, including every word Aubrey's mother had said.

Alissa, who'd been in the middle of discussing a new project with Gabriela, had come along too.

Hearing the story, she was thoroughly disgusted.

"What kind of parents are these? They get a new house out of the relocation deal and hand it straight to their son and his girlfriend, and then they show up here to leech off their daughter?"

Alissa's temper flared. "And when she refuses, they turn to violence?"

"Are these even parents? They sound more like enemies."

She turned on Aubrey's parents, fury written across her face. "Are you two some kind of monsters? Her eye injury is serious — it needs careful treatment. Instead of taking care of her, you make it worse?"

Still simmering, Aubrey's mother snapped back. "And who exactly are you? It's a parent's right to discipline their own child. What business is it of yours?"

"This is unbelievable." Alissa's temper flared, and she rolled up her sleeves, planting her hands on her hips. "You two leeches don't deserve to be called parents. Aubrey should cut you both off entirely."

Aubrey's parents, used to being praised back in the village for raising a college-educated daughter, hadn't been spoken to like this in years.

But with Aubrey still in surgery, her father chose to hold his tongue for the moment. Instead, he pulled out a hand-rolled cigarette and took a few slow drags.

A nurse hurried over. "Sir, this is a hospital. You can't smoke in here."

Furious, Aubrey's father crushed the cigarette out against the floor and turned to glare at Alissa.

"Mind your own business, kid."

His expression twisted with anger, and for a moment it looked like he might actually lash out.

Gabriela, who'd had her attention on the operating room, stepped in and pulled Alissa back.

That was when Billy arrived alongside Wesley and moved in at once.

"Sir. Let's talk this through. No need for anything physical."

Billy had trained in martial arts for a few years — not exceptionally skilled, but strong enough to matter.

He caught hold of Aubrey's father's wrist, gave it a slight twist, and shoved him back firmly. The older man stumbled several steps, nearly losing his footing entirely.

Aubrey's mother hurried to steady her husband, her sagging eyes narrowing venomously as she rounded on Billy.

"Look at you, dressed all fine and proper, and yet you'd treat an elder like this? A young man like you, no less."

Chapter 1163

Billy's expression stayed cold and unmoved. "This is a hospital. Show some restraint."

"And it was you who put your hands on someone first. Who's the uncivilized one here?" Aubrey's mother spat on the floor in contempt. "A disgrace, that's what you are."

Billy had a knack for handling high-stakes, delicate situations — but going toe-to-toe with a loudmouthed, aggrieved countrywoman was a fight he had no chance of winning.

Jaw tight, he stayed silent.

“What, cat got your tongue now that you know you’re in the wrong?” Emboldened, Aubrey’s mother launched right back into it. “She’s our daughter. Disciplining her is our business as parents. But you? You’re a stranger — not even her boyfriend. What right do you have meddling in our family’s affairs? Nothing but a busybody sticking your nose where it doesn’t belong.”

With no interest in dragging out an argument this pointless, Billy stepped back several paces, his expression icy.

Watching all this unfold, Alissa was so furious she nearly laughed out loud.

Growing up, she’d always considered her own father something of a disappointment, but apparently her mother wasn’t much better either.

These two were openly bleeding their daughter dry to prop up their son, and somehow still had the nerve to act righteous about it.

She stepped in front of Billy and fixed Aubrey’s mother with a sharp, cutting stare, her palm practically itching to slap the woman across the face.

Knowing Alissa’s fiery temper, and how easily her privileged upbringing could push her into acting rashly, Gabriela quickly stepped in and held her back.

Alissa always listened to Gabriela — and seeing her shake her head, she gritted her teeth and forced herself to hold still.

Only then did Gabriela turn her full attention to Aubrey's mother.

She started with careful politeness. "You're Aubrey's mother, I take it?"

Sensing the courtesy in Gabriela's tone, the woman grew even more haughty, practically looking down her nose.

"That's right," she said, smug.

Gabriela's voice stayed level and measured. "Even though Aubrey is your daughter, what you just did constitutes intentional assault. Everyone here witnessed it. One phone call from me, and you could be looking at jail time."

Since her opponents were leaning on ignorance as an excuse for their behavior, Gabriela had no qualms about turning that same ignorance against them.

Sure enough, the color drained from the woman's face. "What nonsense are you talking? I was disciplining my own daughter — what does that have to do with the police?"

“Aubrey’s eye condition was already serious. Just now, you pulled on her ear hard enough to reopen the wound and cause bleeding. That qualifies as grievous bodily harm. Once the doctor files the injury report, if it’s classified as minor, you’re looking at three months to three years. If it’s classified as severe — the minimum sentence is ten years.”

Chapter 1164

Gabriela spoke slowly, each word deliberate, laying it out as though explaining the law to someone entirely unfamiliar with it, making certain the weight of it landed clearly. By the time she finished, all the bluster had drained out of Aubrey’s mother. Her head dropped, though her stubborn mouth still refused to concede.

“She’s my daughter. She’d never press charges against me.”

“She doesn’t have to.”

Gabriela’s voice was sharp as a blade now. “You assaulted her and caused a scene in a hospital. Any one of us here can call the police and have you arrested.”

Gabriela knew perfectly well the police likely wouldn’t get involved in a family dispute like this — but her calm, authoritative bearing played exactly into the strategy of using their own ignorance against them.

Standing off to the side, Wesley watched the whole exchange with a faint smile, his eyes soft with something close to affection.

Faced with Gabriela's unshakable composure, Aubrey's mother finally fell quiet. She and her husband retreated to a corner and didn't dare make another sound.

At last, the hospital corridor settled into silence.

Alissa couldn't help but admire how effortlessly Gabriela had handled it all.

But then a bitter thought followed. What was the point of silencing these parasitic parents now? Aubrey would probably never fully escape them, not for the rest of her life. How tragic.

Before long, Aubrey was wheeled out of the operating room.

Allan emerged shortly after, his expression grim. He cast a cold glance at her parents and said, flatly, "Her eye was already in critical condition — recovery would have required extremely careful treatment. Now the wound's become infected again. I'm afraid her left eye will be permanently blind."

Permanently blind. The words landed on Gabriela like a physical blow, a heavy weight settling in her chest at the devastating news.

Aubrey's mother, meanwhile, shrieked in disbelief. "How is that even possible? I only tugged her ear a little! How could that make her blind?"

She rounded on Allan next, accusatory. "This is your fault! You doctors couldn't fix her, and now you're pinning it on us!"

Allan shot her a cold, withering look.

Normally, he didn't let himself get pulled into emotional confrontations with a patient's family. His focus stayed on treatment, nothing else.

But this time, their actions had directly caused irreversible harm to his patient, and it was enough to strip away his usual composure. His expression turned hard, unyielding.

"From now on, while Aubrey remains in this hospital, neither of you is permitted to see her," he said firmly.

Her mother screeched in protest.

"What gives you that right? She's our daughter! She's sick, and we're her parents! How dare you ban us from seeing her!"

Allan's tone didn't waver.

"If you insist on coming back, I'll help her file for a restraining order to keep you away permanently."

Already rattled by Gabriela's earlier threat, Aubrey's mother was momentarily stunned into silence.

But then, seeming to recall something, she hesitated before asking, "But we've already packed everything and come here to stay with her. If we can't see her, where are we supposed to go? Where do we sleep tonight?"

Chapter 1165

The sheer nerve of the question made Alissa's blood boil. Their daughter was on the verge of losing her sight entirely, and all they cared about was where they'd be sleeping?

She couldn't hold back any longer. "What about your son? Is he dead?"

Aubrey's mother exploded. "How dare you curse my son, you vile girl!"

"Then get him over here to sort out your living situation," Alissa shot back. "If he won't show up, I'll book you a hotel room myself. Let's stop leaning on your son for everything. And when it comes time for your funerals someday, I'll handle that too. Somebody's got to take care of things, right?"

Alissa's sharp tongue cut far deeper than Gabriela's measured words ever could.

Having always treated their son like their most precious asset, Aubrey's parents couldn't stomach an insult this blatant.

Her father's face went beet red, his fists clenching as though he might lunge forward at any moment.

Not long ago, Aubrey's mother might have egged him on to do exactly that.

But with Allan's warning still ringing in her ears, she yanked him back instead, hissing under her breath, "Don't. If we get arrested, it'll ruin our son's chances of finding a wife."

Her husband seemed to weigh this, though the reality of their situation remained bleak.

Without access to their daughter, there was no money coming their way. And with nowhere to stay, what were they supposed to do — sleep under a bridge?

Gritting her teeth, Aubrey's mother muttered, "Then we'll sleep under a bridge."

She added, "Aren't there reporters running around these days, always looking for a story? If we sleep under a bridge a few nights, someone's bound to come sniffing around."

"And when that happens, it won't be the two of us who look bad. It'll be her." She shot Alissa a smug, satisfied glance, as though she'd just reclaimed the upper hand.

Alissa was utterly stunned by the sheer shamelessness of these parents.

Even if they didn't care that their daughter had been hospitalized and hurt — couldn't they at least hold onto a scrap of dignity?

Exploiting her like this, willing to tarnish her name without a second's hesitation, all just to keep sponging off her?

She wasn't especially close to Aubrey, but even so, the whole spectacle left her thoroughly disgusted.

"Go ahead and make a scene if you want," Alissa said coldly. "But trust me, I can find someone to have you thrown out of here for good."

Aubrey's mother, though, didn't believe for a second that a pretty young thing like Alissa would actually follow through on something like that. She shot right back, "Fine. We'll go find the nearest overpass right now. If you're so bold, don't even bother pushing us out — we'll jump ourselves!"

She stood there, defiant, almost daring Alissa to try something, her expression practically shouting, If you can't get rid of me, you'll be stuck with me forever.

Alissa was livid.

Aubrey seemed like such a reasonable, decent person. How on earth had she ended up with parents this shameless?

Gabriela tugged gently at Alissa's sleeve. "Let me handle this."

Chapter 1166

She hadn't wanted to meddle in Aubrey's family business — every family had its own mess, and interference wasn't always welcome.

But with Aubrey unconscious, and her parents threatening to camp out on an overpass and make a public spectacle of it, there was no way that wouldn't upset her the moment she woke up.

Fine, Gabriela thought. For her sake, I'll get involved this once.

She turned to Aubrey's mother with a warm smile. "Which overpass were you planning on? I can help arrange for reporters to be there. I'll make sure everything goes exactly the way you'd want."

Aubrey's mother froze, eyeing Gabriela with sudden suspicion.

"You're really that kindhearted?"

“Aubrey’s my closest friend,” Gabriela said earnestly. “I’d never do anything to hurt you.” Her tone stayed calm, sincere. “And I promise — the reporters I bring in will be thorough. They won’t just cover how Aubrey’s injuries have kept her from looking after you two. They’ll also dig into how the entire relocation compensation, the new house, all of it, went to your son. And how he and his girlfriend moved into that new home before they were even married, while the two of you, her poor parents, ended up leaning on your daughter instead.”

Before Gabriela could even finish, malice twisted across the older woman’s face, her eyes narrowing on Gabriela.

“Are you trying to ruin my son’s future?”

“This was your idea, wasn’t it?” Gabriela replied, her expression steady and unbothered. “And even if the reporters I find don’t dig deep enough, the internet will do the rest on its own. People these days are remarkably resourceful. Unless something’s buried very deep, it all comes out in less than a day.”

Even as she spoke, a small pang of regret settled in her chest.

The old Gabriela would have let these two run their little scheme for a few more days before dragging every last bit of their filth into the light — making sure they experienced the full weight of public shame, so thoroughly humiliated they’d never dare try something this despicable on their own daughter again.

But now, knowing what she did of Aubrey, Gabriela suspected she wouldn’t want things pushed that far. Otherwise, Aubrey would never have let herself be used like this by her family for so many years already.

For now, it seemed wiser to de-escalate. At the very least, Aubrey needed some peace to recover.

Her parents were thoroughly cowed by Gabriela's words, no longer daring to try any of their earlier stunts.

Their original plan had simply been to pressure their daughter into giving them a place to stay. But if it meant risking their son's future, it wasn't worth the gamble.

Tails tucked between their legs, they left the hospital.

In the corner of the ground-floor lobby, their luggage still sat piled high. Earlier, Aubrey's father had dragged suitcase after suitcase in; now he hauled them back out one by one, hailing a taxi.

As her mother fretted over the cost of the cab ride, an ache crept into her chest.

Chapter 1167

She'd been so certain they'd be settled into their daughter's place the moment they arrived — otherwise she'd never have dared bring this much luggage along in the first place.

What she hadn't counted on was Aubrey's injuries being severe enough to require surgery. Just the thought of the medical bills made her heart twist further.

Surgery costs?

Her eyes widened as a sudden thought struck her.

She grabbed her husband's arm. "Wait — didn't Aubrey hand over her whole paycheck to us every month? Then where did the money for the surgery come from?"

Her husband frowned. "Maybe her friends paid for it? Did you see how nicely dressed they were?"

It was only after arriving in Okburg, this sprawling metropolis, that they'd realized just how wealthy Aubrey's circle of friends actually was.

But her mother shook her head. "Would friends really be that generous? Even if they lent her the money, she'd still have to pay it back eventually."

Her husband looked at her, confused. "What exactly are you getting at?"

"I'm saying we can't leave yet," she said, urgent. "Aubrey just had surgery. That surely cost a fortune. If she ends up paying that off with her future paychecks, we won't see a single dime of it!"

Her husband's patience finally snapped.

Sure, he had his own bias toward sons over daughters, and a temper to match — but he wasn't a complete fool.

"Our daughter's lying in a hospital bed. Can you stop worrying about her paycheck, just for once?"

When she tried to argue back, he shot her a cold look. "And you — why couldn't you just talk to her properly? Why'd you have to get physical, when she's already hurt?"

He was fairly sure it was her habit of resorting to violence that had made Aubrey's injuries worse in the first place.

Cowed by his glare, her mother lowered her voice. "So what do we do now?"

Figuring Aubrey's recovery would take some time, her father decided it made sense to head back to their hometown for now. The new house from the relocation project had several rooms — plenty of space for them there.

But her mother was dead set against it.

"Absolutely not. With the wedding expenses still unsettled, Shirleen's already getting antsy. What if she calls off the marriage with our son?"

Her husband's eyes went wide. "She's already pregnant with his child. Why would she call it off?"

"She's been threatening to terminate the pregnancy if we don't come up with the money soon," her mother said grimly.

And more importantly, Shirleen's own family was quite well-off. She was an only child, and her family owned two properties. Once her parents were gone, both would fall to their son eventually.

Her husband turned the thought over seriously.

Just then, a familiar figure hurried toward them.

Aubrey's mother stepped forward at once, blocking his path.

"Kevin? What are you doing here?"

Kevin had rushed over the second he'd heard Aubrey was hurt and in the hospital.

Worried sick about her condition, he still managed a polite greeting for her parents.

“Mr. and Mrs. Zhao. You’re here too?”

Chapter 1168

Her mother shot him a hostile look. “We’re here to take care of our daughter. What’s your excuse for being here?”

“Aubrey’s hurt. I’m her boyfriend—”

Before he could finish, her mother cut him off sharply.

“Boyfriend? Don’t make me laugh. My daughter would never date someone as broke as you.”

Kevin’s fists clenched, his temper straining against the leash he kept on it. “Mrs. Zhao, I just came to check on her. Can we talk about this later?”

“No, we cannot,” Aubrey’s mother snapped, ice in her voice. “The Zhang boy from the next village over has already offered 880,000 yuan for her dowry. You’d better stop clinging to her before you ruin her future.”

Kevin’s expression darkened instantly. He met her eyes, his voice low and unwavering.

“Aubrey would never agree to that.”

“She’s our daughter,” her mother shot back coldly. “It’s not hers to disagree with.” She waved him off with contempt written all over her face. “Now get out of here. Some broke nobody thinking he has a shot with my educated daughter. What a joke.”

Kevin drew several deep breaths, forcing down the anger rising in his chest.

He’d always had a temper on him, and though the years had softened it somewhat, he still struggled to hold it fully in check.

If these two weren’t Aubrey’s parents, he might already have thrown a punch by now.

Seeing the dark look settle over his face, Aubrey’s mother felt both smug and repulsed at once.

“Pathetic,” she sneered. “Now scram.”

Kevin drew a long breath.

The thought of Aubrey’s injured eye, of the lonely days she’d already spent in that hospital bed while he’d only just learned any of it — it burned in his chest like a flame.

His feelings for her had undeniably dulled over time, thinned out into something as bland as water. He'd caught himself finding her irritating more than once, growing weary of her clingy, dependent parents, running short on patience for how much reassurance she seemed to need.

But Aubrey had stayed by his side for nine years.

Nine years wasn't just a number — it was a whole fabric of shared moments, woven from late-night texts and stolen hours together. It was every night he came home worn out from overtime, only to find a sweet little message waiting: Don't work too hard.

It was holidays spent scraping together whatever free time they could find, wandering the streets, catching a movie, sharing snacks until nothing was left.

Kevin pressed a hand against his left wrist.

The mechanical watch he wore had been a gift from Aubrey, given to him four years back.

For the first time, he swallowed his pride and pleaded with her parents. "Uncle Zhao, Aunt Zhao. Please. Let me see Aubrey."

"She won't see you." Aubrey's mother sneered coldly. "Aubrey listens to me above everyone else — my word's the final one. I'm standing right here, and if I say no, you're not seeing her. Not in this lifetime."

Chapter 1169

Kevin turned to her father instead. "Uncle Zhao, Aubrey's hurt. She has to want me by her side to look after her..."

"Just go." Aubrey's father waved him off, his expression no friendlier than his wife's. "You and Aubrey were never a good match anyway."

The urge to push past them and storm inside overwhelmed Kevin, but her mother lunged forward first, grabbing at him, screaming.

"You're not going in! Useless, broke loser! If you had any real dignity, you'd let my daughter move on and stop wasting her time!"

"She's already thrown away nine precious years on you, and for what? She's got better options now. How do you have this little self-awareness?"

Her words cut deep — the kind no man could easily swallow. And with Kevin's quick temper and thin skin, something in him started to boil over.

She kept taunting him. "What's wrong? Not tough enough to take a few words, so now you want to hit me?"

Kevin turned and walked away.

If he stayed and kept trading words with her, he wasn't confident he'd hold himself back.

Whatever else happened, he refused to lose Aubrey entirely.

But parents like hers — they'd always loom over any future marriage like a threat waiting to happen.

For the first time, Kevin found himself hesitating.

It wasn't until her mother's cursing faded behind him that he finally pulled out his phone to call Aubrey.

She'd only just been brought back to her room.

The anesthesia hadn't worn off yet, and she was still unconscious.

With no one there to hear it, the phone sat forgotten in the drawer, ringing out unanswered.

Kevin tried several times, and when nothing came through, he switched to a text instead.

“Aubrey, call me back when you see this.”

Time passed. When she finally woke, the pain in her eye was unbearable, her face etched with it.

After a round of tests, Dr. Allan Su delivered the news, grim.

“Given the second injury, there’s a strong chance you’ll lose your vision permanently.”

Aubrey froze for a beat. Tears slid down her one good eye as the weight of his words settled in.

She didn’t scream, didn’t break down. She simply cried, and asked, “Dr. Su — isn’t there anything that can still be done?”

Allan had been furious with her parents earlier, but the more he understood her home situation, the more that anger softened into something closer to pity.

His tone had been sharp before, but the sight of her tears eased him.

“Stop crying. I’ll do everything I can to save your vision.”

Even he wasn't entirely sure why he'd been acting this way.

She was his patient, someone he should have been offering steady comfort and patience — and yet he'd been unusually harsh with her.

He rubbed at his temples and added, "Get some rest. And don't let yourself get hurt like this again."

Noticing how tired he looked, Aubrey said quickly, "Dr. Su, I'm all right now. Please, go home and rest."

Chapter 1170

He was a renowned physician, and if not for Gabriela's connection, he would never have been the one treating her. It was already late, and he'd been on his feet all day, only to end it dealing with her tears on top of everything else.

A pang of guilt hit her.

Genuinely exhausted, Allan gave a few final instructions and left.

Gabriela and Alissa slipped into the room, staying with Aubrey a while, talking with her gently until her emotions steadied before they finally left too.

On the drive home with Wesley, Gabriela let out a quiet sigh.

He reached over and patted her head, his voice soft and coaxing. "You don't have to carry problems that aren't yours to solve."

"Mm," she answered quietly.

She wasn't the type to dwell on things. Growing up the way she had, she'd built up a thick skin and a resilience that didn't crack easily.

In her experience, plenty of problems that couldn't be fixed right away were better set aside entirely. Whatever the situation, there was always a chance things would look better eventually.

Still, Aubrey's sudden accident, and the real possibility of permanent blindness, had caught her completely off guard, and she couldn't shake the ache of sympathy for her friend.

Noticing her quiet, Wesley didn't push the matter further.

Back at the villa, he waited while she showered, then helped dry her hair afterward.

Halfway through, she leaned against the sofa and drifted off to sleep.

She'd been running herself ragged lately.

Wesley looked down at her peaceful, sleeping face, an expression somewhere between amusement and helplessness.

She hadn't even sorted out her own mess of a life, and here she was, still worrying over everyone else's troubles.

But that was exactly who she was — and exactly the part of her he treasured most.

He brushed a hand along her cheek, turned the dryer down to its gentlest setting, and patiently finished drying the rest of her hair.

After tucking her into bed and pulling the blanket up, his phone rang.

He answered right away, stepping out onto the balcony before speaking, his voice lowered.

"Grandfather."

Roger's voice came through with a grunt. "What took you so long to pick up?"

Wesley shut the balcony door quietly behind him. "It's late, Grandfather. What's this about?"

"Whatever you said at Horizon Club the other day has already spread through half the social circles in the city."

That day, in front of so many prominent figures, Wesley had openly raised the subject of marriage with Gabriela. Her visible hesitation had stirred up plenty of talk — and, apparently, a fair amount of embarrassment for the Moss family besides.

"Is that so," Wesley said, unbothered, his tone flat.

"Bring her to the Moss estate tomorrow. Introduce her to the family."

The Moss clan, still bound by old traditions, was sprawling and deeply layered. Plenty of relatives quietly resented Wesley's position as heir to the Moss Group, waiting for the smallest misstep.

Now, with his relationship under this much public scrutiny, failing to act decisively would only invite trouble from those looking to undercut him.

"Tomorrow won't work," Wesley said, flat.

