

His kiss 1171

Chapter 1171

He knew Gabriela wasn't ready for marriage, not yet, and he had no intention of letting his grandfather's pressure land on her unnecessarily. He shut the idea down without hesitation.

Roger's tone soured instantly.

"What kind of attitude is that? Put her on the phone. I'll speak to her myself."

"Say whatever you need to say to me," Wesley said, still calm. "I'll pass it along to her."

Catching the protective edge creeping into his grandson's voice, Roger's temper flared. "This is ridiculous!"

She wasn't even married into the family yet, and already Wesley was shielding her like this.

Once she did marry in, she'd have him completely wrapped around her finger — an unforgivable weakness for a man in his position.

Wesley let his grandfather's anger roll right past him.

“Grandfather, I know exactly what I’m doing. If that’s all, I’ll hang up now. Get some rest.”

Roger was so worked up he could barely draw a full breath.

“Since you’re set on that girl, fine — I’ll stop making things difficult for the marriage. Just get it done as soon as possible.”

Gabriela came from modest beginnings, had never been raised on the family’s rules of etiquette, and had crossed him more than once already. As an old man, he’d decided to let it go, agreeing to welcome her into the Moss family.

Still, her attitude toward him remained utterly outrageous.

Hearing his grandfather’s approval, something in Wesley lifted, a quiet flicker of relief.

At least Roger wouldn’t come at Gabriela with hostility anymore — not the way he had before, every word laced with threat and anger.

It seemed her recent conduct had left an impression on the old man, paired no doubt with his own eagerness to finally see a great-grandchild in the family.

Wesley’s tone eased, softened slightly.

“Thank you, Grandfather. Don’t worry — I’ll marry her as soon as I can.”

After hanging up, he stepped back into the bedroom, looking down at Gabriela, still fast asleep, and let out a long breath.

He understood, better than anyone, what she was resisting.

Wesley owed his life to Allan.

He hadn’t caused Allan’s death directly, but Allan’s misfortune had, unmistakably, traced its roots back to him.

Roger hadn’t played a direct hand in it either, but he’d stood by and let it happen, all the same.

Allan’s death was a debt the Moss family bore, in part, together.

If Wesley and Gabriela married now, that history would always sit at the foundation of whatever they built.

Her return to Everglow Group was, in its own way, both her pursuit of justice for Allan and her own path toward peace.

Wesley felt an unexpected wave of relief at the thought — thankfully, Gabriela wasn't the type to lose herself in endless what-ifs. She hadn't turned her back on him, the one who had, in the end, benefited most from Allan's death.

If she had, he couldn't imagine how unbearable his life would have become.

Since she'd chosen not to run from it, he would face it head-on with her.

Wesley bent down and pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead.

Chapter 1172

Thank you for putting up with all of this, my Gabby.

Perhaps Alissa's warning had done its job — Aubrey's parents didn't show their faces at the hospital for the following two days, leaving her a peaceful stretch to recover.

But on the third day, a call came through, and she learned her parents had been staying at a nearby motel, having burned through the last of their money.

Something in Aubrey's chest softened despite herself.

Not wanting Alissa and the others to think less of her, she quietly reached out to other friends to help arrange a place for her parents to stay.

Once they had somewhere stable to settle, they showed up at the hospital the next day with a pot of chicken soup for her.

They apologized, again and again, showing what looked like real concern, and eventually Aubrey found it in herself to forgive them.

After that, her mother started visiting the hospital regularly.

Others found the whole thing exasperating, but no one interfered further — family business, after all, was family business.

Life carried on, neither quickly nor slowly.

That day, Gabriela made her way to Howard Estate, now Lauren's private residence.

Some kind of spectacle seemed all but guaranteed at today's family gathering, and Gabriela had no intention of missing it firsthand.

On the first of every month, Beverley returned to the Howard Estate for a family meal.

The tradition held, unbroken, so long as Lauren and Matthew's divorce remained unfinalized.

At the table, Rebecca and Lauren's displeasure was immediate and obvious the moment they saw Gabriela.

Rebecca had already been reeling from Gabriela's dominance at work, having lost millions to her recently, and her mood curdled the second Gabriela walked in.

She could just barely tolerate Gabriela in the office — but here, at Howard Estate, her mother's own territory, she felt no obligation to restrain herself.

Rebecca sneered, jabbing a finger toward her.

"Dad, Grandma, this is supposed to be a family gathering. Why is someone like her here?"

Her tone was sharp enough to draw a frown from Matthew. "Gabriela is a daughter of the Howard family now. Her being here makes perfect sense."

“A daughter of the Howard family — a daughter fathered on some unworthy bloodline,” Rebecca shot back bluntly. “Dad, our family name has stood for a century. How can you shamelessly let someone like her sit at this table without a shred of shame for our legacy?”

Rebecca’s words kept spiraling further out of line.

Just as Beverley opened her mouth to scold her, Gabriela set her chopsticks down against the table with a sharp, ringing clang, fixing Rebecca with a cold stare.

That glare cut like a blade, sharp enough to send a shiver crawling across Rebecca’s scalp. Without meaning to, she turned her head away, unable to hold Gabriela’s gaze.

That single flinch drained every bit of momentum right out of her.

Beverley found the whole exchange puzzling, but chose to hold her tongue.

Watching it all unfold, Lauren felt something sink in her chest.

Chapter 1173

Alanna — that despicable woman — and now her daughter, forever standing in Rebecca's way, always managing to overshadow her.

Under the table, Lauren gave Rebecca's hand a squeeze before speaking, her voice cold.

"Gabriela, Rebecca's just in a bad mood, give her some slack. What's the meaning of throwing your chopsticks down in front of your elders like that? Is that how your mother raised you?"

The jab at Gabriela's upbringing was unmistakable, deliberate.

"Dad, I told you we shouldn't have come here," Gabriela said, ignoring Lauren entirely and speaking straight to Matthew. "I've lost my appetite with these two around. I'm leaving."

Lauren let out a cold little laugh.

Running to daddy the moment things didn't go her way — was Gabriela still three years old?

Matthew stopped her quickly, then turned a hard frown on Rebecca instead.

"Rebecca. Let me ask you something — did you recently take over a restaurant through some friend's connection?"

Rebecca perked right up, pride swelling. Even without her father's prompting, she'd already been planning to brag about it to her grandmother anyway.

"Grandma, you wouldn't believe how famous this restaurant is nationwide! It's right in the heart of the busiest downtown district, the interior's designed to rival a seven-star establishment, and the previous owner sold it to me for practically nothing!"

She named the price.

Beverley's expression darkened instantly.

If everything really was as perfect as Rebecca claimed, why would the previous owner have let it go for that little?

Whenever something seemed too good, there was always a catch buried somewhere.

Oblivious to Beverley's reaction, Rebecca kept going, proud. "The place has only been open for less than a year. All the paperwork's finalized, and it's entirely under my management now..."

Even Lauren was starting to sense something was off.

“Rebecca, were there any conditions attached to the purchase agreement?” she asked quickly.

Rebecca considered for a moment. “I think there was one clause. I had to take over all the restaurant’s existing partnerships — whether they were profitable or not.”

Beverley’s hand trembled as her temper snapped. “You fool! You signed something with a clause that obvious without even reading it properly? Didn’t you bring legal counsel with you?”

Rebecca grew defensive, impatient. “One of my closest friends made the introduction. He wouldn’t lie to me! The owner needed cash fast because his other business was struggling — that’s the only reason he’d sell that cheap...”

“Hmph.”

Gabriela let out a short, sharp laugh, rose from her seat, and started to walk away.

The mockery in it was unmistakable, and it lit Rebecca’s temper instantly.

“Gabriela, what’s that supposed to mean? Jealous of my connections? If you don’t like it, then leave!”

“Father, I truly can’t stand being around Rebecca right now. I’m leaving,” Gabriela said, turning to go.

“Gabriela, wait.” Matthew stopped her again, then rounded on Rebecca, his voice hard. “Do you have any idea you’ve just been completely swindled?”

Rebecca waved off the concern with an air of complete indifference and went to fetch the contract from her room.

Chapter 1174

“Dad, take a good look at it yourself. There’s nothing wrong with it.”

Between the bet she’d lost and the sting still fresh from that loss, this restaurant deal had felt like her chance to finally turn things around, and she’d jumped at it eagerly.

She’d read the contract carefully herself and found nothing amiss. Besides, the broker was one of her most trusted friends — she’d had little reason to second-guess any of it.

Matthew took the contract and read it thoroughly, his expression darkening steadily as he reached the final clause.

“There’s an added stipulation here. Once the restaurant opens, it’s obligated to supply at least 150,000 handcrafted Zeng-brand artisanal breads — the kind renowned across the culinary world for their quality — to Century Grand Hotel, every single month.”

Century Grand Hotel operated dozens of locations nationwide, so spread out across the chain, 150,000 loaves a month sounded almost manageable. But for a single restaurant like Rebecca's, that volume represented an enormous revenue stream. She could already picture the guaranteed monthly income pouring straight into her account.

Her expression eased right back into satisfaction.

"I know all about that. Zeng refers to Zeng Tong — he's our restaurant's culinary consultant, and he runs a top-tier team. Producing 150,000 loaves a month won't be a problem at all."

Zeng Tong had appeared on numerous high-profile cooking shows and the country's most-watched culinary programs, cementing his name as something of a culinary icon. Once head chef at a seven-star hotel, he'd cooked for European royalty and any number of celebrities.

Wherever he and his team went, acclaim followed close behind.

The restaurant — called Eight Treasures — had built its reputation entirely on the fact that its owner had brought Zeng Tong on board.

The first Eight Treasures location had opened in Holtsley, a city famous for its vibrant food culture, and had drawn food lovers from across the country. On opening day, the line had stretched over a thousand feet — a spectacle people still talked about.

By the time the second location opened, it had already caught the eye of entertainment reporters, with prominent socialites and elites clamoring to be seen dining there.

The Okburg branch hadn't even opened its doors yet, and it was already generating buzz.

At this point, Rebecca shot Gabriela a look of pure disdain.

"This restaurant was bought with my own money. It's mine, personally. However jealous you are, there's nothing you can do about it."

The place hadn't even opened, and already she had guaranteed monthly sales of 150,000 loaves locked in. Her personal account was about to swell beyond imagination.

Just the thought of it thrilled her.

Gabriela had earned some recognition for her role in the Seaside Resort Project, but she seemed to think she was the only capable person left in the Howard family, everyone else too foolish to do their due diligence.

Watching Rebecca's smugness, Matthew pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration. "Do you even know Zeng Tong's been poached by Twin Delights?"

Chapter 1175

Earlier that month, Twin Delights had secretly recruited Zeng Tong away with an exorbitant offer. The previous owner of Eight Treasures, likely already aware of this, had rushed to unload the restaurant before word got out.

“You thought you’d landed a bargain — you fell straight into a trap set for exactly the kind of person who wouldn’t check!”

Rebecca’s face paled for a beat before she forced her expression back into something like nonchalance.

“Let them poach him, then. Eight Treasures doesn’t need Zeng Tong to stay afloat.”

Besides, she’d only paid under five million for the transfer fee. If it came to nothing, so be it.

Five million was hardly a dent for someone in Rebecca’s position.

Matthew let out a long, weary sigh, as though genuinely exhausted by his daughter’s foolishness, and chose not to respond further.

Sensing something was still wrong, Lauren snatched up the contract’s addendum and read through it herself, her face draining paler with every line.

It turned out Century Grand Hotel had already paid a deposit toward the monthly bread supply — an amount equal to an entire year's worth of orders. If either party broke the contract, the penalty would run to thirty times that deposit.

Century Grand Hotel's deposit came to twenty percent of the monthly total — 300,000 a month, or 1.2 million a year.

If Rebecca's restaurant failed to deliver, the compensation owed would exceed thirty million.

The moment Lauren spelled it out for her, all the color drained from Rebecca's face.

How could this have happened?

She didn't have thirty million lying around, though Lauren could certainly step in if it came to that.

But if word of this got out, Rebecca would become the laughingstock of every social circle in the city for an entire year.

Fury darkened Beverley's face as she fixed Rebecca with a cold, disappointed glare. "A trap this obvious, and you walked straight into it. Foolish girl."

This was foolishness of the highest order.

From here on, whenever Okburg brought up the Howard family, the story of Eight Treasures would inevitably come with it. People wouldn't just shake their heads at Rebecca's stupidity — they'd lament how a family this prestigious had somehow produced such a spectacular fool.

Idiocy on this scale could only stem from unchecked greed.

Rebecca had brought real disgrace to the Howard name.

Seeing Beverley's expression sour further, Matthew hurried to smooth things over. "Mother, don't worry. Gabriela's already convinced Zeng Tong to come back and help."

Piecing the whole situation together, Rebecca's face drained paler still.

Only Gabriela could fix this?

She'd never imagined anyone would dare take advantage of her like this.

Didn't they know she was a Howard daughter? How could they not have known? But there was no time for outrage now. Trembling, she asked Gabriela, "Can you really bring him back?"

Gabriela nodded, then shook her head.

Irritated, Lauren snapped, "What is that supposed to mean, nodding and shaking your head at the same time?"

Gabriela turned to Beverley instead. "Grandmother, would you mind stepping out for a moment? Don't worry, I'll handle this."

Chapter 1176

Beverley shot Rebecca one last cold, cutting glance before allowing the butler to help her out of the Howard residence.

Furious as she was, Beverley trusted Gabriela's word on this.

Once Beverley was safely out of earshot, Gabriela turned to Lauren. "I nodded because I can help. I shook my head because I'm not happy right now. Which means, at the moment, I don't particularly feel like helping."

Rebecca's face flushed red with anger. Gritting her teeth, she demanded, "What do you want?"

Gabriela's eyes swept across the dining table, and with a small sneer, she flipped it over.

"If you can keep me entertained enough to change my mood, maybe I'll consider it."

Dishes crashed to the floor in a deafening clatter, food and shattered porcelain scattered across the ground in chaos.

Lauren's and Rebecca's faces went ashen, as if they'd just been trampled underfoot.

Matthew watched with quiet resignation.

Gabriela had been welcomed back with real effort on his part, only to be treated to insults at the dinner table. Letting her vent felt, all things considered, entirely fair.

Lauren held Rebecca back before she could retaliate, choosing instead to let Gabriela burn through her anger.

Having flipped the table, Gabriela turned and pointed at the enormous television across the room. "Can I break that too?"

Lauren's stomach dropped, and she opened her mouth to refuse.

"If not," Gabriela said, "I'm leaving."

Lauren ground her teeth and reversed course. “Go ahead.”

Rebecca stared, incredulous, her voice shaking. “Mom?!”

Why should Gabriela get to run wild like this? Losing a few million wasn’t worth this much fuss — it wasn’t as if it would ruin them!

But no one paid her objections any mind.

Gabriela grabbed a nearby chair and hurled it straight at the television screen.

With a deafening crash, the expensive display shattered into pieces.

She then pointed toward a vase sitting on a nearby display shelf.

“And that one?”

The vase was a rare, prized piece of traditional blue-and-white porcelain, worth nearly a million, one Lauren had brought over from the McCoy family.

Before Lauren could even answer, Gabriela gave it a casual shove.

The porcelain hit the floor and shattered instantly.

Lauren's face twitched, a pain in her chest like something bleeding.

Gabriela smirked, thoroughly satisfied. "That's a lovely sound. Must've been expensive."

Lauren was seething with rage.

That vase was worth nearly a million — an irreplaceable blue-and-white porcelain piece — and that reckless girl had shattered it without a second thought.

All because she had some leverage over Gabriela's problem, she'd decided she could act however she pleased. Lauren swore to herself she'd find a way to make Gabriela pay for this, one way or another.

"I don't need your help!"

Gabriela suddenly wrenched free of Lauren's grip, her frustration finally spilling over.

“I’ll pay for it myself. A few million is nothing to me. Rebecca, you’re the one who broke our family’s expensive vase — you pay us back first!”

Rebecca arched an eyebrow. “Sure, call someone in to tally up the damage.”

Chapter 1177

A few hundred thousand? She could cover that without blinking.

“But do you honestly still think this is only about a few million in compensation? Your mother’s sharp enough to run circles around most people — how did she end up raising someone so naive?”

Rebecca made no effort to soften her words, letting her frustration out with blunt, cutting honesty.

Something in Lauren’s chest clenched, a sudden sense that the situation might be far worse than she’d realized.

But Gabriela, stung by Rebecca’s remark, went red-eyed with fury, like a cornered animal ready to strike. She looked as though she wanted to tear Rebecca apart with her bare hands.

Rebecca sneered, watching her, delighted.

She loved seeing Gabriela like this — consumed by hatred, and utterly powerless against her.

Never having been treated this way before, Gabriela felt her patience shatter under Rebecca's relentless provocation.

With a sudden scream, she lunged, and the two of them tumbled together into a full-blown brawl.

However busy her schedule kept her, Rebecca had never once neglected her physical training. She was a competent fighter, and within seconds, she'd pinned Gabriela to the floor.

Gabriela lay there, trapped.

The floor was scattered with shards of glass and broken porcelain. Lauren's eye twitched with nerves, terrified her daughter might get hurt on the sharp debris.

"Rebecca, don't take this too far! Smash whatever you want, just let go of Gabriela!" Lauren cried out in a panic.

Pinned to the ground, arms wrenched behind her back, Gabriela felt humiliation burn through her like fire.

She screamed at the servants. “You useless fools! Why isn’t anyone helping me?”

But with Matthew standing right there, the housekeepers and servants kept their distance, none of them daring to step in.

Gabriela turned her fury on her mother instead. “Mom! Don’t beg Rebecca for anything! It’s her or me today — I’ll fight her to the death!”

Seeing her daughter spiraling this far, Lauren turned desperately to Matthew.

“Matthew, say something! Make Rebecca let her go!”

Matthew let out a heavy sigh, his head throbbing from the whole ordeal.

Back in the day, it had been his sons tearing through the house in fistfights fierce enough to shake the walls — but that had been childhood.

Now, his two grown daughters, both well past the age of marriage, were brawling on the living room floor.

What a mess.

Rebecca and Gabriela were both his own blood. And yet, in this particular fight, it was plainly Gabriela at the disadvantage.

“Gabriela, just say something to smooth things over with Rebecca. Apologize to her,” Matthew said.

He’d brought Rebecca back today specifically because Gabriela had made another costly mistake, and only Rebecca had the connections to fix it. If not for his own pleading, Rebecca wouldn’t have bothered coming back at all.

And yet, both Lauren and Gabriela had spent the entire visit provoking her.

Gabriela had, in every practical sense, brought this on herself.

Chapter 1178

She stared at Matthew, stunned, her eyes burning red with fury. “Dad, are you blind? Rebecca is the one attacking me right now! Why should I apologize to her?”

“Whoever starts the fight is the one at fault,” Rebecca said coldly.

She hadn't provoked anyone by simply coming to dinner. Gabriela had been the one hurling insults at her — "mistress's daughter" and worse — one after another. Rebecca had only pushed back, and only a little.

Gabriela let out a piercing scream, thrashing wildly. "Rebecca, I won't let this go!"

Rebecca kept her pinned firmly.

"Maybe you should worry a little more about how you and your precious fine dining crisis are going to survive first," she said, ice in her voice.

With that, she released her grip and stood.

Gabriela lunged again, but Lauren quickly signaled two tall, sturdy maids, who rushed forward to hold her back.

Even restrained, Gabriela kept kicking wildly toward Rebecca, her whole demeanor unhinged, stripped of any composure.

Rebecca cast Lauren a mocking glance. "Mrs. Jiang. This so-called refined young lady you poured so many resources into raising since childhood — turns out this is all she really is."

Lauren's gaze turned to ice.

Rebecca let out a snort of laughter. "Even I, raised without a mother, wouldn't stoop to something like this."

Crimson fury flooded Lauren's face, her chest heaving.

But as the elder in the room, she couldn't very well descend to Gabriela's level and grapple with Rebecca herself. Steadying herself, she asked, cold, "Rebecca, what exactly are you implying?"

"Nothing much," Rebecca said with a sneer. "You think Zeng Tong is easy to deal with? That you can just summon him back whenever it's convenient? If Dad hadn't personally pleaded on your behalf, I wouldn't have bothered asking the Duchess for a favor."

"Dad, you've seen exactly how they've treated me today. I'm done dealing with this," Rebecca said, already turning to leave without hesitation.

Desperate, Lauren called after her. "Wait, Rebecca! Gabriela was in the wrong today. I apologize on her behalf."

Rebecca turned back. "She insulted my mother too."

Lauren clenched her jaw so hard it seemed her teeth might crack. "I apologize to your mother as well."

“And who is my mother?” Rebecca pressed.

Lauren’s lips trembled, bitten nearly bloody. “Alanna.”

Rebecca wasn’t done. “Do you admit that as a mother, you fall short of Alanna?”

Lauren glanced at Gabriela, still thrashing violently against the maids holding her, and felt something twist sharply in her chest.

Admitting inferiority to Alanna felt worse than death itself.

Swallowing down the metallic taste rising in her throat, Lauren forced the words out through gritted teeth. “Yes.”

Rebecca let out a huff and walked back into the living room.

Without asking anyone’s leave, she smashed everything within reach until the room lay in complete ruin.

Standing amid the wreckage, she finally asked, “Lauren. Would you like me to pay for any of this?”

Barely holding back her fury, Lauren spat, "No."

"Good." Rebecca smirked. "Now that I've gotten my anger out, I'll go handle the Zeng Tong situation."

With that, she turned and walked out.

Chapter 1179

Matthew let out a sigh and followed her, leaving Lauren and Gabriela behind in the wreckage, surrounded by a room full of stunned servants.

After a long stretch of silence, Lauren finally let out a bloodcurdling scream.

"Rebecca, you little wretch! I won't let this go!"

Outside, hearing the scream carry from within, Rebecca's mood only lifted further.

As long as Lauren was miserable, Rebecca found satisfaction in it.

Watching her daughter's cheerful expression, Matthew let out a resigned sigh. "Rebecca, that's still technically my home, you know."

"Dad, you already moved out," Rebecca said, blinking playfully. "Before long, you'll finally be free of Lauren for good."

After two years of separation, the divorce would become automatic.

Faced with his daughter's cheeky reply, Matthew couldn't bring himself to scold her. He simply changed the subject instead. "Rebecca, are you satisfied now?"

She nodded firmly.

"Will everything be fine with the restaurant, as long as Zeng Tong comes back?" he asked.

"Dad, I can only promise to bring Zeng Tong back," Rebecca said seriously. "I can't promise Gabriela won't go and mess something else up somewhere else."

Matthew paused for a moment before saying, "Rebecca, please — don't take your anger out on Gabriela going forward. Can you promise me that much?"

However little he cared for Lauren, he still felt real pity, and no small amount of guilt, toward Gabriela. Naturally, he hoped Rebecca wouldn't keep escalating things between them without end.

“Fine,” Rebecca agreed.

Matthew let out a breath of relief — only for her to add, “But Dad, Gabriela’s tried to hurt me more than once. That’s a feud that belongs to our generation.”

“I won’t let the grudges of the last generation spill onto ours — but that means you and the others of your generation shouldn’t be interfering in our business either,” she said, firm, her tone sharp.

Especially since Lauren still had blood on her hands. Whatever else happened, Rebecca had no intention of ever letting that go.

Seeing the resolve in his daughter’s eyes, Matthew chose not to argue the point further.

He’d worked hard to rebuild a real relationship with Rebecca, and he had no wish to let Lauren’s mess drive a wedge between them now.

As for Gabriela — all he could do was lean on whatever connections he had to help her, wherever he could.

Once Gabriela had walked far enough away, Lauren finally signaled the servants to let go of Rebecca.

Rebecca's eyes burned red as she marched up to her mother.

"Mom, Gabriela's gone too far! Why are you letting her push us around like this?"

Lauren looked at Rebecca's barely contained rage with plain disappointment.

"Then go pay her back yourself. With your own money."

Rebecca froze.

At the tail end of last year, she'd lost nearly everything in her account gambling. On top of that, she'd sunk nearly five million into acquiring the rights to Eight Treasures Gourmet, a high-end Chinese restaurant.

Where was she supposed to find the money now?

"Mom, it's only a few million. Do you really have to be this harsh with me?"

Chapter 1180

“Only a few million?” Lauren scoffed, out of patience. “Don’t beg me for it, and don’t even think about turning to your grandparents. Figure out for yourself how much you can actually cover.”

Rebecca knew her mother’s usual temperament well enough. Lauren normally doted on her without limit. Even when Rebecca had once wanted to marry Wesley, her mother had pulled every connection she had to try to secure the match.

But hearing this coldness now, Rebecca understood — it traced back to the whole ordeal with the locked bathroom, the video, the things she’d said that had gotten out. That had wounded her mother deeply.

Gabriela is completely unhinged.

If it hadn’t been for her own drive to strike back at Gabriela and Wesley, Rebecca never would have lost that much money in the first place, and she certainly wouldn’t have rushed to buy Eight Treasures, hoping to earn it all back quickly.

She despised Gabriela with everything in her — but she couldn’t help feeling deeply wounded by her own mother now, too.

She was Lauren’s only daughter. It was Gabriela’s scheming that had forced those words out of her in the first place.

How could her mother hold a grudge against her over that?

It seemed her mother's love hadn't been quite as unconditional as she'd once believed.

Reading the shift in Lauren's mood, Rebecca took a deep breath, forced her fury down, and offered an apology instead. "Mom, I'm sorry. I let my temper get the better of me earlier."

What other choice did she have?

Dad and Grandma already favored Gabriela so blatantly it was almost absurd. Lauren was her only real lifeline left.

Seeing that her daughter still knew how to own up to her mistakes, some of Lauren's composure returned, and her tone softened.

"Don't dwell on it too much. Gabriela may be completely lacking in refinement, but since she gave your father her word, she won't dare pull anything behind his back."

"But..." Rebecca hesitated, thinking back to the seaside resort deal. "Gabriela has a talent for leaving herself an exit. What if..."

"There is no 'what if,'" Lauren said, her gaze turning to ice. "If she dares try anything this time, I'll make her pay for it dearly."

She'd already smashed several of the family's finest vases in her fury, each worth tens of thousands. She wasn't about to let that grudge go quietly.

Rebecca had little choice but to trust her.

Still simmering, Lauren ordered the staff to clean up the living room before pulling Rebecca into her bedroom for a private word.

"You acted far too recklessly this time," Lauren began, laying out the situation carefully.

First — if they couldn't bring Allan back, Eight Treasures would owe Century Grand Hotel over thirty million in compensation, a blow that would gut both its finances and its reputation for years.

Most of the restaurant's draw had always been Allan's name. Without his culinary team behind it, even the most extravagantly decorated establishment would be an empty shell.

The five million already spent on the transfer would be a total loss.