

His kiss 1221

Chapter 1221

Gabriela glanced at Lauren. “Now that’s actually a clever idea.”

That approving look nearly made Lauren choke on her own frustration.

Gabriela’s mother, Alanna, had always been her nemesis, and now even the daughter could get under her skin.

Still, Lauren had no choice but to swallow her irritation and smile. “Gabriela, what would you like smashed?”

Gabriela swept her gaze across the room before pointing to the brand-new television.

“Let’s start with that.”

Rebecca froze, staring at Gabriela in disbelief.

Beverley was still right there, and Gabriela dared to point at something so brazenly.

Lauren, however, snapped sharply, "Rebecca, are you deaf? Smash it. Now."

She gestured to a servant, who promptly handed Rebecca a wooden stick.

Rebecca, thinking of the exquisite dishes at Century Hotel and the five-million-dollar transfer fee riding on this, clenched her teeth and swung hard at the television screen.

With a loud crash, the screen shattered.

Beverley jumped in fright, clutching her chest. Gabriela approached her with concern.

"Grandma, maybe you should step outside for this?"

Beverley couldn't bear to watch any longer. With the butler's help, she left the room.

These two sisters. How could they possibly be this irreconcilable?

Once Beverley had gone, Gabriela pointed out several more items, and Rebecca smashed them one by one.

The living room quickly descended into chaos, worse even than the last time Gabriela had been involved.

Matthew's lips twitched as he considered telling Gabriela to stop. But then he caught sight of Wesley standing beside her, watching her with an indulgent smile that seemed to say, as long as Gabriela's happy, she can smash whatever she likes.

These young people.

Matthew could only watch helplessly, unwilling to step in any further.

Exhausted and drenched in sweat from all the smashing, Rebecca finally asked through gritted teeth, "Is that enough?"

Gabriela smiled and nodded. "Thank you for your hard work."

Rebecca had been holding her anger in check this whole time, but that polite little remark nearly sent her over the edge.

Still, she'd already conceded so much; she couldn't afford to lose control now.

"Gabriela, I hope you'll keep your promise."

“Of course. I’ll call Zeng Tong right now.”

Gabriela dialed Zeng Tong’s number in front of everyone and put the call on speaker.

Zeng Tong picked up quickly. “Gabriela, is something wrong?”

“Sister Tong, I wanted to ask, has anything been bothering you since you went back to Century Hotel?”

Zeng Tong sounded puzzled. “Why ask all of a sudden?”

Gabriela said, “I heard you’ve been having some friction with the new owner, and that you only agreed to handle Century Hotel’s business specifically.”

At the mention of this, Zeng Tong grew visibly irritated.

“Did Rebecca put you up to calling me? Gabriela, let me tell you, your sister is absolutely impossible. She’s foolish and arrogant, and I simply can’t work with her!”

Zeng Tong was usually mild-mannered, but the mere mention of Rebecca set her off, and her words came out completely unfiltered.

Rebecca, standing nearby, turned pale with rage.

Chapter 1222

Gabriela stayed on the phone, quietly watching Rebecca's face contort with anger.

Yet she felt no real sense of satisfaction in it.

After all, Marie was still working under Rebecca. Offending the boss outright could cause trouble down the line.

She said gently, "Marie, Rebecca is standing right next to me, listening to this call. If there's some misunderstanding between the two of you, I can act as a mediator."

Gabriela had been the one to invite Marie back to the team. If Rebecca had done something out of line, she intended to step in and handle it.

Marie, hearing that Rebecca was right there, didn't hold back at all. If anything, her words grew even sharper.

“What is that fool doing, causing you trouble like this? Did she come here just to make problems for you? Gabriela, let me tell you, you and your sister are worlds apart. I’ve never met anyone as foolish as her, and she has the nerve to call herself a socialite!”

Marie’s temper was usually mild, but that didn’t mean she was a pushover. As her rant continued, she finally laid out the source of the conflict between her and Rebecca.

It turned out that ever since Marie had returned to Eight Treasures Cuisine, Rebecca had been taking out all her frustrations toward Gabriela on her instead.

One incident centered on Marie’s signature dish, a Cantonese-style roasted suckling pig, a traditional delicacy known for its meticulous preparation.

The dish owed its fame to Marie’s insistence on using heritage-breed, free-range pigs. These pigs were raised in open pasture on the mountains, fed only natural plant-based feed, with no artificial additives.

That method ensured the pork carried no gamey odor and produced a roast that was flavorful without being greasy.

But it also more than doubled the procurement cost compared to standard breeds.

Rebecca, with too much idle time on her hands at Everglow Group, or perhaps simply eager to assert her authority, had decided to personally oversee the restaurant’s accounts. The moment she saw the cost of the pigs, she replaced them with a cheaper breed.

“Your idiot sister actually said something like, ‘premium breed pig’ sounds fancier than ‘heritage-breed pig,’ and it’s cheaper too. But anyone with half a brain knows premium breed pigs have the worst-tasting meat there is!”

Marie spat the words over the phone, clearly furious. “She’s dragging my hard-earned reputation through the mud. There’s no way I’m taking orders from her.”

And that wasn’t the only issue.

Rebecca had also decided Marie’s culinary team was too large, and that the salaries for so many staff members were excessive. She’d insisted on “maximizing resources” by requiring the team to develop at least four new dishes every week.

While demanding those results, she’d also placed severe restrictions on the ingredients they were allowed to buy. High-end ingredients were strictly off the table.

Her reasoning, apparently, was that a truly skilled chef should be able to create gourmet dishes out of the simplest ingredients.

Chapter 1223

Marie had endured Rebecca’s demands for two full weeks before finally reaching her breaking point the day before. She’d told Rebecca off to her face and declared she’d rather terminate the contract outright than keep working under those conditions.

Rebecca had then invoked Gabriela's name to keep her from walking away entirely. Reluctantly, Marie had agreed to fulfill the hotel's orders for the year before leaving.

After hearing Marie's account, Gabriela could hardly keep from rolling her eyes, and she suspected even Lauren, Rebecca's mother, would have reacted the same way.

Rebecca's behavior wasn't just foolish. It was short-sighted.

She'd been willing to pay a hefty five-million-dollar transfer fee, yet couldn't bring herself to spend a little more on quality ingredients?

Marie was one of the top chefs in the country, leagues beyond the so-called international celebrity chefs people liked to throw money at.

Did Rebecca honestly think she could micromanage a master chef's craft like that?

Even Matthew, who'd been listening in silence, couldn't bring himself to say a single word in Rebecca's defense.

Feeling a little apologetic, Gabriela said, "Marie, I'll have a proper talk with Rebecca about this."

Marie, who thought well of Gabriela, quickly assured her none of this was her fault.

After the call ended, Gabriela turned to Rebecca. "If you want Marie to keep working for you, stop interfering in the kitchen."

Rebecca, still stinging from Marie's insults, couldn't hold back her anger. She glared at Gabriela with open disdain.

"I'm the boss. Are you telling me I can't even oversee my own restaurant's kitchen? That's your solution?"

"That is my solution," Gabriela replied firmly.

She laid out her terms plainly: Rebecca was to stop interfering with ingredients, recipes, or any aspect of kitchen operations, period.

Rebecca's face darkened. Just as she opened her mouth to argue, Gabriela cut her off and turned instead to Lauren.

"If you want Marie's continued cooperation, Rebecca needs to follow these rules. If she can't manage that, then she should find someone else to run things."

Marie had signed a year-long contract with Eight Treasures Cuisine, but Gabriela had no intention of standing by if Rebecca kept pushing her toward breaking that contract and paying the penalty just to leave. If it came to that, Gabriela wouldn't hesitate to let Rebecca deal with the consequences herself, even if it meant smashing ten more pieces of fine porcelain. She wouldn't care in the slightest.

Rebecca, livid, looked ready to explode, her face twisted with rage as though she might lash out at any moment.

Lauren, however, gripped her daughter firmly by the shoulders and smiled diplomatically. "I understand, Gabriela. Thank you for your help today."

Gabriela, uninterested in further pleasantries, glanced once at Lauren's earrings before leaving the Jiang residence with Wesley.

Matthew followed shortly after.

Only then did Lauren release her furious daughter.

Rebecca tried to swallow her anger and failed. Her furious gaze fixed on her mother. "Mom, is that Gabriela's so-called solution? She clearly doesn't care about any of this. Why are you being so polite to her?"

She'd spent so much money bringing Marie back, only to feel as though she'd invited some untouchable deity into her kitchen.

Chapter 1224

Lauren sighed. “Rebecca, you don’t understand how this business works. I’ll send someone over tomorrow to oversee things properly.”

Lauren had offered before to assign someone to help Rebecca, but Rebecca had insisted she could handle a restaurant on her own. Wanting her daughter to grow, Lauren hadn’t pushed the issue.

Who could have guessed Rebecca would make such a mess of it?

“Marie put up with you for two whole weeks. That’s already giving Gabriela plenty of face.”

There was a trace of unease in Lauren’s voice.

The illegitimate child she’d once looked down on had grown far more powerful than she’d expected. Gabriela’s network of connections ran much deeper than Lauren had realized.

The words stung Rebecca deeply.

A woman she considered unworthy of tying her shoes had more influence than she did. And her own mother had just praised that woman to her face.

It was humiliating.

“Calm down,” Lauren said in a low voice. “Let her enjoy her moment for now. One day, I’ll make sure she ends up just like her mother.”

Rebecca had heard her mother say this so many times it had become background noise. “Her mother died of illness. What, are you planning to make Gabriela sick too?”

“How does a perfectly healthy person suddenly fall ill and die?” Lauren replied, her eyes cold. “Rebecca, the timing isn’t right yet. Be patient.”

Meanwhile, in the back seat of the car, Gabriela suddenly pulled off her headphones in one sharp motion.

The abruptness of it caught Matthew’s attention.

“Gabriela, what’s wrong?”

Even Wesley, driving up front, glanced at her through the rearview mirror.

Hearing the concern in her father’s voice, Gabriela turned to him. “It’s nothing.”

She closed her eyes, forcing down the sudden surge of hostility rising in her chest, and made herself think the situation through carefully.

Could it be... that her mother hadn't died from cancer after all?

If her mother had been poisoned by Lauren, then who could have administered it so discreetly, without anyone noticing?

Gabriela's eyes snapped open.

Marie.

Thinking back, after her mother's death, the company had been handed over to her maternal uncle, Josh, only for Marie to eventually seize control of it.

How could a woman known mostly for her gambling habits so easily secure her position at the head of the company?

There must have been someone powerful backing her from the shadows.

“Gabriela, are you all right? Do you feel unwell?”

Matthew’s gentle, worried voice pulled Gabriela out of her thoughts.

She turned to look at him.

If her father had been more assertive back then, he might not have been able to give her mother a perfect family, but at least her mother might have lived a few more peaceful years.

But she quickly pushed the thought away.

The truth wasn’t clear yet, and she had already forgiven her father. She wouldn’t let someone else’s wrongdoing drag her back into resenting him.

Lowering her gaze, she said softly, “It’s nothing. I haven’t been sleeping well lately. I think I’m just a little carsick.”

Chapter 1225

Matthew believed her easily and launched into a string of concerned advice, urging her not to overwork herself and to delegate more to her assistant if she needed to.

Gabriela nodded patiently along with each suggestion.

Wesley glanced at her through the rearview mirror again, his expression unreadable.

After dropping Matthew off at his residence, Wesley drove straight back to the apartment.

Gabriela sat on the couch in the living room, clutching a cushion tightly, her eyes clouded with confusion.

Wesley walked over and pulled her into an embrace.

“Why do you look so lost?” he asked softly.

Gabriela rested her head on his shoulder and murmured, “Wesley, I think my mom might have been murdered.”

Wesley’s chest tightened.

Although he had never met Gabriela’s late mother, he had always held her in high regard.

A single mother who not only built her own company but raised such a remarkable daughter besides. She must have been an extraordinary person.

“What happened?” he asked.

Gabriela didn’t hold back, and recounted everything Lauren had said earlier that day.

Wesley had known about the bug planted in the earring, but since Gabriela had never brought it up herself, he’d chosen not to mention it either.

Now that she’d finally spoken about it, he tightened his embrace and said gently, “Do you want to confront Marie? I can go with you.”

Gabriela shook her head.

Marie was partially paralyzed and serving time in prison. Her heart held nothing but resentment toward Gabriela. Even if Gabriela confronted her directly, she’d never admit to anything.

“Don’t let it eat at you,” Wesley coaxed in a low voice. “Let me handle the investigation, okay?”

Gabriela looked up, her eyes meeting his dark, tender gaze.

She nodded. "Okay."

Wesley kissed her gently on the forehead. "You barely ate anything at the Jiang residence earlier, did you? Let me make you something."

Gabriela tugged at his arm. "I'm not hungry. Don't bother."

Seeing that she had no appetite for a proper meal, Wesley ordered her a mango mousse instead, something sweet to lift her spirits.

The sweetness of it did help ease some of the heaviness she was feeling.

Gabriela managed to eat a little, which lifted her mood enough that she and Wesley could sit down and go over the situation more thoroughly.

That same day, Wesley began arranging for someone to investigate Marie.

But uncovering the truth about Alanna's death proved even harder than solving Allan's case had been. Two decades had passed, leaving almost no trace behind. Unless whoever had done the poisoning confessed outright, there was little chance of ever proving it.

Wesley's team spent over two weeks investigating and turned up nothing.

One evening, Gabriela noticed him poring over the newly gathered documents late into the night, exhaustion written plainly across his face.

She tried to comfort him. "Take your time. It's been so many years already. A little more delay won't make much difference now."

Wesley nodded silently.

What he didn't tell her was that his concern wasn't really about the pace of the investigation, but the growing likelihood that they'd never find any usable evidence at all.

Chapter 1226

Alanna had been declared dead from cancer, a diagnosis the hospital had confirmed after two or three years of treatment.

To everyone else, her death had looked entirely natural, even expected.

Unless the person responsible confessed, there was almost no way to trace any evidence of poisoning after all this time.

But Alanna's case wasn't the only thing weighing on Wesley's mind.

There was also Stewart.

After receiving information about Silvermoon Village from Mason, Wesley had sent people to look into Stewart as well.

Unsurprisingly, they hadn't turned up anything significant.

But that, in itself, felt suspicious.

A businessman at the very top of his field, with not a single discernible flaw? That alone was a red flag.

Stewart was like a venomous snake coiled in the shadows, waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

And what Wesley feared most was that Stewart's target might be Gabriela.

Pulling her into his arms, he asked, as casually as he could manage, "Has Stewart reached out to you lately?"

Gabriela found the question odd.

Wesley had never liked Stewart. Why bring him up now?

She thought for a moment before answering. "He's contacted me twice."

Wesley's brows knitted together. "About what?"

"The Williams Group and Haynes Group have a partnership. He reached out to discuss business, naturally," Gabriela explained.

She added that Stewart had also asked her to help repair the intricate model for the Underwater City project.

She still couldn't understand how Stewart managed to handle the model so poorly that it kept breaking down.

The ones she'd made later for Bradley and Mason, and for Bernice as well, had all held up fine, with no quality issues at all.

But Gabriela didn't see any reason to share those details with Wesley. Knowing him, he'd find some way to get jealous over even something that trivial.

Wesley said firmly, "From now on, let Alissa handle everything with the Williams Group."

Gabriela was surprised. She turned to look at him, brows slightly raised.

"I already have minimal contact with them, maybe once or twice a month. Some matters and documents just need my personal attention."

Although Alissa was capable, and could potentially grow into a female version of Billy with more training, the project director on the Williams Group's side insisted on working with Gabriela directly. There wasn't much she could do about that.

"If Alissa can't handle it, then we cancel all collaboration with them," Wesley said in a low voice.

Gabriela studied him seriously for a moment before leaning into his arms.

"Alright. I'll listen to you on this."

It was just the Williams Group. If they couldn't work together anymore, so be it. There was no reason to upset her boyfriend over something so minor.

Besides, a lighter workload might actually be a blessing in disguise.

Wesley looked pleased, and couldn't help leaning down to kiss her.

Before long, Gabriela noticed the change in him and pushed him back gently.

"I'm a little tired today. Control yourself."

Wesley, however, couldn't hold back. His hand slipped under her shirt, brushing against her soft, smooth skin.

Chapter 1227

"How am I supposed to control this?"

His voice had gone husky, thick with want. "You teased me about my age once. Have I ever disappointed you since?"

Gabriela had once teased him, saying something like, "For someone your age, you sure are enthusiastic about all this."

That single remark had stuck with Wesley ever since. Now, whenever the chance presented itself, he was determined to prove he was still very much in his prime.

Unfortunately for Gabriela, she often found herself at his mercy, her protests drowned out by his unrelenting passion and tenderness.

Perhaps because it had been a while, Wesley's intensity that night was overwhelming. It wasn't until the early hours of the morning that he finally let her rest.

The next day, Gabriela could barely drag herself out of bed. Thankfully, it was the weekend, and she didn't have to report to Everglow Group.

Wesley made breakfast and brought it to the bedroom, gently helping her eat.

Looking at the handsome, attentive man in front of her, Gabriela found herself thinking that waking up to this face, and a good breakfast, every day wouldn't be such a bad life at all.

Over the following month, Gabriela gradually settled back into her usual routine.

Though she was determined to uncover the truth about her mother's death, she understood it wasn't something that could be rushed.

Her days filled up again with work, splitting her time between Everglow Group during the day and late nights at SK Elite Boutique's studio.

Meanwhile, Tessa and Tyler's wedding was drawing close, with Aubrey and Dr. Su's wedding set to follow shortly after.

It felt like a whole season of celebrations was converging at once.

Aubrey's vision had nearly fully recovered by then. One day, Dr. Su's mother took her out to try on wedding dresses.

After much pleading, Gabriela agreed to come along.

Inside the fitting room, Aubrey quickly changed into a wedding gown and stepped out nervously. "How do I look?"

Gabriela smiled and gave her a thumbs-up. "You look stunning."

Dr. Su's mother praised her warmly as well. "Aubrey, you're so beautiful. It's a shame Dr. Su isn't here to see this. He'd be speechless."

Aubrey blushed, suddenly shy.

With such a kind, gentle future mother-in-law, she felt even more hopeful about the marriage ahead of her.

After nine years of dating, she no longer yearned for the thrill of new romance. Marrying into such a wonderful family already felt like more than enough.

Aubrey silently vowed that whatever challenges lay ahead, she would never betray Dr. Su.

After trying on the dress, she changed back into her regular clothes.

Just as she stepped out of the fitting room, a strong hand pressed suddenly against the doorframe.

Before she could react, a tall figure slipped inside and shut the door behind him.

The small changing room was dimly lit, making it impossible to make out anything clearly.

Chapter 1228

Aubrey jumped in fright, about to scream for help, when a large hand clamped quickly over her mouth. A low, familiar voice followed.

"It's me."

Kevin's name flashed through her mind, and her heart sank.

Aubrey's eyes widened as she strained to make out his face in the dark.

Kevin reached out and switched on the light before finally releasing her.

Aubrey felt as if her soul had left her body. "Are you insane?" she asked, her voice shaking. "What are you even doing here?"

"I came to see you," Kevin said, his hand brushing against her cheek, his expression carrying an unsettling edge of obsession.

"Aubrey, you look beautiful today."

But it was a wedding dress meant for someone else.

Aubrey slapped his hand away. "Don't touch me! Get out!"

She was too tense to notice the flash of madness and rage that flickered across his eyes.

“Aubrey, do you really have to marry Samuel?”

“Yes,” Aubrey replied firmly.

Dr. Samuel was the kindest, gentlest man she had ever met, a blessing she felt she must have earned over several lifetimes.

“Tell me. Did you sleep with him?”

Kevin’s tone was sharp, his eyes darkening like an approaching storm, as though her answer alone could push him to destroy everything around them.

Aubrey’s face flushed crimson. Furious, she kicked him. “Kevin, you bastard!”

“Answer me!” Kevin grabbed her chin, his voice edged with uncontrollable anger. “Did you sleep with him or not?”

How else could she have agreed to marry him so easily, if not for that?

Just a few months, and it had been enough to overshadow nine whole years together.

“No!” Aubrey glared at him fiercely. “Dr. Samuel isn’t that kind of person.”

Kevin leaned in, boxing her into the corner. “Not that kind of person? Aubrey, we were together for nine years, and I respected you the entire time.”

His fingers tightened against her chin. “So this whole time, you were saving yourself for him?”

“Stop being ridiculous,” Aubrey muttered angrily, turning her face away. “I didn’t even know Dr. Samuel back then.”

Their relationship had been long-distance for years, with only rare chances to see each other. On top of that, her mother had always warned her against premarital intimacy, threatening to disown her if she ever crossed that line.

When Kevin finally moved to the bustling city of Okburg two years ago, her mother’s watchfulness had only grown stricter, constantly reminding Aubrey to guard her dignity and self-respect. “No premarital intimacy,” she’d say, “or I’ll be utterly heartbroken.”

Aubrey had always been an obedient daughter, which was why her relationship with Kevin had stayed purely romantic, never crossing any lines.

“And now that you’ve met this doctor, you’re dumping me without a word? Is that fair to me?”

Kevin’s eyes reddened as though he were on the verge of tears, and for a moment, Aubrey felt a pang of sadness.

Her voice softened. “You were the one who broke up with me first.”

Chapter 1229

“That was just something I said in anger!” Kevin clung to that sliver of hope, gripping her shoulders. “Aubrey, don’t marry him. Please. Whatever dowry he’s paid, I’ll pay it back. I’m begging you...”

“No.” Aubrey gritted her teeth and steeled herself. “Leave now, or I’ll call for help.”

If anyone caught him sneaking into the women’s changing room, he’d be arrested on the spot.

“Go ahead and call them,” Kevin said, his voice bitter and reckless, his eyes rimmed red. “Let’s see how your future mother-in-law feels about that.”

Aubrey’s face turned pale.

Whatever the circumstances, if Samuel's mother found out her son's fiancée had been hiding in a changing room with her ex-boyfriend, it would undoubtedly upset her.

But what worried Aubrey most was the thought of Samuel misunderstanding her, thinking she hadn't fully let go of Kevin.

"Kevin, I'm begging you, please leave," Aubrey pleaded, tears welling up. "No matter what happened between us, Dr. Samuel and his family are good people. Please don't hurt them."

The rage in Kevin's chest seemed to ease at that.

Aubrey had always been cheerful, the kind of girl who smiled easily and loved to chat and gossip. In his eyes, she'd always been a ray of sunshine, endlessly happy and carefree.

He had rarely seen her cry.

"Fine, I'll leave," Kevin said through gritted teeth. "Tonight, nine p.m., Golden Honey Café. Meet me there."

Aubrey's instinct was to refuse.

She was about to marry Samuel. The wisest thing to do was never see Kevin again. Why risk upsetting Samuel over this?

“Not agreeing?” Kevin tightened his grip on her wrist. “Then go ahead and call someone.”

“I’ll be there,” Aubrey said hurriedly. “Just go, now.”

Kevin gave her one last long, hard look before finally opening the door and slipping out.

Aubrey was left trembling, unsure how he’d even gotten in, or whether anyone had seen him leave.

She stayed in the changing room a long while, waiting for her emotions to settle before stepping back outside.

Gabriela noticed immediately that something was off with Aubrey, but chose not to press her in front of Samuel’s mother, watching as Aubrey forced herself to smile and make conversation.

Later, at the hospital, Samuel’s mother kept reminding Aubrey of things. “Samuel said he can’t be discharged yet. He’ll need to stay at least another week. In the meantime, take good care of yourself and try to avoid any trouble.”

Samuel had been away from Okburg for several days already and wouldn’t be back for another two or three. Worried that Aubrey’s family might cause more trouble in his absence, his mother had taken to visiting the hospital often to keep an eye on things.

Aubrey nodded obediently. "I understand, Auntie. You should head home and rest."

Samuel's mother, worn out from a long day, left soon after.

Sensing something was weighing on Aubrey, Gabriela stayed behind.

Sure enough, once Samuel's mother was gone, Aubrey opened up to her.

"Kevin cornered me in the changing room earlier."

Gabriela was startled.

Kevin really was a ticking time bomb.

"What are you thinking of doing?" she asked.

Chapter 1230

As long as Aubrey stayed resolute, Kevin's antics wouldn't matter much. But if she wavered even slightly and gave in to him, Samuel would end up humiliated.

“Gabriela, am I a terrible person?” Aubrey asked hesitantly. “Because Kevin couldn’t afford much of a dowry, I got upset with him. Then Samuel offered one and helped me get away from my parents, so I leaned toward him instead.”

The more she talked, the more she worried she was being unfairly harsh on herself.

“Wanting safety and happiness is just human nature,” Gabriela said earnestly. “What matters is whether you can stay committed to the choice you’ve made.”

Aubrey bit her lip and told Gabriela about Kevin’s request. “Gabriela, will you come with me to meet him tonight?”

She needed to find a moment to set things straight with Kevin, once and for all. But she was afraid that meeting him alone might upset Samuel if he ever found out.

Gabriela nodded. “Of course.”

At nine p.m., Aubrey and Gabriela arrived at Golden Honey Café, a cozy little spot in town.

Kevin was already there, dressed in a sharp suit.

The well-tailored outfit made him look more refined and put-together than usual, though the discomfort on his face suggested he wasn't used to dressing this way.

And in this summer heat, no less.

Seeing her former boyfriend from a distance, Aubrey felt a pang of sadness rise in her chest.

Kevin stood the moment he spotted her, but his expression darkened as soon as he noticed Gabriela beside her. His already somber face grew even more shadowed with displeasure.

"What's the idea, bringing someone along?"

Gabriela, familiar with Kevin, greeted him politely before finding an empty seat nearby to give the two of them some space.

Aubrey sat down across from him and got straight to the point. "I owe you an explanation for my sudden decision to get married."

Kevin pressed his lips together and waited for her to go on.

Aubrey steeled herself and continued. "But given how sensitive things are right now, I didn't dare meet you alone. That's why I asked Gabriela to come with me."

With a loud bang, Kevin slammed his fist against the table.

"What, were you worried I'd eat you alive?"

"Kevin, you wanted me to come see you. So here I am."

Aubrey glanced at his injured fist, then forced herself to look away. "You want an explanation, and I'm willing to give you the whole thing, step by step, with every detail."

"But if you'd rather not listen, I can leave right now."

Kevin stared at Aubrey's face.

The lips he had kissed countless times were now speaking the coldest, most cutting words he'd ever heard. Each one cut into him like a blade, leaving a wound he couldn't ignore.

Slowly, he unclenched his fist. "Fine," he said, his voice low. "Explain."

Aubrey started from the night she'd been chased by a group of drunken men.