

His kiss 1251

Chapter 1251

“That was thanks to Dr. Hill, from Silvermoon Village,” Aubrey said.

Unfortunately, Dr. Hill, who practiced a distinctive form of traditional medicine, had a reputation for being difficult. He refused to leave the village and was notoriously particular about which patients he’d treat, not unlike the unconventional healers people sometimes described from the West.

“That’s exactly why I’m planning to bring Sun Gang’s case files to him for a consultation,” Su Zhuoming explained.

Aubrey’s hand paused halfway to a dish.

“Dr. Su, does it really have to be surgery, with you performing it?”

Su Zhuoming sighed, a trace of helplessness crossing his face.

“In his current state, Sun Gang can still make out faint shapes. But given time, he’ll eventually lose that too, and go completely blind.”

Surgery would at least give him a sliver of hope.

As a doctor, Su Zhuoming always wanted to give his patients the best chance he could offer.

Aubrey thought back to something Gabriela had said and murmured, half to herself, “I just hope we’re not about to end up with another Myah.”

“What’s going on in that head of yours?” Su Zhuoming tapped her forehead gently. “Eat your food. Let’s not talk about work at home.”

Aubrey had already said what she wanted to say. She knew her husband had his own way of thinking about these things, and she didn’t want to push him further.

After dinner, she drew him a bath, laid out fresh clothes, and called him in to wash up.

To her, these were just ordinary tasks, a reflection of the modesty and sense of duty instilled in her since childhood.

Twenty years ago, in the rural areas where she grew up, water heaters hadn’t been common. Wives would heat water for their husbands’ baths after a long day of work.

It had simply been considered part of life, and Aubrey, raised in a family that held to traditional values about a wife’s role, had absorbed those expectations as second nature.

Even with a degree from a prestigious university, the habits instilled in her from childhood weren't so easy to shake.

Su Zhuoming closed the medical text he'd been reading and gently ruffled her hair. "Why are you doing all this?"

"You've had a long day. I just want to make sure you're comfortable at home. It's what I should be doing," Aubrey replied.

Left with little choice, Su Zhuoming went to take his bath.

Once he was finished, he drew one for her in turn.

"I ran you a bath too," he said, stepping outside the usual expectations to show his appreciation for her efforts.

It wasn't realistic to change his young wife's mindset overnight, so he decided to start small.

Aubrey blinked at him. "Why would you do that?"

"We're husband and wife," he said, his voice low and warm. "It's part of the give and take."

He didn't lecture her about equality between them, choosing instead to gently model it through his own actions.

Chapter 1252

Hearing the softness in his voice, Aubrey's thoughts scattered, her face flushing bright red.

She grabbed her nightgown from the bedroom and hurried into the bathroom, almost as though fleeing, the same instinctive modesty from her upbringing kicking in.

The bathroom was still warm with lingering steam, faintly carrying the clean, fresh scent that was uniquely his.

It felt like Dr. Su was everywhere in that room.

Her cheeks grew even hotter, and it took her a long moment to work up the nerve to undress.

Grown woman as she was, she'd never experienced this kind of intimacy before.

When she finally stepped out, her face glowing red as an apple, she couldn't quite bring herself to meet his eyes.

“Dr. Su,” she murmured softly.

Su Zhuoming looked up, his eyes darkening almost imperceptibly.

Tonight, Aubrey had chosen to wear a sheer red nightgown, the delicate fabric hinting at the curves underneath.

His usually unassuming young wife had a surprisingly striking figure. And this teasingly sheer little thing, who on earth had put her up to wearing something like this?

The nightgown had been a gift from Alissa before the wedding. At the time, Alissa had teased her, saying, “Dr. Su always looks so calm and composed, I can’t even imagine what he’d be like if he ever let his guard down.”

Pressing the nightgown into Aubrey’s hands, she’d added, “You’re so lucky, marrying Dr. Su. What a catch.”

Aubrey herself didn’t quite know why she’d chosen to wear it tonight. Embarrassed, she avoided his gaze and retreated to the bedroom to blow-dry her hair.

But even after her hair was completely dry, Su Zhuoming still hadn’t come to bed.

Curious, she went looking for him, only to find he wasn't in the living room either.

Eventually she found him in the study.

He explained that he'd been feeling worn out lately, with too much work piling up, and that he'd be sleeping in the study for the time being.

It wasn't unusual, in their culture, for couples to need time adjusting to married life, but it still left Aubrey feeling unsettled.

A pang of awkwardness settled over her. Had she been too forward? Dr. Su was so busy every single day, and here she was, worrying over something so trivial.

"Don't stay up too late, Dr. Su. Get some rest," she said softly, before retreating to the bedroom, feeling deflated.

She'd been working so hard to forget about Kevin, to give herself fully to loving Dr. Su instead.

But did he even like her, in return?

Had he only married her out of some sense of obligation, after being pushed into it? Or maybe out of pity? She felt caught between her past and her present, unsure whether she was even worthy of his love.

Aubrey's mind raced all through the night. She tossed and turned, unable to sleep, and by morning dark circles had settled under her eyes.

Chapter 1253

At first, she told herself she was overthinking it. Maybe Dr. Su was simply being considerate, mindful of the scars still healing from her surgery.

But as another half month passed and he kept right on sleeping in the study, Aubrey couldn't shake a growing sense of gloom.

Gabriela, noticing her friend's low spirits lately, grew concerned. Aubrey, who usually couldn't wait to share the latest gossip whenever they met, had gone unusually quiet.

"Is your family giving you trouble again?" Gabriela asked.

Aubrey shook her head.

Ever since she'd learned that Zhao Shanbao had made her the family's convenient scapegoat, she'd cut all ties with them for good.

Dr. Su had spent so much just to help her break free of that toxic family. She wasn't about to waste his kindness by dwelling on them now.

Seeing that Aubrey didn't want to talk about it, Gabriela suggested instead, "Since everyone's free today, why don't we go sing karaoke at Orchid Grove?"

Tessa and Alissa both agreed at once, enthusiastic about the idea.

It had been ages since the four of them had all gotten together.

At the karaoke bar, a few beers in, Aubrey suddenly clung to Gabriela and burst into tears.

"Gabriela, do you think Dr. Su regrets marrying me?"

Aubrey was usually carefree, the kind of person who could light up a room like a burst of sunshine.

So when she showed up in this state, it was clear something serious was weighing on her.

Gabriela patted her gently on the back.

“How could that be? If Dr. Su didn’t like you, why would he have married you?”

The Su family wasn’t exactly old money or dynastic wealth, but Su Zhuoming was one of the country’s leading ophthalmologists. With a background like his, and no family pressure forcing his hand into an arranged marriage, why would he marry someone he didn’t actually care for?

“But Dr. Su doesn’t want me,” Aubrey said softly, her voice heavy with shame and frustration. “It’s been over two weeks now, and he still hasn’t shared a bed with me. Every night, he sleeps in the study.”

Gabriela was taken aback, and even Alissa looked genuinely surprised.

Only Tessa seemed unfazed, her expression suggesting she’d already suspected something like this.

Whatever their individual reactions, the group quickly rallied together to help Aubrey work through it.

“Do you think it has something to do with Kevin?” Alissa asked carefully. “Maybe Dr. Su’s still bothered by everything that happened between you two?”

After all, Aubrey had spent nine years with Kevin, her first love. Their breakup hadn’t come from a lack of feeling but from parental interference.

And then there was the wedding, which Kevin had nearly crashed altogether.

Some men, however magnanimous they seemed on the surface, could carry grudges sharp as needles underneath.

Gabriela knew that better than most, given how petty her own husband, the ever-imposing CEO, could be underneath all that composure.

Aubrey shook her head. “Dr. Su isn’t like that.”

Alissa, never one to shy from an outlandish theory, offered up another. “What if Dr. Su just... can’t?”

Chapter 1254

The suggestion sounded absurd, but it wasn’t entirely impossible either.

A man as accomplished and good-looking as Su Zhuoming, still unmarried at thirty-five, might have some hidden reason behind that.

Marrying someone as lovely as Aubrey and then never consummating it? It wasn’t unreasonable for Alissa to at least wonder.

Even Tessa nodded along, her expression serious.

Aubrey, however, was indignant.

“How could you even think that about Dr. Su? He’s not that kind of man!”

Her fierce defense made it sound as though they’d insulted him personally, but Alissa just shrugged. “This kind of thing isn’t really about character.” Then, with a mischievous glint in her eye, she leaned in closer.

“Why don’t you test him tonight?”

Without waiting for a response, she launched into a list of provocative suggestions.

“Make him that special herbal tonic soup, put on that sheer nightgown of yours, pair it with something really daring underneath. Give him a proper tease. If he’s a normal man, trust me, he won’t be able to resist.”

“The soup part’s easy, you don’t need our help with that,” Alissa added with a wink. “But the lingerie? I’ll pick something out for you. What do you think, the kind that’s basically just a string...?”

“Stop!” Aubrey’s face flushed crimson, her embarrassment plain to see.

Her reaction only made Alissa more curious.

“Why are you blushing so hard? I’ve never even had a boyfriend, and I’m not this shy about it.”

That’s when something seemed to click for Gabriela. She leaned forward, incredulous. “Aubrey... don’t tell me... you and Kevin never...?”

Aubrey looked down and gave a silent nod.

Alissa nearly shrieked, and even Tessa, usually unshakable, looked genuinely stunned.

Alissa didn’t hold back. “Wait, wait, wait. If I’ve got this right, you and Kevin were together for nine years. And you’re telling me nothing ever happened? Not even once?”

“Even a monk wouldn’t have that much self-control!” she exclaimed.

Aubrey’s face was practically radiating heat from embarrassment, but she still tried to defend herself.

“Kevin and I were long-distance for most of it. We never lived together, and I stayed in my company’s housing even after he moved to the city for work.”

She went on to explain how relentless her mother had been about making sure nothing happened before marriage. Every time she and Kevin met, her mother reminded her over and over to behave herself. And Kevin had always respected those boundaries.

There had been one night, though. A Friday. Aubrey had gone over to his place.

They'd ended up kissing, deeply, urgently. Things had escalated fast, clothes coming off, his hands wandering, and she'd been right on the edge of losing herself completely.

But just as they were about to cross that line, her phone had rung.

Her mother, calling to discuss the traditional dowry arrangements and remind her about a prospective match from a well-off family she was supposed to meet that weekend.

The call had hit like a bucket of ice water, snapping her straight back to reality.

Chapter 1255

That night, Aubrey had her first real fight with her mother.

She'd refused to meet the other man, but the dowry conversation had already driven a wedge between her and Kevin.

He'd been firmly against paying such a steep price, and the tension between them had only grown from there.

After that, any thought of intimacy had been completely buried under the weight of their ongoing arguments.

Alissa clicked her tongue, shaking her head in disbelief.

"Well, I've got to give Kevin some credit. That's some serious self-control."

She paused, then added with a wicked grin, "But wait... you don't think he might've had the same problem, do you? Not being able to... you know."

Before Aubrey could respond, Alissa gave her a look of exaggerated pity.

"Wow. You're really unlucky. Two men, and neither one could—"

"Shut up!" Aubrey cut her off, face burning.

"Kevin is completely normal!"

“But you dated for nine years and never once slept together. That’s not exactly normal,” Alissa pressed.

Aubrey puffed up, indignant.

“Since when does dating someone mean you have to sleep with them? I’m just more traditional, and Kevin respected that. Is that really so hard to understand?”

She launched into a brief rant about how, back in their grandparents’ generation, even holding hands before marriage had counted as a bold, daring act.

Just because society had loosened up over the years didn’t mean everyone had to follow along.

Alissa blinked, momentarily stunned into silence by Aubrey’s conviction.

Still a little baffled by the whole thing, she realized she might have jumped to conclusions too quickly.

“I’m sorry,” she said, and meant it. “I shouldn’t have assumed things about you and Kevin based on my own... lack of experience.”

Seeing the sincerity in Alissa's apology, Aubrey's anger faded. Gabriela, who'd stayed quiet through most of the exchange, finally spoke up. "Honestly, I agree with you, Aubrey. Being in love doesn't mean you have to rush into anything. I didn't sleep with Dustin for years either."

But she quickly steered the conversation back on track.

"The real question is, what are you going to do about Dr. Su?"

Aubrey buried her face in her hands.

"I don't know."

She didn't want him to think she was desperate, but she couldn't shake the fear that he might secretly resent her history with Kevin.

Gabriela leaned in and lowered her voice. "Here's what I think. Find the right moment and see whether he's actually interested in you or not."

She went on to share the recipe for a special herbal tonic soup that Loretta had once made for her and Wesley, harmless, but known to stir up some serious passion.

Alissa, ever the instigator, immediately volunteered to buy Aubrey something daring to wear. Tessa chimed in with practical advice of her own.

“And if the soup and the outfit work a little too well and he gets a bit too enthusiastic, here’s what you do...”

The group dissolved into laughter, leaving Aubrey to wonder just how her life had gotten quite this complicated.

Chapter 1256

Aubrey turned her friends’ advice over in her mind the whole way home, her thoughts swirling as she stumbled through the door.

Kevin was sitting in the living room, absorbed in a book.

He’d already showered and was dressed in a loose robe, the collar hanging open just enough to reveal his collarbone, lending him a quiet, understated sensuality.

Aubrey, still faintly smelling of alcohol, felt her courage swell with the last of the buzz, and let her gaze drift down along the open collar.

Her eyes landed on the smooth lines of his chest, cleanly defined.

Kevin followed her gaze and quickly realized what she was staring at. Her unabashed look left him somewhere between amused and exasperated.

He set his book aside and stood to steady her, catching the faint scent of alcohol as he did.

“Have you been drinking?”

Aubrey nodded. “Went out with Gabriela and the others. Didn’t drink much.” Kevin frowned slightly.

“Go take a shower. I’ll make you some tea to help sober up.”

“No need!” Aubrey said, her tone playful. “Kevin, are you hungry? I could make you a midnight snack.”

Kevin glanced at the clock. “It’s almost eleven. Eating this late isn’t exactly healthy, don’t you think?”

His lifestyle was disciplined, and he kept careful watch over his diet.

“But I’m hungry.” Aubrey pulled out the ingredients Gabriela had given her, a hearty soup mix meant to restore energy, and held them up for him to see. “I’ll make it now, and we’ll share it. What do you say?”

"All right," Kevin relented, seeing how set she was and deciding not to fight it.

He stood in the kitchen doorway, watching his wife work. She moved quickly, washing and prepping the ingredients before covering the pot.

"Go shower. I'll keep an eye on it," Kevin offered.

But Aubrey refused to budge, standing stubbornly beside the pot as if guarding it.

Nearly forty minutes later, she ladled the finished soup into two large bowls, one for him, one for herself.

Kevin stared at the full bowl in front of him, slightly at a loss. "Drinking this much liquid this late might leave your face puffy in the morning."

"Just drink it," Aubrey said with a pout, the last of the alcohol still lending her boldness. "I worked hard on this. You're not allowed to waste it."

Under her expectant gaze, Kevin had no choice but to finish the whole bowl.

Uncomfortably full as he felt afterward, he had to admit it had tasted quite good.

Watching him drain the last drop, Aubrey beamed with satisfaction and quickly finished her own bowl before heading off to shower.

When she came out of the bathroom, she was wearing the robe Alissa had given her, sheer and delicate, along with that daring piece underneath that felt almost scandalous just to have on.

Her head was still foggy, and she couldn't quite bring herself to look directly at what she was wearing. But determined to find out how Kevin really felt, she gritted her teeth and kept it on anyway.

Chapter 1257

Dressed like that, she opened the bathroom door and stepped out, drying her hair as she wandered the house looking for him.

Strangely, he wasn't in the living room, and he wasn't in the study either.

She finally found him out on the balcony.

Kevin stood there, tall and straight, his figure silhouetted against the night, gazing out at something in the distance.

"Kevin," Aubrey called, sliding open the balcony door and stepping outside.

The night wind was strong, and it sent a chill through her, instantly clearing away whatever was left of the alcohol in her system.

Kevin turned around.

He'd felt unusually warm after finishing the soup and had come out to cool off.

He hadn't expected to turn and find his wife standing there in a sheer robe, her hair falling over one shoulder.

Aubrey's round face and delicate chin gave her a youthful charm, the kind that made her look like she'd only just graduated college, brimming with life.

Kevin sometimes wondered whether marrying her was a little like an older man marrying a much younger woman.

But tonight, dressed up as she was, there was an unexpected air of maturity about her, an understated elegance that caught him off guard.

For a moment, his gaze went darker than the night sky behind him.

Fully sober by now, Aubrey felt whatever courage she'd had evaporate all at once.

Suddenly and acutely aware of what she was wearing, she turned instinctively to retreat.

But before she could get away, Kevin wrapped his arms around her from behind.

"Aubrey. Who taught you to dress like this?"

His voice was low, edged with both urgency and restless longing.

Aubrey froze, her mind going blank. "No one taught me..." she stammered.

Her waist was surprisingly slim, fitting perfectly in the circle of his arms.

Kevin tightened his hold, turning her to face him before leaning down to kiss her deeply.

Aubrey startled at first, but surrendered to it soon enough.

Kevin held her close, kissing her for what felt like an endless stretch of time.

From the balcony to the living room and finally into the bedroom, he carried her the whole way, her lips left tingling and numb by the intensity of it.

But just as things seemed to be building toward something more, Kevin hesitated. Aubrey, remembering what Alissa had speculated earlier, felt a pang of insecurity rise up in her. “Kevin, do you still mind that I used to date someone else?” she asked, her voice trembling.

Kevin went still, unable to answer right away.

Aubrey thought she’d found her answer. Her eyes reddened as tears welled up.

“When you married me, you already knew about the nine years I spent with him. If it bothers you this much, why would you give up your own happiness just to marry me?”

“I’ve been trying so hard to forget him, Kevin. I don’t think about him anymore. All I think about is you. So why won’t you accept me? Is it because you look down on me for it?”

Chapter 1258

Kevin sighed deeply and kissed her again, cutting off her words.

None of it mattered anymore.

He'd chosen to marry her, and whatever her past held, he owed her his unconditional acceptance.

This time he kissed her with even greater intensity, slowly working her robe off her shoulders.

When he caught sight of the daring piece she wore underneath, his gaze darkened further, his voice dropping to something hoarse.

"How dare you wear something like this, Mrs. Zhou."

With one swift tug, it snapped away.

Aubrey was so mortified she curled her toes in embarrassment.

Kevin kissed her gently after that, his tenderness plain in every touch.

As he moved closer, he paused, meeting an unexpected barrier.

"Aubrey... is this your first time?"

Overwhelmed and utterly exposed, Aubrey nodded shyly.

“Kevin, I’m a bit old-fashioned. And my mom, who always favored sons over daughters, insisted that I...”

Her explanation cut off abruptly as a sharp pain shot through her.

Her face went pale, and she pushed weakly at him, asking him to stop.

Kevin pulled her close instead, soothing her with soft kisses and murmured reassurances.

Though every part of him wanted to keep going, he held himself back, mindful that this was her first time. Afterward, he cleaned her up gently, made sure she was comfortable, and let her rest.

Curled into his arms, Aubrey felt a deep sense of safety settle over her, and murmured a soft “goodnight” before drifting off to sleep.

The next morning, she woke up sore, but nowhere near as uncomfortable as Tessa had warned her she might be.

“You’re awake?”

She was about to sit up when Kevin's gentle voice sounded beside her.

Looking up, she found his eyes smiling down at her, warm and full of affection.

He looked so handsome smiling like that, like some refined gentleman carrying himself with quiet sophistication.

"Good morning, Kevin," she said softly.

Her greeting was answered with a kiss pressed to her forehead.

A moment later, he leaned in and kissed her again, as though she were the most precious thing in the world to him.

Aubrey couldn't help but feel a flicker of confusion.

Now that they'd finally consummated the marriage, Kevin's tenderness seemed almost unusually intense, out of character even.

Aubrey's expression stayed innocently puzzled, which made Dewitt chuckle. "What's wrong? Not used to waking up next to me yet?"

"No," she murmured softly. "It's just... you seem so different from before, Dr. Dewitt."

Before, his gaze had always carried a faint trace of pity, underscored by an almost imperceptible coolness.

Aubrey had long suspected he didn't truly care for her, and it was that complicated look in his eyes that had planted the doubt in her heart in the first place.

But now, that distance had vanished completely. What remained was pure tenderness, and an unmistakable, barely-contained joy.

"That's because, from this moment on, you've truly become my wife."

Chapter 1259

Dewitt pulled her into his arms, letting out a soft sigh. "Do you believe me? I'll cherish you for the rest of my life."

Who could resist words like that?

Especially coming from someone as reserved and quietly charming as Dr. Dewitt.

Beaming, Aubrey wrapped her arms around his neck. "I believe you."

After a few more tender moments together, he urged her to lie back down and rest a while longer.

"I'll go make us breakfast."

It was almost hard to believe how gentle and attentive he'd become as a husband after last night. Snuggled under the covers, Aubrey felt something sweet blooming in her chest. "Okay."

Dewitt returned before long with breakfast, a simple bowl of oatmeal. The two of them sat across from each other at the dining table to eat.

Aubrey took a few bites, then began sneaking glances at him.

Noticing, Dewitt set down his bowl with a resigned smile. "What's on your mind?"

With her husband being so gentle, and the barrier between them finally broken after last night, Aubrey's usual insecurity had eased, leaving her feeling bolder than before.

If he weren't such a flawless man to begin with, she wouldn't have felt the need to tread so carefully around him in the first place.

"Dr. Dewitt," she began, her tone playful. "I've always thought marrying you was like some kind of dream come true. Even the most privileged heiresses envy me for it. But... after we got married, you insisted on sleeping in the study every night. Do you know what my friends started saying about you because of that?"

Dewitt's curiosity was piqued. "Oh? What did they say?"

"They thought... they thought maybe you were, well, incapable." Her voice dropped to a whisper by the end, her cheeks flushing with embarrassment.

After all, if anyone knew just how untrue that was, it was Aubrey.

Hearing this, Dewitt didn't respond right away. Instead, he calmly finished the last of his porridge, then reached for a napkin and wiped his mouth with quiet elegance.

"Aubrey, I owe you an apology," he said, his tone suddenly solemn.

His seriousness startled her. "F-for what?"

In that instant, a flood of dramatic plotlines from every romance drama she'd ever watched flashed through her mind. Could it be... that Dewitt was carrying some unrequited love, some unattainable ideal buried in his heart? Was that why he'd stayed single so long, only marrying her to satisfy his family?

If that were true...

Lost in her own melodrama, Aubrey hadn't even decided whether she'd be able to forgive him when Dewitt's voice pulled her back. "Aubrey," he said gently, "I have a confession to make. I carry a rather severe, deep-seated fixation on purity."

Her breath caught.

"What do you mean?"

"I married you because I genuinely like you," he continued steadily. "But I've always struggled with the fact that you had a long relationship before me. I couldn't quite accept the idea of you having been with another man first."

Chapter 1260

Aubrey stared at him, her mind going blank for several long seconds. It took her a moment to fully process what he'd said.

A "deep-seated fixation on purity" ... wasn't that just a polite way of saying a fixation on virginity?

In that moment, Aubrey felt a strange, bitter kind of relief that she'd never slept with Kevin.

Otherwise, this whole marriage might have ended in disaster.

Her thoughts spun in complete disarray, but Dewitt's quiet voice kept ringing in her ears.

"Aubrey. I'm sorry."

His traditional upbringing had left him with deeply held convictions about purity. He believed premarital intimacy was a kind of irresponsibility toward one's future spouse.

That belief was exactly what had kept him single for so long, in a world that had largely left such ideas behind.

But he also recognized the flaw in his own thinking. That was why, after marrying Aubrey, he'd never once brought it up or treated her coldly because of it.

Still, as his confession settled over her, Aubrey felt a rising tide of hurt and anger.

So that was the reason he'd been sleeping in the study this whole time.

Her chest tightened, her eyes reddening, but she said nothing.

To her, Dewitt had always felt like some distant, perfect dream, unreachable, untouchable.

That perfect image of him lay shattered now. She didn't dare stay in the house any longer, afraid of what she might say to him in the heat of the moment.

Aubrey went upstairs, changed, and left.

Watching her retreating figure, Solomon let out a low sigh.

His young wife was upset.

But he didn't regret being honest with her.

Now that he'd laid everything bare, going back to hiding his feelings wouldn't sit right with who he was.

He'd simply have to make it up to her, slowly, over time.

It was the weekend, and Aubrey had no work to occupy her. She spent most of the day wandering aimlessly on her own.

By afternoon, she couldn't hold it in any longer and decided to find Gabriela to vent.

Gabriela was still at SK Elite Boutique's flagship store.

The first project she was working on with Leo was already in its final stages.

The client who'd commissioned the piece had taken a particular liking to how the design blended its various elements, and had arranged to stop by that evening to try it on.

When Aubrey called, Gabriela sent her a location pin.

"Just come on over," she said.

Aubrey took a cab to the flagship store. Standing before the understated but obviously luxurious storefront, she hesitated, unsure whether to go in.

A staff member stationed outside to greet customers approached her with a smile. "Miss, is there anything I can help you with?"

Ever since Maura had caused a scene at the store, Leo had instructed all staff that no one without membership or an appointment was allowed inside without express permission.

"I'm looking for Gabriela," Aubrey said quickly.

"Oh, you must be Miss Zhao. Please, follow me," the staff member said.