

His kiss 1271

Chapter 1271

In her mother's final days, she could barely eat at all. Whatever she managed to swallow would come right back up, and she'd had to rely on nutritional IVs just to stay alive.

Then a bout of high fever had taken her within the week.

Gabriela pushed down a heavy suspicion rising in her chest. "That Dr. Tian... could he possibly..."

Ever since Myah's facade had crumbled, Gabriela couldn't help but let her mind drift toward the darkest possibility whenever any doubt surfaced.

Wesley took her hand and answered gently, "I had him thoroughly investigated already. Dr. Tian's record checks out. Nothing suspicious there."

If Dr. Tian wasn't the problem, then the illness itself must have been.

Her mother had been healthy, and yet the disease had struck without warning and progressed aggressively...

Gabriela's head snapped up.

Wesley's expression told her he'd arrived at the same conclusion.

They spoke almost in unison. "Chronic poisoning."

Certain foods, when contaminated or spoiled, could cause a range of illnesses over time, cancer included.

Moldy or spoiled foods, peanuts, corn, sprouted potatoes, were notorious for this kind of harm.

Most people, of course, would avoid eating something the moment they noticed it had spoiled. The real danger came when someone deliberately used those foods to hurt another person.

Gabriela's mind raced through everyone who'd been close to her mother back then. Even Josh wasn't entirely above suspicion.

"Don't worry," Wesley said, stroking her hair gently. "I'll have everyone who was near your mother during that time investigated thoroughly. Trust me on this."

Gabriela nodded. "I trust you."

The next morning, after breakfast, Gabriela avoided Truett and sought out Farley instead, hoping to ask about Alanna's situation back then.

Unfortunately, Farley hadn't been around much during that period.

"After Alanna fell ill, she didn't have the strength to keep running the company. Kaleb and I handled most of it between us," Farley explained.

"The company wasn't very large back then, but losing our main decision-maker still left us scrambling. Kaleb and I worked ourselves ragged every day, barely a moment to catch our breath. We only made it out to the villa when there were major reports or financial matters that needed her sign-off."

Farley paused, a hint of suspicion crossing his face. "Why are you asking about all this now? Did something happen?"

Not wanting to worry him, given how much he'd aged, Gabriela shook her head. "I just can't understand it. My mother ate well, lived such a disciplined life. How did she end up with esophageal cancer, of all things?"

Farley let out a deep sigh.

"During the company's early days, Alanna used to work so hard she'd forget to eat entirely. Maybe that's what wore her body down over the years."

Gabriela nodded and let the question drop.

After breakfast, she headed off to work.

She hadn't even made it through the front door of the Everglow Group building when a figure suddenly darted out from around the corner and charged straight at her.

"Gabriela, I'm going to fight you to the death!"

The one shouting and swinging at her was Rebecca.

Chapter 1272

"You're absolutely shameless! You smashed my family's vase, then the TV, then had the nerve to act like you were doing me some huge favor bringing Zane back!" Rebecca was livid.

Zane, as it turned out, had already gone back on her promise, walking off the job entirely and taking her whole culinary team with her, effectively staging a strike.

Over the past two days, Rebecca had been buried under a mountain of backlogged orders and was very nearly losing her mind.

“You’re such a hypocritical, disgusting, shameless little illegitimate child, just like your mother! Neither of you is fit to be seen in public!”

Rebecca was so consumed by rage that she didn’t care where she was, or the growing crowd gathering to watch her fall apart. All she wanted was to humiliate Gabriela with the ugliest words she could find.

Gabriela blinked, quickly piecing the situation together.

“Zane left?” she asked, her voice perfectly calm.

Just as she’d expected. Zane had gone back to Gourmet Haven, but hadn’t lasted even six months.

It was exactly why Gabriela had agreed to help Rebecca in the first place, knowing full well she’d never manage to hold on to someone like Zane.

Rebecca was both oblivious and self-absorbed, but her worst quality by far was her temper. She had a nasty habit of looking down on anyone she considered beneath her.

Unfortunately for her, Zane took genuine pride in her craft and poured her whole heart into her work.

She had a clear respect for strong leadership, and could put up with a bad temper if the person in charge was actually competent.

Rebecca, however, was the exact opposite of everything Zane respected, tripping every single one of her landmines. That Zane had held out three or four months before finally snapping was already more than Gabriela had expected.

Rebecca's eyes burned with resentment. "You must be feeling awfully pleased with yourself right now, aren't you? I knew you never had good intentions, Gabriela. With how badly we get along, why would you ever want to help me?"

Gabriela raised an eyebrow, her tone perfectly composed.

"Well, now that you remember how badly we get along, you're not entirely a lost cause."

"But knowing that, you still had the nerve to come begging me for help. Do you really think everyone else in the world is as clueless as you?"

Rebecca, already worn thin from the whole Gourmet Haven disaster, hadn't been sleeping properly in days. Gabriela's blunt mockery landed right on that raw nerve.

Furious and past reasoning, Rebecca raised her hand to slap her.

Gabriela tilted her head slightly, dodging it with ease.

Rebecca's hand swung through empty air, and she stumbled forward several steps, nearly falling flat on her face from the momentum, mortified.

"You shameless little bastard, how dare you dodge me!"

Rebecca screamed. Ignoring her entirely, Gabriela pulled out her phone and dialed Jasper.

"Mr. Howard, your sister's out here this morning acting like a wild animal, snapping at anyone who comes near her. Care to come deal with her?"

Chapter 1273

None of this had anything to do with Jasper, but Gabriela dragged him into it on purpose.

With Rebecca making such a scene in public, Jasper's carefully cultivated reputation as the "devoted brother" would take a hit if he didn't step in. But if he did get involved, he'd end up tied to her embarrassing outburst, making it look like her behavior reflected poorly on his own judgment.

Gabriela had no intention of passing up a chance to trip him up.

Before long, Jasper came down from the sixty-sixth floor.

Rebecca was still shouting threats at Gabriela, who remained perfectly calm, watching her unravel with cool detachment.

Jasper let out a heavy sigh, his head already aching at the sight.

He was still allied with Rebecca for the moment, so he couldn't just cut ties and abandon her outright.

But getting tangled up in this particular mess would do nothing good for his image either.

While he was still working out how to extract himself gracefully, Gabriela beat him to it. "Mr. Howard, your sister's clearly in a mood today. Why not take her up to the sixty-sixth floor with you instead of letting her back onto the sixty-third? We wouldn't want her disrupting everyone else's work."

Jasper felt a spike of irritation but kept his polished smile firmly in place.

"Gabriela, that's hardly fair. Rebecca's your elder sister. You two should be closer than this."

Gabriela tilted her head and made a curious little sound. "Oh? Then let's ask her directly, does she even consider me her sister?"

“Not in your wildest dreams!” Rebecca roared. “You’re nothing but a shameless little bastard. Don’t you dare imagine I’d ever call you family!”

Gabriela turned back to Jasper and shrugged, the picture of mock helplessness.

“Well, Mr. Howard, there you have it. She only claims you as her real sibling.”

A chill crept up Jasper’s spine at the perfectly innocent look on Gabriela’s face. A sense of foreboding settled over him, she was clearly cooking up something.

Every alarm bell in his head was going off at once.

Jasper couldn’t stand having a teammate who caused more trouble than she was worth.

Yet he couldn’t just abandon her either. With a frustrated sigh, he tried to talk some sense into her.

“Rebecca, you’re clearly not thinking straight today. Why don’t you head home for now? Or, if you’d rather, come with me up to the sixty-sixth floor.”

“No way!” Rebecca was fuming, her temper burning too hot to let this go.

Especially since Gabriela's thinly veiled remarks earlier had been laced with insinuation, hinting she'd never truly meant to help her in the first place.

"Gabriela, even if I have to drag in an elder to mediate, I'm settling this with you right here, in front of everyone!"

Gabriela, considerably calmer, gave her a pointed reminder. "Are you sure you want to do this here?"

They were standing right outside the Everglow Group's office building, surrounded by a crowd of onlookers thoroughly enjoying the drama, ears already perked for the next act.

Chapter 1274

Rebecca took Gabriela's composure as a sign of guilt. "What, are you scared?"

"Not at all," Gabriela replied with a smile. "Go ahead. Let's hear it."

Rebecca demanded that Gabriela call Zeng Tong over right away.

Gabriela didn't argue and made the call without hesitation.

Zeng Tong, who'd been avoiding Rebecca like the plague, wasn't thrilled about showing up. But since it was Gabriela asking, she reluctantly agreed and arrived shortly after.

The moment Rebecca laid eyes on her, all her pent-up grievances came boiling over.

She couldn't hold back. "So you've finally decided to show your face?"

Zeng Tong's abrupt departure, taking her entire culinary team with her, had left Rebecca's business, Eight Treasures Delicacies, in ruins.

Orders had gone unfulfilled, complaints had flooded in, and some of the more hot-tempered customers had even taken to the internet to rant about the "most incompetent boss they'd ever seen." The once-glowing reputation of her restaurant had been thoroughly tarnished, and Rebecca had spent every waking moment since surrounded by the word "incompetent."

It felt like her head was about to split open.

Zeng Tong frowned at the outburst and spoke firmly.

"When I came back, it was out of respect for Gabriela that I signed that contract with you. Yes, I was the one who broke it first, and that was my fault. But I already paid the three-hundred-thousand-yuan penalty laid out in the agreement. What more do you want from me?"

Zeng Tong had had more than enough of Rebecca's clueless meddling. Rebecca understood nothing about the culinary world, yet insisted on micromanaging every detail of it. Zeng Tong would rather pay out hundreds of thousands of yuan than keep working under her.

Rebecca, though, only grew more incensed at her dismissive tone.

"Who exactly do you think you are, Zeng Tong? You can call yourself a gourmet chef all you like, but at the end of the day, you're just hired help. How dare you speak to me like that? Keep this up and you won't work anywhere in Okburg again!"

Rebecca's unfiltered venom made Zeng Tong's expression go dark. Even Jasper, standing off to the side, looked visibly displeased.

He stepped forward and took hold of Rebecca's arm. "Rebecca, calm down. If there's a problem, we'll sort it out back at the office."

"I won't calm down!" Rebecca yanked her arm free. "Brother, do you even know how she's been treating me? Some customers wanted new dishes, so I asked her to develop something. She didn't even look my way. When I went into the kitchen myself, she threw me out!"

"I'm her boss. I'm the one paying her salary. Who does she think she is, treating me like this?"

Rebecca had been raised like the moon at the center of a sky full of adoring stars, doted on her entire life. Her pride sat sky-high, and Zeng Tong seemed to have arrived expressly to knock her down a peg.

Every encounter with the woman left her seething.

Chapter 1275

Zeng Tong rolled her eyes and replied evenly, “Miss Espinoza, when I signed that contract, I made it perfectly clear the kitchen was my domain, off-limits even to you. And let’s not forget, you insulted my whole team and swapped out the ingredients I’d specified without permission, which also broke the terms of our agreement. I didn’t bother arguing that point with you either. I resigned, and I paid the penalty willingly.”

Her rebuttal was calm and methodical, cutting straight through the noise.

The gathered crowd was starting to piece the situation together: a spoiled heiress had assumed that paying someone’s salary gave her the right to boss them around however she liked. When the employee turned out to have a spine and quit instead, she simply couldn’t handle it.

But what did any of this have to do with Gabriela? Why was she being dragged in at all?

Rebecca answered that herself. “You make it sound so noble, but who’s to say you’re not just Gabriela’s little lapdog!”

Zeng Tong’s face darkened further.

She'd had enough. Arguing with Rebecca clearly wasn't going to lead anywhere.

Instead, she turned to Gabriela. "Gabriela, I put up with your sister for nearly four months, out of respect for you. I've already resigned and paid the penalty. Don't try to talk me into going back. It's not happening, not even if Leo himself asks me."

Gabriela had known there was no salvaging things between the two of them, but even she hadn't expected it to escalate quite this far.

She offered a genuine apology. "Sister Tong, I'm truly sorry about this."

"It's not your fault," Zeng Tong said. "Your sister doesn't behave like a reasonable person. Don't waste your energy on something so thankless."

With that, she turned and left, ignoring Rebecca's furious shouting behind her entirely.

The crowd of onlookers, many of them Everglow Group employees, began murmuring among themselves.

"Miss Howard really does have a gift for misplacing her anger, doesn't she? Her own employee quits, and somehow that's our Director Gabriela's fault?"

The comment came from someone in Gabriela's own department.

Over the past few months, her exceptional work had won over plenty of her colleagues, including her once hopelessly clumsy assistant.

Hearing the crowd side so openly with Gabriela nearly sent Rebecca over the edge.

“Gabriela, don’t think this is over! I’ll make you pay for this!”

“Sure,” Gabriela replied, unbothered, letting her gaze sweep once over the murmuring crowd before turning and walking back into the building.

Jasper watched her go, puzzled.

That’s it? That’s all?

Usually, whenever Rebecca stirred up trouble like this, Gabriela wouldn’t stop until she’d turned it into a full spectacle.

Why let it go so easily this time?

But before he could relax, his assistant handed him a phone with urgent news.

The entire scene outside the Everglow Group building had already been secretly filmed and posted online.

The video captured Rebecca's meltdown in excruciating detail, with Jasper standing visibly awkward in the background.

It spread fast, sparking heated discussion almost immediately.

Zeng Tong's many food-enthusiast followers flooded the comment section with outrage.

"Does Miss Howard have nuclear waste where her brain should be? How dare she insult a chef of Zeng Tong's caliber?"

"Some people think a little dirty money gives them the right to look down on everyone else. This Rebecca woman's arrogance is disgusting."

Chapter 1276

Gabriela scrolled through a few of the comments, took a casual screenshot, and sent it along with the video to Lauren.

When Lauren opened the message, her face darkened as she stared grimly at the screen.

How had her daughter turned into such a fool? Was it the stress of getting older and still unmarried, hormones and all, finally rotting her brain?

What Lauren failed to grasp was that Rebecca's descent into absurdity had been building for a long time.

In the past, Rebecca's life had been nothing but smooth sailing, wrapped in constant admiration.

But ever since Gabriela had entered the picture, everything had started unraveling.

Her carefully maintained image as a refined socialite had cracked wide open, exposing the petulant, spoiled woman underneath. And once the mask slipped, she'd stopped bothering to hold herself together at all, spiraling into chaos and dragging anyone nearby down with her.

If she was going to lose face regardless, she figured she might as well take Gabriela down with her.

Lauren, for her part, wasn't thinking that far ahead yet. For now, she was too busy glaring at her screen, seething over the latest disaster her daughter had made of herself.

Lauren had poured her heart and soul into raising Rebecca, and now, watching her daughter turn into someone this aggressive and unruly, the disappointment weighed heavier on her by the day.

Still, if only to prove her own daughter was no worse than Alanna's, Lauren had no choice but to grit her teeth and clean up the mess.

She spent a hefty sum bringing in a top-tier PR consultant.

Managing public perception, scrubbing videos, digging up scandal on others in return, these were standard tactics in the entertainment world, and they worked just as well in high society.

Gabriela, however, didn't react right away. She waited until Lauren had successfully suppressed the online firestorm before casually forwarding the video to Gem.

"Gem, do me a favor and put out a statement. Just say I owe Zeng Tong an apology for asking her to come back to Eight Treasures Restaurant."

Lauren had only just finished putting out that fire when, on the other side, Gem's account reposted the video.

Not only that, but she'd tagged Zeng Tong directly and issued a sincere apology on Gabriela's behalf.

This time, far more people saw it.

And Gem, a mega-influencer with nearly a hundred million followers and serious backing of her own, wasn't someone Lauren's money could silence.

No amount of spending could smother this round of outrage.

Rebecca was trending again.

It hadn't even been six months since she'd lost her bet to Gabriela and refused to kneel.

Viewers, seeing this latest outburst, started digging up her old videos too.

[Gabriela's already been publicly acknowledged by her family. Her mother was driven to her death, and the dead deserve respect. Yet Miss Howard just keeps throwing insults around, how shameless.]

[So foolish, and so vicious. No wonder Zeng Tong walked away from that restaurant.]

[A daughter usually reflects her mother. Hers must be no better, to raise someone like this.]

Chapter 1277

Then came the conspiracy theories.

[Lauren really does seem like a ruthless, controlling woman. Zero tolerance for anything out of line. Makes you wonder, honestly, about how Gabriela's mother actually died.]

That comment took off fast, gathering thousands of replies underneath it. Before long it had climbed to the very top of the thread, pinned for everyone to see.

Online commentary was always a mix of fact and speculation.

As for the theories swirling around Alanna's death, Gabriela had deliberately fanned those flames herself, hoping to keep the other side on edge.

For once, she almost had to thank Rebecca, whose sacrifice of her own image had handed Gabriela a fresh angle to work with.

Since she still lacked hard proof against Lauren, planting seeds of fear seemed the next best option.

Gabriela screenshotted the comment and sent it straight to Lauren, asking bluntly, "Lauren, did you kill my mother? Do you ever have nightmares about it?"

Sure enough, the moment Lauren saw the comment and its more than twenty thousand replies, panic washed over her.

She didn't even have time to finish cleaning up after her daughter before she was scrambling to hire even more paid commenters, hoping to bury the thread.

[Has whoever wrote that been watching too many crime dramas? Gabriela's mother died of cancer. It's not exactly a secret. Anyone can look it up.]

But the harder she pushed to refute it, the guiltier she seemed.

The replies came just as fast:

[Those paid trolls are a little too obvious. How much are you getting per comment?]

[Jumping in to "clarify" this fast? Sounds like a guilty conscience to me.]

Gabriela was now certain of it. Lauren had been behind her mother's death. Even if she hadn't done it with her own hands, she'd certainly been the one pulling the strings.

Gabriela clenched her fists tight, nails digging into her palms.

Three months.

If she couldn't find solid proof within three months, she wouldn't hesitate to take far more drastic measures to make Lauren pay for what she'd done.

Her mother had been murdered, and even now, years later, her name was still smeared with the word "mistress."

Whatever Lauren had done to her, Gabriela intended to return in kind. Lauren might have left no visible trace behind, but Gabriela could play that same game.

Without quite realizing it, a deep, consuming hatred had taken root somewhere inside her. Even three months felt like an eternity to wait.

Just then, a knock sounded at the door.

It was her assistant. "Director Gabriela, Mr. Moss is here to see you."

Wesley had heard about Rebecca's public meltdown and had dropped everything to come straight to Everglow Group, worried Gabriela might be upset.

Her clenched fists loosened at once, the confusion clouding her eyes clearing in an instant.

“Send him in.”

When Wesley walked in, his eyes swept carefully over her face. Gabriela’s gaze flickered, and she let out a soft laugh.

Chapter 1278

“It’s not like this is the first time you’ve seen me like this. You really thought something this small was worth rushing over for?”

“Of course it was,” Wesley replied firmly.

As the heir to Moss Group, his appearance at Everglow Group sent ripples through the entire office, even the seasoned executives took notice. Everyone understood the same thing.

Gabriela was not someone to be trifled with.

Wesley checked the time. Already past five.

“Come on, Gabriela. Let’s get you home.”

She shook her head. "Not yet. I need to stop by the SK Elite Boutique studio first."

She had a new design to go over with Leo.

Wesley's expression darkened instantly.

"Does it have to be today?"

"Yes." Gabriela nodded. "I already made plans with Leo this morning."

As someone still finding her footing, she wouldn't dare flake on someone as prominent as Leo.

Wesley's jaw tightened.

Gabriela stepped closer and looped her arms around his neck. "Didn't I already explain this to you? Leo just sees me as someone to mentor. Why are you getting worked up about this again?"

Wesley didn't want to seem petty, but he couldn't quite help himself.

A little jealousy now and then could be charming, even a bit of playful spice between a couple, the kind of thing Gabriela might find endearing.

But too much of it, and he'd start looking childish instead.

Still, something about Leo just didn't sit right with him.

On the surface, the man seemed gentle, harmless even. But every time Gabriela mentioned his name, Wesley felt like a cat on a hot tin roof.

It was maddening.

Finally, he admitted bluntly, "I'm jealous. I don't want you going to see him right now."

He could tell she was in a bad mood today, and he worried that if Leo offered her even a small, casual bit of comfort, it might plant something in her that hadn't been there before.

Even the faintest spark of attraction toward the man would be enough to drive Wesley out of his mind.

Faced with her boyfriend's blunt confession of jealousy, Gabriela felt a mix of amusement and exasperation.

To settle him, she offered, “How about this. You drive me there yourself. Would that work?”

That, Wesley could live with.

He drove her straight to the SK Elite Boutique studio.

Once there, Gabriela threw herself into work right away.

She’d already explained the situation to Leo when they’d first scheduled the meeting to design a new outfit.

This time, guilt was driving her. Her personal grudge with Rebecca had inadvertently made Zena a pawn in the whole mess, costing her hundreds of thousands of dollars in the process. Gabriela felt she owed her an apology.

She’d originally planned to compensate Zena directly for the loss, but Zena had turned her down.

“If your idiot sister ever found out, she’d assume you did it on purpose just to stir up more trouble for her. I don’t need that kind of drama in my life.”

Zena wasn't afraid of conflict, but she had no interest in getting tangled up with someone like Rebecca ever again.

Chapter 1279

Besides, to Zena, a few hundred thousand wasn't really the point.

Since she wouldn't take the money, Gabriela had to think of another way.

Part of the reason Zena had agreed to return to Ba Zhen Yu Shi in the first place, besides the Duchess's influence, was her genuine love for SK's designs.

She was also a fan of Leo's work. And because Gabriela had a professional relationship with him, Zena had come to see her in a friendlier light too.

Gabriela decided to gift her a set of SK clothing instead.

Leo didn't bother asking why, and agreed to help right away.

Still feeling a twinge of guilt, Gabriela added, "Leo, once the outfit's ready, I'll pay whatever SK normally charges for it."

Leo, naturally, didn't want to take her money. "Why are you being so formal with me about this?"

But Gabriela insisted. "Because this is my way of apologizing to Zena. If you won't let me pay, the gesture loses its meaning."

Leo had no choice but to agree, however reluctantly.

He sketched out a new design quickly, and Gabriela added a few touches suited to Zena's profession. Together they hammered out the initial concept for the outfit.

By the time they'd finished, night had fully settled in.

Gabriela said her goodbyes to Leo.

He hesitated a moment before asking, concern in his voice. "Are you... doing all right today?"

Gabriela knew exactly what he meant, Rebecca's public outburst.

"It's nothing. I'm not letting it get to me," she said.

Leo studied her carefully.

After being torn into like that in public, how could it not affect her at all?

Today, her eyes had lost that usual bright spark, a clear enough sign that something was weighing on her.

But since she clearly didn't want to talk about it, he didn't push.

He simply said, "If you ever need help with anything, don't hesitate to ask."

"Got it. Thanks, Leo."

The two of them walked out together.

Wesley was seated on the sofa outside, absorbed in his phone, a hint of gravity in his expression, as though something important had come up.

Hearing their footsteps, he looked up right away. "All finished?"

“Mm-hmm.”

Gabriela walked over and took his arm. “Let’s head home.”

Wesley gave Leo a polite nod before leaving with her.

Leo lowered his gaze and let out a soft, barely audible sigh.

Gabriela was clearly troubled by something.

He wished he could offer some comfort, even if it was nothing more than sharing a meal together.

Gabriela and Wesley made it back to Rosemont Gardens before long.

As they waited for the automatic gate to swing open, a figure suddenly emerged from around the corner and knocked on the car window.

Gabriela flinched, startled.

Looking closer, she realized she recognized the woman.

A housekeeper who used to work at her family's villa.

Gabriela stepped out of the car, and the moment she got a good look at the woman's face, she froze.

"Aunt Zhu, what happened to you...?"

Chapter 1280

How had she ended up looking like this?

Aunt Zhu had been let go not long after Marie moved into the villa. During her time there, she'd sided with Phyllis and joined in bullying Gabriela.

Even so, once Gabriela had reclaimed the house for herself, she hadn't thrown Aunt Zhu out.

Both Tessa and Aubrey had warned Gabriela against keeping someone like her around, calling her a ticking time bomb. But Gabriela believed that whatever her flaws, Aunt Zhu had her limits.

In the end, Aunt Zhu had left the villa on her own. It had happened around the New Year, when she'd taken extended leave and simply never returned.

The reason she'd given at the time was, "My child is sick. I need to go stay in the countryside and look after him."

Gabriela hadn't pressed for more details. Hearing it was about her child's illness, she'd even given Aunt Zhu a sum of money to help.

But she remembered clearly that when Aunt Zhu left, her hair had still been jet black, and she'd looked no older than forty.

Now, just a few years later, that hair had gone completely white, and her face had aged so dramatically she looked well past sixty.

Meeting Gabriela's baffled stare, Aunt Zhu suddenly dropped to her knees, tears streaming down her face.

"Miss Gabriela, is there any work I could do for your family? I'm strong, I can handle any kind of labor. Please, I'm begging you, just give me a job."

Gabriela reached out to pull her back up. "Please, get up and talk to me."

She managed to lift her, but Aunt Zhu's back stayed hunched, her voice trembling with fear and unease.

“Miss Gabriela, I know I treated you unfairly back then. I wronged you. I don’t even have the right to ask you for help now...”

At that moment, Wesley stepped out of the car too. He gently but firmly drew Gabriela back a step, creating a small distance between her and Aunt Zhu.

Aunt Zhu began recounting everything she’d been through these past few years.

It turned out that the year she’d gone home for the New Year, she’d found her son gravely ill, diagnosed with leukemia.

In the years since, she’d drained every last bit of savings and borrowed from anyone who’d lend her money. Her husband, unable to bear the strain, had eventually demanded a divorce.

But Aunt Zhu had refused to give up on her son. She’d gritted her teeth and kept going, caring for him while scrambling to earn whatever she could to pay for his treatment.

In just a handful of years, the stress and hardship had aged her by decades.

“Miss Gabriela, I was so cruel to you back then. This is my punishment for it.”

Tears kept streaming down her face as she spoke.

“But if I have to be punished, why couldn’t it just fall on me? Why does my boy, Xiao Feng, have to suffer for it too?”

Gabriela and Wesley listened in silence.