

His kiss 141

Chapter 141

Loretta's vision dimmed, and for a moment she thought she might collapse. The rumor was absurd—utterly impossible.

"These people are talking rubbish!" she burst out.

Miriam, spotting her agitation, leaned in with calculated gravity. "Do you remember that fortune-teller you brought in last time? The one who warned something bad would happen to Mr. Moss before year's end?"

Loretta nodded. "Oh, yes—it sounded dreadful! Thank goodness I paid for those protective rites."

"If you ask me, Gabriela is the one who warded it off," Miriam continued, each word deliberate. "When she arrived last night, she was so badly hurt she couldn't even stand. Mr. Moss carried her all the way inside himself."

Could a delicate young woman like Gabriela truly shield Wesley from ill fortune? The thought hovered in Loretta's mind, impossible yet strangely compelling.

Miriam carried on weaving her story. "See how her cheekbones slope gently instead of jutting out? That softness means good fortune. And the radiant, joyful energy that follows her? Every sign points to a woman born under a lucky star."

Loretta drew in a quick breath. “I was so taken with her beauty, I didn’t even notice these.”

“Believe me, any man who wins her hand would be walking away with the prize of a lifetime,” Miriam said firmly.

“I judged her wrong,” Loretta admitted at last.

“It’s fine. There are still ways we can... encourage developments between Mr. Moss and her,” Miriam said, her tone softening. Leaning closer, she murmured a scheme into Loretta’s ear. “When he turns in tonight, we’ll do this...”

“Are you sure that will work?” Loretta faltered.

She had always enjoyed her conversations with Miriam, trusting the housekeeper without question—perhaps because of those warm, kind eyes and her steady, gentle manner. But Gabriela was another matter entirely, and Loretta’s unfamiliarity bred caution.

“For now, we need to keep Gabriela here,” Miriam pressed on. “Mr. Moss upset Gabriela last night, and the thought of staying another night likely unsettles her.”

Loretta gave a small nod. “Alright, we’ll do as you say. I’ll figure out a way to make her stay.”

Gabriela, despite her injured foot, had carried out her tasks with quiet patience, never once complaining. That gentle, agreeable nature had won Loretta's favor. Now she far preferred Gabriela to Fiona, whose spoiled delicacy grated in comparison.

When their private discussion ended, Loretta and Miriam returned to the living room, where Gabriela sat waiting with calm composure.

"My foot's feeling much better. My uncle called earlier and asked me to come home."

At that, whatever hesitation Loretta still harbored vanished in an instant. She leaned forward, her tone almost urgent. "Leaving already? Is something bothering you here?"

Gabriela, puzzled by the sudden warmth in Loretta's manner, answered politely, "Mr. Moss was kind enough to take me in last night, and I'd hate to impose any further."

Miriam leaned in with a warm smile. "It's no trouble at all. The manor's big enough to spare a room for you."

Gabriela gave an awkward smile. But the room they meant was Wesley's own bedroom.

Catching the flicker of hesitation in her eyes, Loretta felt a pang of shame. Only last night she'd been convinced Gabriela had no self-respect, that she was chasing after money and would latch onto her grandson without a shred of dignity.

“Gabriela, are you angry at me for giving you a hard time earlier?” she asked gently.

Gabriela shook her head quickly. “Not at all. My uncle’s asking me to come home.”

Chapter 142

“With that injured foot of yours, how are you even planning to get there? Stay another night, and leave tomorrow once you’ve had more rest.” Loretta’s eyes grew misty with theatrical sorrow. “If you walk out now, it’s as good as saying you are upset with me.”

With Loretta’s voice brimming with earnestness, Gabriela felt cornered into agreeing. “Fine, I’ll give it one more night.”

Miriam exhaled in quiet relief and headed to the kitchen to arrange dinner.

Knowing she’d be staying, Gabriela pulled out her phone to call her uncle. She spoke softly into the phone. “Yes, I’m not coming back tonight. My ankle’s still sore, so I’ll stay over at a friend’s place... No, it’s nothing serious—no need for the hospital.”

From the side, Loretta observed her. Wesley had said Gabriela had been locked out late at night, yet here she was, still speaking to her uncle with unshakable respect. Gabriela truly seemed a rare find. Loretta’s affection for her deepened—after all, here was a young woman who treated everyone with genuine courtesy.

Gabriela, however, felt a prickle of unease beneath Loretta's suddenly adoring gaze, sensing an odd shift in her demeanor.

Dinner was soon served, drawing everyone to the long, gleaming table. Loretta's gaze sharpened when she noticed how closely Gabriela attended to Wesley's tastes. When a platter of spicy shredded vegetables landed near him, Gabriela leaned in and murmured, "Mr. Moss, maybe go easy on this one. Or I can take out the chilies for you—how about that?"

As his secretary, she knew his preferences by heart. Wesley couldn't handle too much heat because of his heart, yet he still craved a faint burn of spice. He gave a quiet "Okay," and though his face remained composed, the faint curl at the edge of his lips betrayed the lift in his mood.

Loretta found the change in him astonishing. Her grandson had always been stubborn, brushing off nearly everyone's advice—yet Gabriela could move him without effort. She cast a sidelong glance at Miriam, who met her gaze with a serene smile that wordlessly said, "Told you she was remarkable."

Once dinner was cleared away, Loretta and Miriam drew Gabriela into a round of cards. Laughter and lighthearted banter carried them past ten o'clock, until at last they let her slip away to her room for the night.

Gabriela climbed the stairs, her gaze sweeping over the sprawling master bedroom with quiet reluctance. "Miriam, would it be alright if I stayed in a guest room tonight?"

With practiced ease, Miriam offered a smooth excuse. "We ended up playing so late there wasn't time to ready a guest room. Just spend another night here."

A faint discomfort prickled at Gabriela. “And... what about Mr. Moss?”

Loretta cut in before Miriam could speak. “He can keep sleeping in the study.”

Gabriela found it a bit improper, yet Miriam gave her a gentle push through the doorway. “That’s settled—Loretta and I are far too old to be staying up late. Good night.”

Once she was nudged into Wesley’s bedroom, Miriam and Loretta made their way toward the study to track down Wesley.

He had just stepped out of the shower, a faint curl of steam clinging to him as he worked a blow-dryer through his damp hair. The moment he spotted Loretta and Miriam entering together, a ripple of unease crossed his face.

“Grandma, Miriam—what brings you both here?”

Chapter 143

Loretta pulled Wesley straight out of bed, her voice clipped and urgent. “I went to see a fortune-teller. He says your bad luck’s been running rampant lately. Step aside for a minute. I’m sprinkling holy water right now.”

His damp hair clung to his forehead, stray droplets sliding down the line of his neck as she dragged him away. Suppressing a groan, he muttered, “It’s the middle of the night, Grandma. Can’t we do this tomorrow?”

Her tone left no room for argument. “Absolutely not. Once we start, we finish—and we finish tonight.”

From the doorway, Miriam hurried in, clutching a massive basin brimming with holy water. The thing was so full it sloshed with every step, forcing her to walk stiffly, swaying like she was balancing on a tightrope.

Concern flickered across Wesley’s face, his brow drawing tight as he moved in. “Here, let me give you a hand.”

Loretta instantly blocked him with an outstretched arm. “Don’t touch a thing—stay out of the way!”

He could only retreat a step, letting the two women fuss over the task themselves.

That was when Miriam, having overfilled the basin, wobbled under its weight. The water sloshed violently, spilling across the bed in a sudden wave.

Flustered, Miriam blurted an apology. “Oh dear, I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean for that to happen. This basin’s far too heavy for an old woman like me to carry without spilling.”

Wesley exhaled through his nose, his voice gentling. “Are you hurt?”

Miriam shook her head with a quick smile. "I'm perfectly fine."

Loretta's eyes swept over the room with a solemn air, her voice low and certain. "Your bad luck is no joke this year. It was already terrible, and now it's doubled." Without warning, she clapped her hands together, as though struck by divine revelation. "The fortune-teller warned you—no new beds until the year's over. You need to move back to your original room tonight."

Wesley gave a flat reply. "I sometimes crash in the study, or at the office." He'd even slept in hotel rooms while traveling for work.

"That was before!" Loretta shot back, narrowing her eyes. "Things have changed. Go sleep in the master bedroom!"

Wesley let out a slow sigh, shaking his head. "Weren't you the one who insisted on giving my master bedroom to my secretary?"

"The bed's large enough for both of you to sleep on your own sides," Loretta said as if the matter were already settled. "Gabriela's a proper young woman. You're a full-grown man. Surely you're not worried she'll try something she shouldn't with you?"

Wesley shot her a wary look, confusion flickering in his eyes.

From the moment Loretta stepped in, she had seemed intent on criticizing Gabriela at every turn, yet within mere hours, she and Miriam were suddenly united in opinion.

Wesley had no interest in deciphering whatever peculiar schemes played out in these two women's minds. Instead of engaging, he pushed open the study door and called to a passing servant, "Prepare a guest room."

"Understood, sir."

Their displeasure was evident in the tightness of Loretta's mouth and the narrowing of Miriam's eyes, but the servant worked quickly, readying the room in no time.

Both women followed Wesley inside like shadows unwilling to be shaken.

He regarded the pair with thinly veiled exasperation and said in a firm, nonnegotiable tone, "I'm feeling a little worn out today and need some rest. Let's do the holy water tomorrow."

Loretta's spine stiffened, her tone brooking no refusal. "Absolutely not. This is a brand-new room with a brand-new bed. At the very least, I have to light a blessed candle and pray for peace."

Wesley found the whole thing absurd. To him, the biggest source of unrest in the house was Loretta and Miriam, not some unseen bad luck.

But Loretta had been steeped in superstition for as long as he could remember. He had grown up knowing her faith in these little rites was unshakable, and after he'd narrowly escaped a brush with death, her devotion had only intensified. Every month without fail, she kept to a strict schedule of

prayers and consultations, and if the slightest sign of bad luck appeared, she would go to extraordinary lengths to counter it on his behalf.

And he knew her well enough to understand that if she didn't carry out her ritual tonight, she'd toss and turn until dawn.

With a resigned breath, Wesley gave a reluctant nod. "All right. But try not to make a mess this time."

Without missing a beat, Loretta swept in carrying three blessed candles. She arranged them neatly beside the bed, murmured a solemn prayer, and whispered sacred words before striking a match and setting the wicks alight. Everything went off without a hitch, prompting her to clap her hands with satisfaction. "That's it. All done."

But Wesley's gut told him the night was far from over.

Sure enough, Miriam's shrill voice broke the moment. "The blanket's on fire!"

Chapter 144

The flames had only just licked across the fabric, not yet taking hold, and Wesley lunged for his coat to smother them.

Before he could, Loretta caught his arm. "These are blessed candles—you can't just snuff them out like that!"

In the next heartbeat, Miriam upended the basin of holy water, dousing both fire and bed in one dramatic splash.

The mattress sagged under the weight of the water, dripping onto the floor.

Wesley's patience frayed to its limit. Still, he bit back his frustration, fixing both women with a tight-lipped stare as he endured their chaos in silence.

Hearing the alarm about the fire, the servants swarmed in from every direction, eager to help douse the flames.

In moments, the hallway descended into a noisy scramble.

Gabriela, startled by the commotion, snatched a coat from the hook and hurried out.

A crowd of over a dozen people jammed the corridor, their faces tight with worry. At the center of the commotion stood Wesley, draped in a black, robe-like pajama. His hair was still damp, dark strands falling over his eyes, and his expression radiated irritation.

A flicker of unease tightened Gabriela's chest. "What happened?" she asked.

Loretta sidled up to her, looking utterly defeated, and lowered her voice. “The fortune-teller was right—Wesley’s bad luck this year is worse than ever. First, the bed in his study was soaked, and now the guest-room bed caught fire. He can’t sleep on a new bed at all.”

Wesley’s gaze cut toward her, the corner of his mouth twitching. The sheer gall it took for Loretta to twist events like this made his eyes darken in mild, simmering exasperation.

Gabriela couldn’t wrap her head around it. “How does a bed just catch fire out of nowhere?”

Was Wesley lighting up a cigarette or something? No—he wasn’t the type to be that reckless. No one offered her an explanation.

Miriam, standing close by, muttered, “Poor Mr. Moss. Everyone else gets to relax during the holidays, but he’s still buried in work. Spends his days locked in meetings and now doesn’t even have a proper place to sleep.”

At that, the situation finally clicked for Gabriela. She turned to him and immediately insisted, “Mr. Moss, why don’t you just go back to your bedroom tonight? I can fix up a guest room and manage for the night.”

Wesley’s lip dipped in a curl, his expression growing even darker.

“Not happening,” Loretta cut Gabriela off without hesitation. “You’re a guest here, and I’m not about to have you shuffling rooms in the middle of the night.”

“But Mr. Moss...” Gabriela began, biting back the rest.

Wasn’t he supposed to be avoiding any new rooms or beds because of all that ominous bad luck talk?

With a coaxing lilt, Loretta added, “Wesley’s room is huge! Why don’t you just share it with him?”

Gabriela’s eyes widened as she countered, “Absolutely not. If it’s that inconvenient, I’ll just head home right now.”

Wesley hadn’t uttered a word, yet his expression was already set in a grim, unreadable mask.

Was she really that unwilling to stay near him? Would she rather return to that oppressive house—the same one that could bolt its door in her face in the dead of night—than spend one evening in the same bed with him?

Loretta caught Gabriela by the wrist and drew her aside, lowering her voice to a hush. “Let me be straight with you—Wesley isn’t into women. You’re perfectly safe with him.”

Her eyes glistened as she launched into an exaggerated sob. “Please, just do me this favor. Stay with him tonight. You can take the bed and let him sleep on the floor.”

Gabriela stood there, stunned into silence. She hadn't expected to learn that Wesley was not only a masochist but also gay. Bosses truly had their own baffling quirks.

And what kind of person would let him take the floor while she claimed the bed? She knew all too well that if Wesley spent the night on the rigid floor, she'd likely be unemployed by morning.

Loretta's casual disclosure of such an intimate secret felt like someone had just handed Gabriela a ticking time bomb. Knowing too much about her boss was dangerous. She was doomed.

Tears glistening in her eyes, Loretta leaned in, voice trembling as she pleaded, "I told you something incredibly important. You have to help me, all right?"

The question landed like a blade. Was that... a threat?

Gabriela's chest tightened. She drew in a sharp breath, then nodded. "Fine. I'll do it."

What choice did she have? When Loretta begged with tears yet pressed with subtle menace, refusal wasn't on the table.

The master bedroom was spacious anyway; she could always sleep on the floor.

The moment Gabriela agreed, Loretta lit up, seized her hand, and all but dragged her toward Wesley. “Wesley,” she announced with cheerful triumph. “Gabriela’s agreed to let you come back to the master bedroom. You two can share it tonight!”

A storm gathered instantly over Wesley’s face.

Chapter 145

Wesley’s temper snapped like a dry twig.

Sensing his mood darken, Gabriela offered a gentle murmur. “Don’t take it to heart. Your grandmother only means well.”

The warmth in her voice slipped under his guard, making his chest tighten—and, perversely, stoking his irritation.

Unable to restrain himself, he hissed under his breath, “Fool!”

How could she give in so quickly on something like this? What if she ran into someone truly malicious? She’d be taken advantage of.

Realizing he disapproved of how she’d handled things, Gabriela kept her gaze lowered and her lips pressed shut, afraid to provoke him further.

Loretta, catching sight of Wesley's darkening expression and terrified Gabriela might bolt, dissolved into tears yet again. "Wesley, your mother left too soon, and I raised you under more pressure than you can imagine. Of course I want the boy I watched grow up to stay safe and sound. Now I'm only asking you to spend one night in the same room with Gabriela, and you turn me down? That's cruel. I see who you really are now. I'm so disappointed in you!"

A dull throb pulsed at Wesley's temples.

Gabriela stood frozen in shock.

Down the hall, the servants slipped away one by one, unwilling to be caught lingering over their employer's private affairs.

Only Miriam seemed to savor the scene, flashing Loretta a sly, triumphant thumbs-up.

Seeing Wesley tongue-tied, Loretta pressed on. "You're a grown man, Wesley. Quit fussing and get back to your bedroom!"

Without managing a single rebuttal, the usually imposing, self-possessed Wesley found himself herded toward his master bedroom by a storm of coaxing and scolding, punctuated by Loretta's tears and sharp reprimands.

The door slammed hard behind them, leaving Gabriela staring at Wesley's dark, unyielding expression, caught in a silence so awkward she didn't know where to look.

His gaze lingered on her, steady and searching. “Do you know...”

The truth was, he found himself falling for her a little more with each moment. Yet she didn’t return his feelings—she’d even mocked his long legs once. Sharing a room without any defined relationship—what kind of arrangement was this?

Sensing his mood had shifted for the better, Gabriela seized her chance. “You should take the bed tonight,” she murmured warmly. “Don’t worry. I’ll be just fine. I’ve slept on floors more times than I can count, and I’m used to it.”

Wesley’s lips curved in a cold, mocking smile. “You really think I would let a woman sleep on the floor?”

Gabriela bit back any reply, deciding not to argue. Pride was clearly at stake here—gay or not, Wesley wasn’t about to let her trample over his sense of manhood. If she kept pushing to sleep on the floor, she’d only wound that pride deeper.

But the thought of climbing into his bed left her uneasy. So, in a cautious murmur, she offered, “Then... how about we both sleep in it? It’s plenty big—we can stay on our own sides.”

In her mind, with him being gay, there was nothing to worry about.

Wesley’s sharp eyes caught the exact calculation behind her offer. She stood there like an employee negotiating with her boss—careful not to offend, unwilling to see him banished to the floor, yet too

wary to challenge him outright. Her indifference to sharing a bed—her utter disregard for him as a man—landed like a punch to the gut.

Fury surged, burning through his chest. “Fine,” he answered, his voice edged with frost.

With Wesley’s agreement, Gabriela felt the tension leave her chest. “I’m going to sleep. Good night,” she murmured gently.

She’d nearly drifted off earlier, but the commotion had roused her. Now, her body felt leaden with fatigue. She removed her coat and slipped under the covers, ready to let sleep take her.

“Gabriela.” Wesley’s voice cut through the quiet, sharp with shock. “What in the world are you wearing?”

Last night’s slip dress had already been scandalous enough—skimpy but at least not see-through. Tonight’s clung to her like mist, the sheer fabric leaving little to the imagination. The thin straps perched on her shoulders looked as if they’d give way with a careless tug.

A sudden, unwelcome heat coiled low in Wesley’s abdomen.

Realization dawned on Gabriela, and she snatched her coat, fumbling to pull it back on. “This slip dress came from Miriam. What’s got you so worked up?” she muttered defensively.

Chapter 146

She hadn't expected any trouble tonight, so the daring slip hadn't seemed like an issue. As Wesley's secretary, she wouldn't dare dig through his wardrobe for something else to wear. Who could have guessed it would turn into this?

"Worked up or not, I wouldn't be into you," Wesley muttered through clenched teeth. "Go change."

Gabriela had nothing else to wear. The only option left was yesterday's curve-hugging gown—utterly unsuitable for sleeping.

Wesley realized that too. With a weary sigh, he disappeared into the walk-in closet and pulled open the wardrobe. Everything inside belonged to him, including the robe he reached for. At his six-foot-two frame, the robe could have swallowed two Gabrielas whole. In the end, he came back with a crisp white shirt and handed it over.

Gabriela changed behind the closed closet door and emerged a moment later. Wesley kept his gaze fixed elsewhere, his voice clipped as he ordered, "Get under the blanket and stay still. No moving around."

The sharpness in his tone pricked at her pride. Gabriela was a bit offended. Gay or not, did he have to behave as if she were unbearable?

"Got it, Mr. Moss," she murmured, curling quickly beneath the covers.

Minutes ticked by, and still, Wesley hadn't climbed into bed. Gabriela, ever unbothered, drifted toward sleep, her lashes lowering in lazy blinks until her eyes shut completely. Only after his pulse steadied did Wesley finally slip into bed.

Gabriela was already out cold, her breathing deep and even, utterly oblivious as he eased down beside her. She lay in perfect stillness, her face serene.

Wesley shifted onto his side, his gaze lingering on her for what felt like an eternity. With each quiet breath she took, the tension in his chest eased, replaced by a deep, aching tenderness.

"Gabriela," he murmured softly, calling her name more than once.

She didn't stir, her lashes resting like dark fans against her cheeks. Holding his breath, he leaned closer until her warmth brushed against him and pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead.

He cared for her—more than he dared admit. Yet the cruel truth was that her heart didn't seem to hold the same place for him.

Loretta and Miriam, pleased with their plotting, crept up to the bedroom door and pressed their ears against it, straining to catch even the faintest sound. Silence met them. With a twinge of disappointment, they slid the lock into place.

"Do you think this will actually work?" Loretta whispered, doubt creeping into her voice. She had expected at least some evidence of the fiery scene Miriam had so confidently predicted.

Miriam, undeterred, lowered her voice but spoke with conviction. “Gabriela is stunning—flawless figure, gorgeous face. If Wesley can spend an entire night in the same bed with her and still keep his hands to himself, then there’s only one explanation...”

She let the implication hang, the unspoken conclusion clear—he was truly gay. That possibility turned Loretta pale. She swallowed hard, clinging to the fragile hope that everything would unfold as planned.

Morning arrived in a wash of soft light. Gabriela woke from the most peaceful sleep, her lashes fluttering open—only to freeze at the sight before her. A sharp gasp caught in her throat, and she snapped her eyes shut, heart thudding. When she dared to peek again, the image remained.

Wesley lay beside her, one arm draped around her in a loose, protective hold. To her relief, he hadn’t woken.

Gabriela’s initial wave of relief dwindled quickly, replaced by a restless curiosity that had her sneaking a few more covert glances at Wesley. Waking up cradled in the arms of her crush was a rare luxury—one most employees could only dream about.

His embrace radiated steady warmth, his scent a subtle blend of sandalwood and something darker, more intoxicating. Even in sleep, his sharply cut features looked effortlessly handsome, his lips set in a faint, alluring pout.

What a man—gorgeous to the point of being unreal.

Such a shame he was supposedly gay.

Gabriela started to shift, ready to slip away, when her body went rigid and her eyes snapped shut.

Wait a second. Hadn't Loretta insisted Wesley wasn't into women?

Then why could she suddenly feel the hard heat of his arousal pressed against her?

Her lashes stayed clamped together, every muscle strung tight as she held her breath, pretending to still be asleep.

Chapter 147

Gabriela felt as if she could barely breathe, nearly overwhelmed by how close she was to Wesley. Why was he still rock-hard against her? Was he awake? If he realized she was nestled so snugly against him, would he be upset?

Wesley was, in fact, fully awake. The slightest shift from Gabriela snapped him to alertness. A twinge of irritation flickered within him. It was early morning, and the woman he cherished was wrapped in his arms—how could he possibly remain unaffected? His body burned with intensity, yet he kept still, wary of alarming her. He planned to feign sleep, hoping she would slip away first, but she stayed put. Now, with his physical reaction impossible to hide, she seemed too nervous to move, as if suffocating under the weight of the moment.

Wesley, both frustrated and self-conscious, spoke with measured calm. "Have you forgotten how to breathe? Open your eyes."

His tone was cool, but it carried the rough edge of someone freshly roused from sleep, making the moment feel even more intimate.

Gabriela, still pretending to be asleep, refused to open her eyes.

"Don't you care about your paycheck?"

That snapped her to attention. Her eyes flew open instantly. She tilted her head up, meeting Wesley's intense, deep-set gaze. Her cheeks flushed crimson as she played dumb, acting as if she had just stirred awake. "Morning, Mr. Moss."

"Morning," he replied, a faint smirk tugging at his lips. "Didn't you say sleeping on opposite sides of the bed would work out fine? Care to explain this?"

Petite as she was, Gabriela had curled up completely within Wesley's embrace. With any other man, this might have spelled trouble. Her attempt to brush it off didn't fool him, and at his words, her face grew even redder.

With a playful tone, she shot back, "Mr. Moss, if I said I might have a sleepwalking problem, would you buy it?"

Wesley didn't respond to her quip. Instead, he said, "Get up, freshen up, and figure out how you're going to justify this to me."

Gabriela scrambled to her feet and bolted to the bathroom, her heart racing. She was flustered. Wesley seemed so stern—did accidentally ending up in his arms really warrant an explanation?

Watching her dart away, Wesley let out a soft chuckle. The master bed was enormous, spanning four meters—plenty of space for two to sleep far apart. Last night, after lying down, he'd tried to force himself to sleep immediately. But the subtle scent beside him enveloped him, setting his pulse racing. He tossed and turned, barely sleeping a wink. Making her a little anxious and flustered felt fair—he shouldn't be the only one uncomfortable.

Wesley rose, planning to leave the room and find another bathroom to shower. But the door wouldn't open. Recalling Loretta and Miriam's meddling from the night before, he pieced together their scheme and chuckled quietly. Today, he realized just how charming Gabriela was. In just two days at the estate, she had completely won over his housekeeper and grandmother.

When Gabriela emerged, dressed and composed, Wesley informed her, "The door is locked from the outside. I've called my grandmother—she will come and unlock it." Without waiting for her reply, he stepped into the bathroom.

Soon after, Loretta and Miriam arrived to open the door. Loretta had had a restless night, and when Wesley's call came, she rushed over to see what had unfolded. Seeing Gabriela already dressed, she felt a pang of disappointment. "Gabriela, did anything happen between you and Wesley last night?"

Gabriela's expression faltered, a touch awkward. "Everything was fine. The bed is huge, and we each kept to our own side without disturbing each other." She didn't dare admit she had ended up curled in Wesley's arms.

Miriam's eyes widened. "You two shared a bed?"

Chapter 148

Gabriela's ears turned scarlet as she insisted, "It's an enormous bed! We weren't even within arm's reach of each other!"

Loretta and Miriam exchanged a look. Miriam kept scanning Gabriela's neck for any telltale marks, but found none.

What the hell. They had slept in the same bed, and nothing had happened. Was it possible that Wesley really had no interest in women?

Gabriela sensed Loretta's and Miriam's disappointment but didn't know how to comfort them. "Mrs. Larson, Miriam, shall we head downstairs?" she suggested, hoping to escape the awkwardness before Wesley finished his shower.

Loretta and Miriam, visibly deflated, followed her out of the master bedroom.

When Wesley emerged from the bathroom and entered the walk-in closet, he chose a shirt, vest, tie, and watch, dressing with care before slipping into his suit. He usually worked from home in casual clothes, but today, for some reason, he felt the need to dress sharply. Perhaps it was to reassert some authority in Gabriela's eyes.

As Wesley descended the stairs, Gabriela's gaze immediately found him. Now fully dressed, he exuded his usual distant, unapproachable air.

She said briskly, "Mr. Moss, I apologize for the inconvenience these past two days. I would like to head home now."

She hoped her polite request would spare her from explaining her earlier actions.

Wesley's lips quirked slightly. Despite the morning's unexpected events leaving him a bit irritated, deep down, he wanted her to stay. He enjoyed her presence.

"Which home?" he asked with a scoff. "The one where they locked you out at night?"

Gabriela hesitated, then met his gaze firmly. "Yes, that's my home—the house my mother left me. I'll reclaim it one day, no matter what." In the future, no one would dare bar her from her own home again.

The usually reserved Gabriela had a spark of determination in her eyes as she spoke of taking back her house. Wesley was certain she could do it. Having grown up in tough circumstances, she had still emerged vibrant and optimistic. Nothing could stand in her way.

"Is your foot better?" he asked, his tone detached.

Hearing his cool voice, Gabriela replied quickly, "It's fine now. I can even wear heels." Even if it still ached, she wouldn't admit it—Wesley would only lecture her again.

"I'll have my driver take you home," Wesley said.

Gabriela almost declined, but knowing his temperament, she nodded and thanked him.

Their conversation flowed smoothly, but it left Loretta and Miriam uneasy. "Come on!" Loretta interjected urgently. "Wesley, Gabriela is a guest—you can't just send her off the moment she's up. At least let her have breakfast first."

"I'll have the kitchen prepare it," Miriam chimed in, hurrying off at once.

Gabriela had no choice but to stay. She resolved to leave right after breakfast, determined not to linger.

But things did not unfold as she expected. After a quick meal, Loretta mentioned the onions she had brought and asked Gabriela to help dry them in the sun.

Wesley, catching onto Miriam's matchmaking, sighed. "Grandma, Gabriela is on vacation. You shouldn't be giving her tasks."

"Mr. Moss, it's fine," Gabriela cut in quickly, worried Loretta might get upset. "It's just a small favor—no trouble at all."

After drying the onions, Loretta produced a stack of gift boxes and asked Gabriela to help assemble them. Each would be given as a New Year present to the estate's staff as a small token of appreciation.

Gabriela was stunned—she had never seen a family give gifts to their servants before.

How many staff did the manor employ? How much would all those gifts cost?

For a fleeting moment, Gabriela reasoned that if she shamelessly stayed through New Year's, perhaps she might receive a gift too.

Surely Wesley wouldn't mind adding one more, right?

Chapter 149

Miriam's gaze brightened the moment she caught Gabriela's hesitation.

Everyone had an Achilles' heel.

Gabriela had always seemed untouchable, flawless in poise and charm, and Miriam had been racking her brain for a way to keep her close. Inviting her to help pack gifts had been nothing more than a delaying tactic.

So, Gabriela had a soft spot for lavish gifts? Excellent. A refreshingly uncomplicated desire.

Her eyes gleaming, Miriam cleared her throat. “These here are just Mr. Moss’s gifts for the staff. Loretta’s here for New Year’s, so she’ll be giving out gifts too,” she said casually.

Noticing Gabriela’s ears practically perk up, Miriam pressed on. “I’ll hand out mine too.”

Gabriela could hardly contain her delight—the three of them would distribute gifts separately.

How could she not love that?

Loretta wasn’t slow on the uptake. She chimed in at once, “Exactly. My gifts are reserved for those who spend New Year’s here.”

Gabriela’s pulse quickened, her chest alight with giddy anticipation.

This family was obscenely rich.

One glance at Gabriela’s spark-filled eyes, and Miriam was already hatching a fresh scheme to keep her anchored here.

While Gabriela busied herself packing those gifts, Miriam leaned toward Loretta, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial murmur.

After last night's failed scheme, Loretta's expression was wary. "You really think this will work?" she asked.

"Of course it will!" Miriam said with confidence. "Gabriela's got real feelings for Wesley. You just jumped the gun yesterday, and it spooked her into thinking she should leave."

Loretta discreetly rolled her eyes. That ridiculous stunt had been Miriam's brainchild, yet here she was, pinning the blame elsewhere.

"Just follow my lead," Miriam said. "This time, we make sure she stays. Feelings need time to grow. Push too hard and they wilt."

Loretta held her tongue. Right now, getting Wesley to open his heart mattered more than picking a fight.

"Fine," she said at last. "But this is the last time I'm trusting you."

Before long, Gabriela had neatly finished packing every last gift.

Loretta glanced at the grand clock dominating the wall, then clapped her hands in feigned surprise. “Is it that late already? I’ll cook today. Gabriela, stay and have lunch before you leave.”

Gabriela followed her gaze to the clock.

Ten o’clock sharp. Lunch? Now?

“Well—” She opened her mouth, then hesitated.

Those gifts were tempting, but another day here might only push Wesley’s patience further. Her well-paying job was worth far more in the long run than any lavish gift.

“After lunch, can I head straight back?” Gabriela asked.

“Of course,” Miriam replied at once, her tone smooth. “Once you’re done eating, Mr. Moss’s driver will take you home.”

Soon, Loretta set the last dish on the table, and lunch was ready.

When Wesley stepped out of his study and spotted Gabriela still lingering at the estate, his brows lifted in mild surprise, then curved in faint amusement. Whatever scheme Loretta and Miriam were brewing this time, he was almost curious enough to play along.

But the moment he sat down, his expression shifted.

The spread before him was a parade of everything he disliked.

Front and center: a daunting platter of onion purée—easily six onions pulverized into a single mound. To his left: celery stir-fried with beef. To his right: steamed fish blanketed in cilantro. Braised ribs, the one dish he actually enjoyed, had been banished to the far end of the table, drowning under a tide of fiery chili peppers. Even the tomato soup had not escaped; it, too, swam with onions.

Wesley's brow furrowed. "Did we change chefs today, Miriam?"

She gave a breezy laugh. "The chefs went home for the New Year. Your grandmother decided she'd do the cooking."

Loretta ignored his reaction, deftly lifting a rib and setting it on his plate. "Please, try some of my cooking."

Miriam's eyes, however, were fixed on Gabriela.

And right on cue, Gabriela spoke up before Wesley could. "Mr. Moss has a weak heart. He shouldn't eat anything that spicy."

Loretta silently retrieved the rib from his plate, replacing it with onions and meat instead. "Then eat this," she said matter-of-factly. "Onions are good for the heart."

Wesley was at a loss for words.

Loretta knew his tastes by heart, so why was there not a single dish on the table he actually enjoyed?

Chapter 150

He was certain he hadn't done anything to warrant her displeasure.

What was she up to this time?

"Go on, try it," Loretta said.

Catching the slight pause in Wesley's movements and fully aware of his aversion to certain foods, Gabriela cut in, "Mr. Moss can't stand onions. They make him queasy."

Loretta's brows lifted in genuine surprise. "Really? And how would you know that?"

"I occasionally take a part-time role at the company, making his lunch," Gabriela replied evenly.

Loretta shot Miriam a quick look, a flicker of something unspoken passing between them, before she said with a hint of reproach, “You’re coddling him too much. A man shouldn’t be spoiled. If spicy food is off the table because of his heart, then these are exactly what he should eat.”

Without giving Wesley a chance to object, she scooped a generous mound of onions and celery onto his plate. “I put a lot of effort into making this meal. You’re a grown man, still fussing like a child over vegetables. And you think you have the right to sulk?”

Her sharp tone was nothing he couldn’t ignore. But staring down a plate piled high with onions, celery, and cilantro? That was another matter entirely. His jaw tightened, and a storm settled in his eyes.

When Wesley made no move to eat, Loretta let out a sharp huff. “Eat them or don’t, but don’t expect me to whip up anything else.”

Wesley wasn’t about to spar with her over a single meal. Setting down his fork, he leaned back in his chair, meeting her gaze with quiet composure.

At the company, Gabriela had long been accustomed to smoothing over his moods. Catching the faint tension in his expression, she stepped in. “How about I make something else for Mr. Moss?”

Loretta’s mouth tightened, clearly unhappy with the offer, but she relented. “You’re a guest, but if you insist... Oh, and keep it mild. Wesley can’t have anything too salty.”

In no time, Gabriela prepared a fragrant borscht without onions and a perfectly braised carp.

It had been days since Wesley had tasted her cooking, and the moment he did, his mood lightened noticeably.

Loretta and Miriam each sampled the food and exchanged impressed looks, declaring it better than a professional chef's.

Once Wesley's plate was nearly empty, Loretta leaned forward. "Gabriela, since you're free over the holidays, why not stay here and work part-time? You wouldn't have to do anything except cook for Wesley."

Gabriela froze, caught off guard. "But..."

She was supposed to be on vacation. The idea of spending it under her boss's roof, constantly catering to his preferences, was hardly appealing.

Loretta said matter-of-factly, "He's clearly used to your cooking. Look how much he enjoyed it today. You should stay."

Wesley's brows arched ever so slightly.

This time, Loretta had a point.

Having Gabriela's cooking every day through the holidays would be a luxury worth keeping.

Sensing Gabriela's reluctance, Loretta asked, "How much do you make per day cooking for Wesley at the company?"

Gabriela faltered.

The truth was, she'd never been paid for it. She'd only taken on the role to repay that outrageously expensive women's suit, and along the way had become his unpaid taste tester and grocery runner.

For all her twenty-eight-thousand-dollar monthly salary, it wasn't exactly easy money.

"Well," Loretta said, "I suppose we should give you more than your usual rate. I'll offer three thousand a day. How about that?" She had no idea what white-collar wages looked like these days, but figured a graduate student shouldn't be offered too little.

Gabriela had been rehearsing her polite refusal—until that number hit her.

Three thousand. A day. Oh, she could live with that.

At that rate, she might just sign up to be Wesley's personal chef until the end of time.

Her eyes lit despite her best efforts to stay composed. Leaning toward him, she asked, voice tinged with anticipation, "Mr. Moss, do you think your grandmother's offer is workable?"

Wesley, catching every flicker of calculation behind her gaze, found her enthusiasm faintly entertaining. With the kind of smooth ease that came naturally to him, he replied, "Of course."