

His kiss 211

Chapter 211

There was no hint of fondness in Gabriela's heart for Fiona, either. Not only had Fiona ruined one of her favorite work outfits, she'd also relegated her to the role of Wesley's unpaid servant.

Inside the elevator, Gabriela kept a poised, professional smile. "Ms. Dewitt, are you certain you want me lingering here chatting with you?"

Her calm words slipped out just as the doors began to glide shut.

Fiona lunged forward, jabbing the open button with her finger. As the elevator opened again, she shot Gabriela a scathing glare, her face twisted with loathing. "Just answer the damn question!"

Gabriela's smile didn't falter as she replied evenly, "Indeed. Mr. Moss and I happened to be headed in the same direction, so I rode with him to the office."

Fiona's expression chilled even further. The audacity of that woman—living with Wesley yet maintaining the charade of a purely professional relationship.

"I'll give you one warning," Fiona hissed. "Don't ever ride in Wesley's car again."

Gabriela tilted her head slightly, her lips curving faintly. "I'm employed by Apex Group. Ms. Dewitt, you don't pay my wages, so on what authority are you trying to order me?"

“All you ever care about is money—pathetic and disgusting!” Fiona snapped open her wallet and flung a bundle of cash in Gabriela’s direction. “Tell me, is this enough to make you obey?”

As the elevator doors inched shut again, Fiona darted forward to jab the open button. The bills never touched Gabriela; several slipped into the crack of the door, wedging there awkwardly.

Fiona’s bravado faltered on the spot.

Keeping her tone even, Gabriela replied, “Ms. Dewitt, with those bills jammed in the door, we’ll now need maintenance to check the system. That repair will cost quite a bit.”

Fiona’s eyes widened in disbelief as she retorted, “Have you lost your mind? I’m talking about Wesley, and you’re still going on and on about money?”

Her composure finally snapped, shattering the elegant facade she usually wore.

“And what gives you the right to tell me what to do?”

Her temper flared, and she suddenly lifted her hand, ready to strike Gabriela.

Before Gabriela could even move away, a hand caught Fiona's wrist midair. Billy's voice cut through the tension, calm yet firm. "Ms. Dewitt, I'd suggest you control yourself."

Fiona opened her mouth to lash out again, but the words faltered as her eyes landed on Wesley nearby. The icy indifference in his gaze made her pulse quicken, and she instantly felt the weight of his displeasure.

Turning her frustration elsewhere, she shot Billy a venomous glare. "Let go of me."

Billy immediately released her wrist, offered a courteous apology, and stepped back with practiced restraint.

Gathering herself, Fiona moved toward Wesley with a saccharine smile, her tone softening as she addressed him. "Wesley, my father just launched a project on Sunset Island. He'd love to host you for dinner tonight to discuss it. Would you be available?"

As she spoke, her eyes flicked to Gabriela with a triumphant gleam. In Fiona's mind, only a family as powerful as the Dewitt family could offer Wesley true advantage. And what was a mere secretary beside that?

Wesley barely acknowledged her, his tone cool and detached. "Tell your father that if he wishes to work with Apex Group, he can schedule a meeting through the appropriate department manager."

Fiona's smile faltered, her confidence cracking for the first time. The project her family was pushing was lucrative—one plenty of investors would fight for. If Wesley genuinely wanted in, he would still need to

win her favor. Yet the way he phrased it made it sound as though the Dewitt family were the ones clamoring for Apex's approval.

She tried to salvage the moment, her voice softening. "Wesley..."

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"Billy," Wesley cut in, his command brisk. "Look into the details and arrange for Ms. Dewitt to meet the right project manager."

Without another glance, he strode into his office. Over his shoulder, he added, "Ms. Haynes, follow me."

Gabriela hurried after him.

After him, slipping inside before quietly pulling the door shut. Wesley studied her carefully, realizing she showed neither frustration nor the slightest hint of jealousy. He couldn't decide whether that left him reassured or oddly disappointed.

"If Fiona shows up again, call security right away," he instructed curtly.

Gabriela tilted her head with a bright smile. "And then have them throw her out?"

Honestly, Fiona's behavior and words had been quite disrespectful and arrogant.

After a pause, Wesley let out a quiet sigh. “The Dewitt family is not to be taken lightly. Don’t go up against her directly, alright?”

It wasn’t that he feared the Dewitts. What gnawed at him was the thought of Fiona holding a grudge and targeting Gabriela. He couldn’t keep watch over Gabriela every second of the day.

“Understood.” Gabriela tilted her head in a brief nod. “Mr. Moss, would you like me to make you a cup of coffee?”

Wesley gave a quick nod. “Go on.”

Slipping back into her routine, Gabriela soon buried herself in paperwork.

Meanwhile, Brenden drifted back to his usual antics. By mid-afternoon, he slipped away from the office and went straight for his girlfriend.

The woman on his arm turned out to be Renee—the same one Gabriela had glimpsed at Phyllis’s wedding.

The moment she spotted Brenden, Renee latched onto him with theatrical affection, her voice syrupy sweet. “Baby, how could you stay hidden throughout the New Year holiday? I’ve been dying to see you.”

The heavy cloud of perfume around her hit like a wave, clinging to the air as she nestled closer against him.

Brenden's expression tightened, the once-familiar perfume now cloying and oppressive. With a casual shrug, he slipped his arm free and muttered, "Loretta is visiting the estate this year. I have to spend my time with her."

Renee clung tighter, lips pouting. "But you've ignored me for a long time! You owe me—and I'm cashing in with a full shopping day."

He gave her the easy grin he always reserved for pretty faces. "Fine. I'll keep you company the whole day."

Together, they strolled into an upscale boutique.

Renee, with the staff hovering attentively at her side, plucked out a bag tagged at eighty thousand, batting her lashes as she pressed Brenden to buy it for her. The handbag was a pale lavender square, prominently displaying its brand-name emblem. Beyond that, it offered no real function—its worth existed entirely in the logo.

Brenden's mind wandered in spite of himself, recalling Gabriela's tear-streaked eyes when she brushed past him, the warmth of the meals she had painstakingly prepared, and the way her hands trembled when Loretta paid her for part-time work. A sudden weight settled in his chest.

Sensing his hesitation, Renee looped her arms around his, her tone sugary and insistent. “Baby, it’s a brand-new release, and eighty thousand isn’t even that much. You should just get it for me.”

“Fine!” Brenden passed his bank card to the clerk with a careless wave. “Renee, if it makes you happy, I’ll buy it, no matter the price.”

The clerk dipped into a respectful bow and disappeared to process the transaction.

Renee squealed in delight and wrapped herself around him, peppering his cheek with kisses. “Baby, you take such good care of me!”

Once, Brenden had reveled in this ritual—the extravagant spending, the intoxicating rush of being adored by a stunning woman. But now, the thrill had hollowed out.

Gabriela’s clear, luminous eyes—eyes that always stiffened just slightly whenever they landed on him—replayed in his mind.

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A short while later, Brenden escorted Renee into a glittering jewelry boutique, where he purchased a diamond necklace worth two hundred sixty thousand dollars. To that, he added a pair of rare pearl earrings priced at ninety thousand and a conch pearl brooch tagged at one hundred thirty thousand.

Renee’s delight was unrestrained—she showered him with sugary endearments, her voice sweet enough to draw curious glances from nearby shoppers.

Once the spree was over, Brenden led her to an upscale restaurant and secured a private room. Renee eagerly ordered dish after dish—each one exquisite and exorbitant—running up a bill somewhere between twenty and thirty thousand dollars.

Watching her eyes gleam with a mix of greed and excitement, Brenden finally leaned back and said evenly, “Renee, this is the end for us.”

The words struck her silent, her smile freezing before she blurted out, “What? Why?”

“You know how I am,” he replied in a flat tone. “The moment it stops being enjoyable—when I’m bored or the spark is gone—that’s when it’s over.”

Brenden had always been gentle, but once his warmth vanished, there was nothing left but ice.

Renee had known this day would eventually arrive. Still, the advantages she reaped from being with him had exceeded anything she’d imagined. Simply carrying the title of Brenden’s girlfriend kept rivals in the showbiz at bay and earned her a steady stream of coveted resources.

Yet Renee wanted more than his protection and wealth. She craved both his money and his presence. Brenden wasn’t just rich—he was strikingly handsome and refined, a far cry from those arrogant heirs who flaunted their inheritance. Even in bed, he treated women with considerate care, a rare quality among men like him.

Unwilling to let go, she leaned closer, her voice dripping with flattery. “Baby, did I do something wrong? Tell me what it is—I can change.”

Brenden regarded her with cool detachment. “Take today’s gifts as a farewell. Don’t bother coming after me again.”

With that, he beckoned the waiter, paid the bill, and walked out without a backward glance.

Renee’s eyes welled up, her chest tightening with bitterness. The man she had relied on had abandoned her, and without him, navigating the entertainment industry would become treacherous. She clenched her jaw, unwilling to accept defeat—but she knew Brenden’s rules. If she tried to hold on to him after the breakup, the consequences would be ugly.

Her fingers dug into the conch pearl brooch until her knuckles whitened, rage simmering in her chest. Who had stolen her man? Whoever that woman was, Renee vowed she would uncover her identity.

Brenden stormed out of the restaurant, his stride quickening until it almost felt like he was flying. A rush of vitality surged through him—he was free. Now he had the right to offer Gabriela the kind of future she deserved.

His first instinct was to pull out his phone and call her. But as his thumb hovered over her name, doubt prickled. Would it come across as too abrupt, too forceful? He lingered in hesitation, phone still in hand, the screen glowing with her number he didn’t dare press. What was she doing at this moment?

At that moment, Gabriela was tidying her desk at the office, slipping papers into neat stacks as the day wound down.

She straightened and offered a polite smile. “Mr. Moss, if there’s nothing else, I’ll head out for the evening.”

Wesley finally lifted his gaze from the computer screen, his eyes sharpening on her. “Where are you going?”

“I’m going home,” she blurted out.

Wesley gave a detached nod. “Alright. Go on.”

Just as Gabriela reached the door, his voice stopped her. “After dinner, join me for a run.”

She froze, startled. Rosemont Gardens was miles away from Moss Manor—was he really for real?

Wesley spoke as though it were nothing out of the ordinary. “Is there an issue?”

Gabriela hesitated, her tone cautious. “Mr. Moss, my place is too far from yours.”

“It might not be practical.”

"Then extend your stay at Moss Manor," he replied without missing a beat.

Gabriela was left speechless, unsure how to answer.

Noticing her hesitation, he queried, "Do you think living at Moss Manor is some sort of burden?"

She found herself unable to answer.

Scrambling for words, Gabriela defended herself. "That's not what I meant. I just..."

"Then you'll stay at Moss Manor."

His words carried no room for refusal, leaving her to follow him back in a stunned haze.

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Loretta had already paid her for the temporary work, and now Gabriela was returning to live under the same roof again. The arrangement felt awkward, even improper.

Her unease only deepened when they stepped into Moss Manor's grand hall and found Fiona settled comfortably in the living room.

Given the Dewitt family's influence—nearly equal to that of the Moss family—Loretta had no choice but to extend courtesy, even if the fondness she once had for Fiona had diminished.

A few servants busied themselves around Fiona, setting out tea and carefully arranged plates of fruit.

Fiona leaned forward with a gracious smile. "Mrs. Larson, please don't be so formal with me."

Loretta's lips curved faintly. Since Fiona had failed to win Wesley's affection and resorted to bullying Gabriela, she could no longer treat her with the same warmth.

Miriam stepped in with a warm smile. "Ms. Dewitt, will you be joining us for dinner? I'll ask the kitchen to prepare a few of your favorite dishes."

Fiona's expression tightened with faint irritation. Wasn't Miriam supposed to be the type who read the room? She was in the middle of a conversation with Loretta. What business did a mere housekeeper have butting in?

"I'm not hungry yet. I'll wait until Wesley comes back before I eat," Fiona replied coolly, her tone edged with condescension.

No sooner had the words left her lips than the sound of steady footsteps echoed across the marble floor.

Fiona turned instinctively, her smile only half-formed before it collapsed altogether.

Gabriela had the audacity to follow Wesley home. This was beyond absurd.

Gabriela herself felt a flicker of awkwardness. She had bid Loretta a proper farewell that very morning, only to show up again in the evening with Wesley, as if she were desperately clinging to him. But when she caught the glint of scorn and resentment in Fiona's gaze, her unease hardened into quiet resolve.

Her connection with Wesley was perfectly proper—what right did Fiona have to sneer at her?

Her eyes shifted toward Wesley just as he shrugged off his suit jacket, the gesture casual yet commanding. Without hesitation, Gabriela stepped forward and offered her hands.

The simple act carried a natural grace, almost instinctive in its attentiveness. Wesley paused, faintly surprised, before letting an amused smile curve his lips as he placed the jacket into her waiting arms.

Gabriela clutched his jacket, the lingering warmth seeping into her hands and bringing a faint flush to her cheeks. Catching Fiona's venomous glare, she straightened her shoulders and tightened her grip, strolling past at an unhurried pace as though parading triumph before a powerless challenger.

Her air carried the smug composure of a woman guarding what another could only covet.

The sight tugged at Wesley's lips until they curved into a faint smile.

So... Gabriela did care about him after all.

For Fiona, however, the humiliation cut deep. When had she ever endured such a look? And from someone as insignificant as a secretary?

Her nails dug into her palm to steady her fury before she forced a smile and asked sweetly, "Wesley, why has your secretary followed you home?"

Wesley remarked in an even tone, "I have tasks for her, so she'll remain at Moss Manor for a while."

Loretta's and Miriam's faces instantly lit with delight, clearly pleased by his words. Only Fiona's expression twisted, fury rising beneath her carefully painted smile.

A secretary like Gabriela—what urgent responsibilities could she possibly have at night? If it were truly important business, wasn't Billy the one expected to deal with it?

Suddenly, Fiona's mind flashed with a shameful suspicion, her complexion growing visibly colder. That faintly. "She's the one whose presence is questionable."

Loretta's expression tightened, her tone cooling. "Gabriela is here for work." She crossed the room to stand protectively by Gabriela's side, her hand brushing the girl's arm with grandmotherly affection. "Besides, I treat her like my own granddaughter. There's nothing improper about her staying here."

Actually, Loretta secretly hoped for whispers to spread; a little gossip could only add fuel to her quiet wish of seeing Wesley marry Gabriela sooner rather than later.

Fiona prided herself on her impeccable standards; she had always dismissed other men as unworthy. Wesley was the rare gem she had discovered after so much careful judgment. How dare a mere secretary presume to compete for him?

No. Absolutely not.

Fiona's fingers curled into her palm. She needed to find a way to stay at Moss Manor.

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Once Fiona made up her mind, she wasted no time. She stayed for dinner and then casually suggested spending the night at Moss Manor now that darkness had fallen.

Before Wesley could even respond, Loretta interjected, "Fiona, you're a young lady from a prominent family. Staying overnight at another household so freely wouldn't reflect well on your reputation."

"It won't be an issue," Fiona replied smoothly, though her eyes slid toward Gabriela with a flash of disdain. "The Moss family and my family have a close relationship. It's perfectly fine for me to stay here. But Miss Haynes..." Her lips curled faintly. "She's the one whose presence is questionable."

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Fiona's smile faltered. Rage burned beneath her polished exterior. Loretta had once doted on her and tried to boost her relationship with Wesley, so why now was her favor shifting toward someone of such modest origins? What spell had Gabriela cast on Loretta?

Though Fiona couldn't come up with a reason, she was not willing to give up her pursuit of Wesley. She actually had a trump card, but the time to use it had not yet arrived.

Fiona complained, "Mrs. Larson, it seems you treat Miss Haynes with more affection than you do me."

As she spoke, her gaze wandered across the living room and came to rest on an aquarium. Inside, a fish shimmered in brilliant hues of blue, yellow, and red. She complimented, "Wesley, this colorful fish is truly exquisite."

Wesley answered with nothing more than a slight nod.

Fiona pressed on, her tone measured and thoughtful. "With all that space, it seems quite empty to have only one fish in your aquarium. Why don't you consider adding a few more? Having a diverse group of fish swimming together would create a much livelier atmosphere, don't you think? Plus, it would be delightful to watch them interact and brighten up your home even more."

"Actually, that's a Betta splendens." Wesley's cold voice cut cleanly through her words.

Fiona froze, momentarily dumbfounded. "What?"

But it wasn't Wesley who answered. A calm, almost careless voice chimed in, "This kind of fish can only be kept alone. If you add another to the aquarium, they'll fight until one of them dies."

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The one who had just spoken was Brenden. He stepped into the living room, his gaze fixed on Fiona with obvious shock. "I never thought you could be so thoughtless."

Fiona's lips twitched, but before she could retort, Brenden's attention had already shifted. His expression softened the moment he caught sight of Gabriela beside Wesley.

"Gabriela! You're here too?" His voice carried a note of genuine delight.

Gabriela stiffened at his sudden appearance. The memory of his unstable other self still lurked in her mind, and the thought of nightfall made her pulse quicken.

She forced a polite smile. "Hello, Mr. Saunders. I'm just here doing some part-time work."

Brenden frowned as though the formality wounded him, his tone uncharacteristically tender. "Why are you being so formal? Just call me by my name."

Gabriela faltered, caught in her own hesitation. Would refusing offend him? The silence stretched, and Wesley's expression darkened visibly, his jaw tightening.

Meanwhile, Fiona found herself at a rare loss for words. What was Brenden playing at? He had a way of quietly undermining her, brushing aside her authority, and acting as though he shared some unspoken camaraderie with Gabriela.

Fiona's lips tightened into a flawless, courteous smile, masking the storm of irritation building behind it.

"Wesley, why keep such a fierce type of fish in your home?"

"Actually, that's my fish," Brenden cut in. "I'll take it with me when I return home in a few days."

Fiona's eyes narrowed. "Oh, so you're the one with the fish. Does Wesley have an aquarium as well? Where is it?"

Brenden replied, "His is positioned in the side hall."

With an elegant gesture, he guided Fiona down the hall. There, an enormous aquarium—almost spanning the entire wall—gleamed in the low light. Dozens of vibrant fish swirled gracefully inside.

Fiona's eyes narrowed as she spoke, her tone sharp. "With it taking up half the wall and being tucked into a side hall, such a massive aquarium doesn't seem quite right for your layout. Wesley, you should consider—"

Wesley's eyes turned cold, any trace of patience evaporating. "Do I look like I want your opinion on my aquarium?" he snapped, cutting her off. "This is my home, not a design consultation. If it's not to your taste, you know where the exit is. Use it."

His harsh words cut deeply. Fiona's face burned with embarrassment. Humiliated beyond measure, she swept out of Moss Manor, her cheeks aflame and pride shattered like fragile glass.

Meanwhile, Wesley asked Gabriela to go for a jog with him in the garden. Gabriela darted upstairs to change into her sportswear, but Brenden suddenly appeared, blocking her path.

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Brenden grabbed Gabriela and pressed her into a corner so suddenly that a cold sweat prickled down her spine.

“What do you think you’re doing, Mr. Saunders?” she asked.

He held her gaze, studying her intently—the brightness of her eyes, the sweep of her long lashes, and the flawless curve of her cheek. It all drew him in more than he expected.

After a moment, his voice dropped, calm but serious. “I broke up with Renee today.”

His words left her utterly bewildered. He was just a playboy, with a body count that easily surpassed forty-three. Breaking up was routine for him. Why on earth did he feel the need to announce it to her?

Still, Gabriela forced a look of curiosity and asked, “You’re telling me this because?”

Brenden blinked, caught off guard. “I figured you’d be happy to know that.”

Gabriela bit back the urge to ask why she should be, wary of his unpredictable mood. Instead, she replied cautiously, “Well... congratulations?”

He caught the perfunctory edge in her tone, his gaze locking onto her with a sharp intensity that made her stomach tighten.

Gabriela preferred not to engage with him further and instead wanted to join Wesley for a jog. “If there’s nothing else, I’ll go get changed for a run. Mr. Moss is waiting for me.”

Her indifferent tone seemed to unsettle Brenden completely. This wasn't what he had expected. Didn't she have a crush on him? Then why wasn't she displaying any joy over his breakup? If anything, she seemed completely unmoved.

Gabriela took Brenden's silence as tacit approval and quickly left, heading to change.

Yet, when she finally wandered into the garden, Wesley was nowhere to be found.

She called out his name a few times.

"Over here!"

Wesley's voice was low, steady, but there was an edge Gabriela could feel even without seeing his face. The dim lighting made it impossible to read his expression when she finally turned, and she shrugged it off, assuming it was just her imagination.

"Shall we get started, Mr. Moss?" she asked, her tone polite, neutral.

His gaze lingered on her for a heartbeat before he said simply, "Sure."

Meanwhile, Brenden lingered in the hallway, his mind racing, turning everything over—and then it hit him.

He had repeatedly rejected Gabriela, even taking Renee to Phyllis's wedding and leaving Gabriela humiliated in front of everyone. Gabriela must have been heartbroken, disappointed to the point of closing herself off from him. The memory of her giving that scarf to Wesley instead of him was further proof of her disappointment. And now she would rather join Wesley for night runs than spare him a single word.

A cold sweat broke out across Brenden's back as he pieced everything together. At least he had come to his senses just in time. Ending his relationship before Gabriela could shift her affections completely to Wesley was a good move. Everything wasn't lost... yet.

Acting fast, he placed a call and ordered an enormous bouquet of flowers. He even downloaded e-books on romance, desperately studying how to win back a woman who had once adored him. The more he read, the deeper his panic grew. How had he failed so completely to understand Gabriela's heart? And how much effort would he have to invest before he could win her back?

That evening, Gabriela was utterly drained from the run, and Wesley, as if deliberately testing her, had pushed it well past thirty minutes. Her nerves frayed and she gasped, "Mr. Moss, you should take it easy with that heart condition of yours. Shall we call it a night?"

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Wesley's gaze cut through her like ice.

She tried again, reasoning calmly. "Exercise is about consistency and not just one-time activity."

“Consistency?” Wesley echoed. “Are you saying that you’ll join me here every—”

“Single day?”

Gabriela paused, considering her reply. “Would that come with extra pay?” she murmured, half in jest.

Wesley’s temper flared, his voice cold and cutting. “You are free to go.”

The chill in his tone made her wince, instantly regretting her words. Spending a few extra minutes running by his side hardly cost her a thing, especially after he had already paid her salary ten years in advance. What was the point of bringing money into the equation?

She relaxed her shoulders, letting a gentle, conciliatory smile curve her lips. “You should rest early too, Mr. Moss. Good night.”

Back in her room, Gabriela peeled off her clothes, letting the hot water wash away the remnants of the day before slipping into bed.

The night was a rare slice of peace. “NotASaunders” hadn’t sent a single message, leaving her sleep undisturbed—for now. Brenden’s unpredictable moods, it seemed, didn’t strike every evening, only in fleeting bursts.

Morning arrived too quickly. Gabriela climbed into the car with Wesley, heading to the company as usual.

The moment she stepped into the lobby, several colleagues shot her long, curious glances. She had already explained yesterday that there was nothing between her and Wesley, yet the rumor mill refused to die. Their disbelief didn't bother her. After all, how long could their thirst for gossip last before they bored themselves?

The receptionist rose and greeted Wesley with her usual polite smile before leaning toward Gabriela in a whisper. "Ms. Haynes, someone dropped this off for you early this morning."

Ever since the incident with Rhys, she hadn't dared accept flowers on Gabriela's behalf. Now, Wesley stood nearby, his expression hardening at the sight of the bouquet. The receptionist silently praised her own good judgment for refusing to sign for it.

Gabriela's gaze flicked to the flowers.

The courier lingered in the lobby, bouquet in hand, waiting for her signature.

Receiving flowers had started to unsettle her. Thoughts of that disgusting man, Rhys, twisted her stomach. She didn't even glance at the card attached to the bouquet to confirm who sent it and insisted, "Take them away. I'm not accepting these."

The courier's brow furrowed. "But it's already been paid for..."

“Do whatever you like with them,” Gabriela snapped, her frown sharp as a knife. “Just leave. And please ensure that no more flowers addressed to me are delivered here.”

Cowardly intimidated by her icy tone, he hurried off with the bouquet.

Meanwhile, Gabriela’s rejection of the flowers only confirmed Brenden’s worst fears: she was shutting him out completely, and whatever feelings she’d had for him were gone. Regret gnawed at him. If only he had ended things with Renee sooner. Now it was difficult for him to win Gabriela’s forgiveness. He began racking his brains to figure out what he needed to do next in order to win her back.

At the office, Gabriela felt a low, simmering gloom she couldn’t shake.

Wesley’s expression was a mask of steel, with a hint of mockery curled at the edge. “What’s the matter? Do you regret not taking those flowers?”

Gabriela shook her head quickly, forcing a semblance of cheer. “Would you like some coffee, Mr. Moss?”

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“No, thanks,” he replied, voice flat. “I don’t want coffee. Sit there, and don’t hover in front of me unless absolutely necessary.”

“Understood,” she said cautiously, trying to measure every word. “Then I’ll stay out of your way. If you need anything, just say the word. I’ll be right here.”

Wesley turned toward her, eyes lingering a beat too long before a cold laugh escaped. “That face of yours... it’s clearly earned you a lot of secret admirers. One of them was even eager enough to send flowers first thing in the morning.”

Gabriela froze.

What was going on with him today?

His temper was unusually sharp, his words cutting in a way that set her nerves on edge. Since their night run yesterday, he had been in a foul mood.

Could Fiona’s unexpected visit be the source of his sour mood? Gabriela wondered. Well, it would be better not to think too much of it. In the office, the cardinal rule was clear: never presume to read the boss’s mind.

Wesley’s scornful laugh broke through her thoughts as he noticed her standing quietly to the side. He had to give her credit—she was a master at feigning ignorance. He dismissed her entirely, turning back to his computer as if she were already invisible.

All day, Gabriela kept herself taut, every task executed with precision and speed. At two-thirty in the afternoon, Wesley convened a meeting with his team to review the investment plan for the first half of the year.

After updating his schedule, Gabriela made her way to the break room.

A short while later, Tessa entered and noticed Gabriela in a daze. “Ms. Haynes, why are you standing here?”

“Ah, nothing,” Gabriela replied, glancing up, then blurted out, “Ms. Ortiz, is it alright if I take the rest of the day off?”

“Is everything okay?” Tessa asked, concern knitting her brow.

Gabriela explained, “There’s an urgent family matter I need to handle.”

Tessa, aware of Gabriela’s complicated family matters, pressed gently. “Do you need any help?”

“No, I can manage,” Gabriela said firmly. “Mr. Moss has been in a foul mood all day, so I didn’t have a chance to ask him for leave.”

“It’s fine. Just go ahead and leave,” Tessa said with a reassuring smile. “You can file the leave request tomorrow. With Billy in that meeting, nothing’s likely to go wrong.”

The meeting was expected to stretch until nearly the end of the workday.

"I appreciate it," Gabriela said, her relief palpable.

She swiftly packed up her things and slipped out of the office before anyone could notice.

Throughout the meeting, Wesley's sour mood was impossible to ignore. His stern expression and sharp, piercing gaze swept the room intermittently, each glance sending a chill through the senior executives.

Even Billy, usually unshakable, felt the weight of it. The source of Wesley's displeasure was obvious to him: it had to be that bouquet of roses.

He sighed inwardly. Why would Gabriela, who was clearly with Wesley, still bother messing around with other men?

Billy made a mental note to straighten her out when he got the chance.

The meeting dragged on for over two hours. When Wesley finally returned to his office, Gabriela was nowhere in sight. After asking around, he discovered she had taken leave.

A flicker of irritation surged through him. Tugging at his tie, he tried calling her. Yet the line went straight to voicemail.

Wesley's instincts sharpened the instant he realized something was wrong. Gabriela had always been dependable, and even on leave she never once let her phone go silent.

Without hesitation, he instructed, "Find out the real reason she took leave today, Billy."

Billy gave a crisp nod and quickly dialed a number, arranging the investigation. After a short exchange, his expression tightened ever so slightly. "Please send the footage right away."

The call ended, and within moments the video file arrived. Billy scanned the footage before handing his phone to Wesley. "Mr. Moss, the surveillance footage that had been deleted is finally back."

Several days ago, Gabriela had returned from visiting Farley with a scraped elbow. She tried to laugh it off, but Wesley wasn't convinced. His unease made him order Billy to look into it.

Billy had gone in person to check the cameras from that day, only to realize part of the footage had been tampered with. He'd immediately brought in experts to recover what was lost. Today, the missing pieces were finally restored.

The screen revealed a red car hurtling straight toward Gabriela. She narrowly evaded disaster, twisting aside just in time. The evasive move left her elbow grazed—but it had spared her life.

Wesley's fingers curled into a hard fist, the veins on the back of his hand faintly visible. "Whose car is that?" His voice carried a sharp edge.

Billy answered carefully, “The license plate was deliberately covered, so we can’t trace it for now.”

A heavy silence followed as Wesley lowered his gaze, a storm of tension radiating from him. “By any means necessary, this person must be found.”

Billy inclined his head, steady and confident. “You can rest assured, Mr. Moss. That particular car model is a limited edition—only fifty exist worldwide. Within our borders, just five were sold. I’ve already set a full investigation in motion.”

Wesley gave a brief nod before his eyes locked on the young man appearing in the footage. His expression sharpened. “Wasn’t that Stewart? Why would he show up there of all places?”

In the footage, Stewart Williams extended his hand to lift Gabriela, but she stepped back, deliberately keeping space between them.

“Perhaps Mr. Williams just happened to be passing,” Billy offered in a steady tone. “There’s no connection between him and Miss Haynes.”

Not long ago, Erik from the Williams Group had mistaken Gabriela for someone he knew, but Billy had already confirmed Stewart was a stranger to her. Despite the explanation, Wesley’s eyes darkened, displeasure carved deep across his face.

“Send out more people,” he instructed, voice sharp. “Before the night’s over, I want to know exactly where Gabriela has been.”

"I'll see to it right away," Billy assured him.

Meanwhile, Gabriela made her way to the cemetery, the cold air carrying a faint scent of damp earth. It was the anniversary of her mother's death.

With both hands, she carried a bouquet and laid it gently before the gravestone. Her gaze caught on something unexpected.

Another bouquet rested there already—a delicate arrangement of white roses and gardenias. The blossoms were fresh, their petals still jeweled with droplets of water. Someone else had been here today, honoring her mother's memory.

Gabriela frowned, uncertain. Could it have been Josh, or maybe Farley?