

His kiss 221

Chapter 221

She quickly dialed their numbers to check, only to find it wasn't either of them. Josh's voice carried a guilty weight as he explained, "Phyllis's scandal may have died down, but there are still strangers stirring up trouble. I didn't dare visit your mother today. If anyone had followed me, I might have disturbed her peace."

Gabriela murmured a few reassuring words before ending the call.

But if neither Josh nor Farley had left those flowers, then who had?

She mentally sifted through everyone she knew, yet no one seemed to fit. For the moment, she chose not to linger on it.

She stood before the gravestone, her fingers trembling as she traced the engraved name. "Mom... I came to see you," she murmured, her voice barely carrying in the still air.

When her mother was alive, Gabriela had believed she was the happiest girl in the world.

Even now, she often dreamed of being small again, tucked against her mother's chest, shielded from every storm.

“Mom, Uncle Josh has treated me well. He agreed to move out and return the house. You don’t need to worry about me anymore. I’ve found work at a big company, my paycheck is steady, and my boss... he’s been nothing but kind.”

After pouring her heart out, Gabriela rose slowly and started to walk away. The cemetery lay so deep in the hills that she knew it would take a long, lonely walk—half an hour at least—before she reached the main road again.

Before she could escape the secluded path, a coarse burlap sack dropped over her head, cutting off the light. Her world plunged into darkness, and the moment she tried to cry out, a sharp wave of dizziness swept through her until everything went black.

When she finally stirred, the air around her was unnervingly still. She fumbled for her phone, the faint glow of the screen revealing her surroundings. She was inside the steel belly of a refrigerated truck compartment. Frost clung to the worn metal walls, and the damp chill gnawed at her skin until her teeth began to chatter.

The horror deepened when she noticed water creeping in from the seams of the floor. Thin trickles ran across the grooves, pooling faster with each passing second. A sick realization hit her like ice—someone had locked her inside this truck and left it to drown.

With no reception, calling for help was impossible. She might end up sinking in silence, her life snuffed out at the bottom of the water.

Forcing herself to breathe evenly, Gabriela fought the panic clawing at her chest. A crime drama flickered across her mind—the scene where the protagonist was trapped in a locked car trunk, just like she was. How had the male lead survived? He’d smashed open the air vent and caught a signal that way.

But here, in this icy coffin, breaking the vent would only let the freezing water pour in faster, dragging her under even quicker. Understanding her situation, Gabriela could do nothing but keep dialing for help, her fingers trembling with each failed attempt.

More than an hour slipped by, yet her phone remained stubbornly without signal.

Meanwhile, Wesley, tired of waiting for Billy's investigation to yield answers, finally snapped, "Get the car ready. We're going to Rosemont Gardens."

When word reached Marie that Wesley was at the door, unease washed over her. She rushed to the entrance, forcing a nervous smile as she greeted him. "Hello, Mr. Moss. What brings you here?"

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Wesley brushed past her without acknowledgment, his presence filling the villa's living room with an oppressive weight. At his side loomed his sharp-eyed assistant, and behind them marched a disciplined line of bodyguards, each radiating silent menace as they took their positions.

The atmosphere was stifling, enough to shake even Marie—a woman who once ran miles with debt collectors waving machetes at her heels. Now, with Wesley standing before her, she was struck dumb with fear.

When his reason for coming spilled out—that Gabriela had vanished—Marie froze, then quickly masked the flicker of glee and venom that darted through her expression. She smoothed her face into practiced calm. "Today happens to be her mother's death anniversary," she replied softly, her tone measured. "Gabriela might linger at the cemetery. There's really no need to worry, Mr. Moss. She'll likely return later."

Wesley stilled. “Her mother’s death anniversary?”

Pieces fell into place in his mind. No wonder Gabriela had carried a clouded look all day.

Josh leaned forward, his voice carrying a hint of reassurance. “Every year on this date, Gabriela lingers at the cemetery until nightfall. She called me not too long ago—there shouldn’t be any problem.”

Wesley’s eyes narrowed. “Not too long ago? Be precise. When exactly?”

Caught off guard, Josh rubbed the back of his neck before answering, “It was close to half past three.” He quickly pulled out his phone, scrolling through the log before holding it out. “She noticed another bouquet sitting in front of the gravestone. Gabriela thought it was from me and called to ask.”

At exactly 3:22 in the afternoon, Gabriela had placed a call to Josh.

The screen’s glow reflected in Wesley’s sharp gaze. It was nearly six now, the last of the daylight draining away as shadows thickened across the room. Wesley’s voice sharpened with restrained fury. “You’re her family. How could you leave her out there alone until nightfall?”

Marie rushed to defend her husband. “Josh wanted to go with her, but ever since Phyllis became the target of public criticism, the netizens have been watching us like hawks. Gabriela refuses to clear the air for us, so we hardly dare show our faces outside.”

Wesley's expression turned glacial, his stare cutting through her excuses. "I didn't come here to listen to foolish talk."

Marie faltered, quickly bowing her head in apology, her words dying in her throat.

Phyllis leaned forward, her voice laced with venom. "Gabriela's nothing but an ungrateful wretch. Our family sheltered her all these years, and she still schemes to snatch the house from us. Even if she's been kidnapped, she had it coming!"

"Kidnapped?" Wesley's eyes sharpened like blades, fixing on her with a glare that made her shrink. "What exactly do you know?"

"I—I don't know anything!" Phyllis stammered, her bravado crumbling beneath his icy stare. She ducked her head, voice trembling. "A woman like her—always offending people, never making friends—it wouldn't be strange if she just disappeared and no one cared."

"No friends, you say?" Wesley's expression turned frigid, his gaze sweeping over her with suffocating weight. His voice dropped to a lethal chill. "Remember—she has me."

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Phyllis felt intimidated by Wesley's icy demeanor. Ice crawled down her spine while her scalp tingled with raw terror. Fear strangled her voice—one wrong word might provoke Wesley's wrath.

Billy stepped forward, his voice cutting through the silence like a blade. "Phyllis, if you possess information, speak now. Mr. Moss's patience has limits."

Phyllis, who wielded cruelty against the defenseless, crumbled before him. Her fragile composure shattered completely, trembling fingers betraying her as she whispered, "Someone called me days ago, demanding to know when Gabriela would be alone. I revealed that today marks the anniversary of her mother's death."

Billy's stomach plummeted as the gravity struck him. He pressed urgently, "Who contacted you?"

"The caller refused to identify herself. A woman—her voice dripped with arrogance."

Wesley's expression turned lethal, his words frozen steel. "Surrender it."

Phyllis's knees nearly gave way. "What?"

"Your phone."

She thrust the device toward him without hesitation, her hands shaking violently. Wesley seized it. "Phyllis, pray your cousin remains unharmed, or you will be in deep trouble."

Phyllis's lips trembled as words tumbled out. "How is this my fault? She antagonizes everyone she encounters..."

Wesley had already stopped listening to her excuses. He spun on his heel and strode toward the exit, his commands ringing out with military precision. “Billy, deliver this to tech—trace that number immediately.”

“Understood.”

“Deploy our men to search for Gabriela at the cemetery.”

“Done.”

Wesley vanished through the doorway, yet his intimidating presence lingered. Phyllis’s composure collapsed entirely as she crumpled to the floor, tears streaming.

Dustin emerged from his cowardly refuge in the corner, rushing to steady her. His spineless display only intensified Phyllis’s fury and disgust. She had snatched Gabriela’s boyfriend, yet this worthless man couldn’t even face Wesley with dignity.

Still, she had chosen this path herself—enduring the revulsion was necessary, lest others mock her poor judgment. Her nails carved crescents into Dustin’s flesh as she gripped his hand, weeping with bitter rage. Dustin offered useless consolations that fell on deaf ears.

Marie refrained from further criticism of Dustin, her attention fixed on the empty doorway. A few missed calls and Gabriela's brief absence had transformed Wesley into a man possessed. The realization made Marie's heart sink.

With Wesley's help, Gabriela could effortlessly reclaim Haynes Group whenever she desired. In this family, only Josh harbored genuine concern for Gabriela, yearning to join the search.

Marie's voice turned arctic as she blocked his path. "Gabriela isn't some helpless child who gets lost. Besides, Mr. Moss has deployed his people already. Why interfere? Venture outside now, and those relentless reporters will devour you alive."

"Gabriela is my niece. With her missing, nothing else matters!"

Josh wrenched free from Marie's grasp and bolted outside, likely hoping to catch up with Wesley.

Meanwhile, no matter how hard Gabriela tried, her phone found no signal. Then a more horrifying reality dawned—her battery was dying. The continuous emergency calls had drained the power at an alarming rate.

Terrified of complete disconnection, Gabriela ceased her desperate dialing. She pocketed the device and attacked the truck door with renewed determination. The barrier held firm while water continued its relentless invasion.

Defeated, Gabriela could only offer silent prayers that someone might notice her absence and summon help. The freezing water climbed to her thighs with merciless persistence. Her body surrendered to the

cold as her limbs grew wooden and unresponsive. Gabriela understood the brutal truth—no rescue would come.

To everyone around her, she remained expendable. Only Farley had ever shown genuine care. But Farley's mobility limitations and infrequent contact meant her disappearance would pass unnoticed.

In her darkest moment, Wesley's image surfaced in her mind. Their last encounter had been strained, his demeanor distant and cold. She wondered if he would be furious if he discovered she was absent from their evening run at Moss Manor.

She recalled their first meeting during her job interview, when Wesley had presided from the interviewer's chair. His unwavering stare and devastating handsomeness had sent heat flooding her cheeks and set her heart racing wildly. After that team-building event, she had returned home only to find herself drawn into his orbit—sitting beside him, accompanying him to elegant parties, unexpectedly serving as his personal secretary, even donning an apron to cook for him.

She had known him for only a few months, yet they had shared many precious memories. In this moment of stark clarity, Gabriela finally acknowledged the truth she had buried—she harbored deep feelings for Wesley. She adored him completely, so intensely that his mere proximity painted her cheeks rose-colored.

The terror of discovery had kept her silent. If Wesley uncovered her emotions, he might banish her to another department, severing their connection forever. Now, drowning regret flooded her heart. Had she known death would claim her so young, she would have confessed her love regardless of the consequences. Even if he harbored no romantic interest in women, she still hoped he would understand the depth of her devotion.

The merciless cold intensified as the water climbed past her chest, slowly reaching her throat.

Before consciousness abandoned her, Gabriela's final desperate wish blazed through her fading mind—to glimpse Wesley's face one last time. She wondered whether he would feel even the briefest flicker of grief upon discovering her lifeless body. Gabriela's eyes drifted closed as darkness claimed her.

When awareness returned, she found herself cocooned in pristine hospital linens. Warmth enveloped the room—the heater hummed steadily while a thick quilt embraced her form. She felt gloriously, impossibly warm. Gabriela clutched the disinfectant-scented quilt against her chest, emotion crashing over her like a tidal wave that nearly brought tears. She had survived—death had released its grip.

“Gabriela, you’ve awakened.”

A familiar voice pierced her relief, and Gabriela turned to find Brenden watching her with evident concern.

Shock rendered her speechless for a moment. “Mr. Saunders, you rescued me?”

“Yeah.” Brenden nodded, guilt gnawing at his conscience.

In truth, Wesley had been her savior. But Gabriela already harbored obvious feelings for him, and learning he had rescued her might cement those affections permanently. Brenden's thoughts churned with selfish calculation. He told himself, “Wesley, forgive this deception for the sake of my future happiness. I'll make it up to you later.”

Gabriela suspected nothing. Gratitude flooded her heart completely. Despite Brenden's notorious reputation as a shameless flirt, he had risked everything to drag her from death's embrace when it mattered most. She murmured softly, "Thank you for saving my life."

Brenden studied Gabriela's pallid lips, his guilt intensifying to an unbearable degree as he found himself unable to acknowledge her heartfelt thanks. Beyond the hospital room door, Wesley stood motionless as stone.

He had just concluded his consultation with Gabriela's physician. After receiving confirmation that her lungs had escaped permanent damage, he had breathed a sigh of relief—only to be shattered by Gabriela's grateful words to Brenden. A bitter laugh escaped his throat. What twisted joke was fate playing?

He was the man who had a one-night stand with her. He had pulled her from those freezing waters. His build differed so drastically from Brenden's—how catastrophically poor must Gabriela's perception be to confuse him with Brenden repeatedly?

Wesley shouldered the door open and stepped inside. Harsh hospital fluorescents caught his angular features, casting shadows that emphasized his natural air of dangerous authority. Brenden acknowledged him with visible nervousness. Gabriela offered her own tentative greeting.

Wesley ignored both pleasantries, his gaze cutting through Brenden like a blade. "Leave us."

Brenden wasn't willing to leave Gabriela alone with Wesley, fearing he might accidentally reveal the truth. But Wesley's intimidating stare left no room for argument, so he slunk toward the exit with obvious reluctance.

Wesley dragged a chair beside her bed and settled into it. His commanding presence immediately set Gabriela's nerves ablaze, particularly since her underwater ordeal had left her with reckless thoughts of confessing her forbidden feelings.

"How do you feel? Do you have any pain?" Wesley asked.

"No pain at all. Thank you for your concern, Mr. Moss," Gabriela responded with practiced haste.

Her limbs felt disconnected and clumsy, while dizziness and overwhelming fatigue clouded her thoughts. Wesley studied her pale face, released a heavy sigh, and moved to draw back the curtains. The night sky stretched endlessly black, identical to that evening four years ago when she had appeared outside his hospital room like an apparition.

He and Gabriela had been confined to the same room twice due to Loretta's manipulations. They had shared the same bed and enjoyed countless dinners together. Yet she persistently viewed him as nothing more than her employer. Even in mortal danger, she had frantically dialed Farley's number and sent messages to "NotASaunders."

Yet she had never once thought to call him.

He planned to clear the air with her—to tell her he was the one she'd had the one-night stand with. Otherwise, she would never see him as a man worthy of her romantic consideration. She would never depend on him or offer him complete trust. This time she had escaped unscathed, but what about future dangers? If another crisis arose, she still wouldn't seek his help.

Wesley found the very thought of what could happen to her unacceptable.

“Gabriela, I must share something crucial with you now.” He drew a steadying breath, his voice dropping to a low, hypnotic cadence. “On the night of our team-building event, I was the man who had sex with you in Room 1205.”

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When Wesley finally let the secret slip, the silence that followed pressed heavily against his back. Assuming Gabriela’s quiet was born of shock, he softened his tone, his words carrying a trace of vulnerability he rarely allowed. He admitted how furious he had been when she mistook Brenden for the man who had slept with her. His pride had refused to let him confess the truth, and pretending to be Brenden had been his misguided way of connecting with her, hoping she would piece it together on her own.

But the time for games was over; he wanted her to know the truth now. He spoke at length, retracing their shared words, the hidden moments when his heart had quickened, when desire had burned beneath restraint, and how he had buried it, denying himself the admission.

Still, from behind him came nothing—no word from Gabriela, only silence.

“Now that you know what happened that night, tell me, how do you feel about me?” Wesley finally turned, anticipation tightening in his chest, desperate to read her face and see whether she might choose to be with him.

Instead, he found Gabriela breathing slow and steady, her lashes resting quietly against her skin, lost in the calm of sleep. For a heartbeat, he froze, caught between disbelief and exasperation. "Asleep? Unbelievable."

All this time he had bared his soul, nerves frayed like a schoolboy confessing his love to his first crush, only to discover she had drifted off. He lowered himself to the edge of the bed and brushed his fingertips across her cool, delicate cheek.

Meanwhile, outside the hospital room, Fiona stood utterly stunned; she had overheard every word of Wesley's confession. A sudden voice shattered her focus.

"Fiona? What are you doing here?"

She spun around to see Loretta and Miriam, with Brenden trailing behind. Having heard about Gabriela's accident, Loretta and Miriam had rushed to the hospital, only to find Fiona lingering at the door.

Snapping to attention, Fiona smoothed her expression into something casual and offered a light smile. "Oh! Hi! What a coincidence. What brings you all here?"

"Gabriela's had an accident," Loretta answered briskly. "We came to check on her. And you?"

"I have a friend admitted here," Fiona replied quickly. "I just stopped by to visit." She let her gaze dart to the door plate, forcing a small, awkward laugh. "Seems I must've gotten the wrong room."

Loretta and Brenden didn't suspect a thing, but Miriam's eyes narrowed ever so slightly, suspicion plain on her face. Fiona only tightened her smile, stepping back with feigned ease. "Well, I won't keep you then. Bye."

Without waiting for a response, she turned on her heel and slipped away down the corridor. Once she rounded the corner, she pressed herself against the wall, her hand clutching her racing heart.

What on earth had she just discovered? Gabriela had slept with Wesley? And she had even gotten his identity wrong. How could anyone as proud as Wesley be drawn to someone so naive?

Fiona remembered peeking at Wesley's WhatsApp once, noticing how calmly he had taken someone's insults. Her mind replayed his quiet smile at the messages, and suddenly, everything made sense.

Her idea that he was a masochist who had some strange taste for being scolded? Purely a misunderstanding. In reality, Wesley had been indulging Gabriela all along.

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The realization left Fiona both shocked and elated. Thank goodness Gabriela hadn't heard a thing since she had been asleep. There was still space for Fiona to maneuver, to act before Gabriela found out the truth.

Heart racing with renewed purpose, she immediately placed an order for a fruit basket.

Two hours later, Fiona paused outside Gabriela's hospital room, a lavishly arranged fruit basket nestled in her arms. At that moment, Gabriela had only just regained consciousness. Loretta and Miriam were talking to her.

Loretta's voice quivered with shock. "How could something like this happen? Why would anyone try to kidnap you? Do you have enemies? This is absolutely terrifying!" Turning sharply, she asked Wesley, "Have you contacted the police?"

"I have," Wesley answered steadily. "I'll also dispatch people to conduct a thorough investigation."

Loretta wasn't satisfied. "Until they catch whoever's behind this, Gabriela mustn't go anywhere on her own. If she has to leave, Wesley, arrange for someone to escort her."

Miriam chimed in at once. "Exactly. For now, it's safer if you remain at the estate, Gabriela. We'll all rest easier knowing Mr. Moss is personally taking you to and from work."

Overwhelmed by their protectiveness, Gabriela promised she wouldn't venture out alone again. Her voice softened as she added, "If not for Mr. Saunders stepping in, I dread to think what might have happened." At that, Brenden let out a sigh of relief.

Wesley hadn't told Gabriela the truth, allowing Brenden to take all the credit for saving her. It was truly kind of Wesley not to reveal the deception. But the faint smile on Wesley's lips vanished in an instant. His expression hardened, a glacial fury flickering in his eyes.

Brenden, oblivious to the storm brewing, mistook the look for solemn approval and nodded earnestly, as though in shared understanding. In reality, Wesley wished he could call the guards and have him thrown out on the spot.

Billy, standing nearby, instantly caught the shift in Wesley's mood. He was struck dumb, unable to find words. The memory was still burned in his mind: they had finally located Gabriela's IP address through her phone. Wesley had plunged headlong into the pond, ignoring the frantic rescue team's attempts to hold him back.

By the time Gabriela was pulled ashore, her body was cold and rigid, her chest frighteningly still. Wesley himself was ghostly pale, his soaked bangs plastered to his forehead, lips tinged blue, eyes bloodshot with anguish. He gripped Gabriela's lifeless hands as though sheer will alone could call her back.

Billy had never, in all his years, seen Wesley unravel like that.

Fortunately, Gabriela regained consciousness quickly and, to everyone's relief, had no serious injuries. But what was going on now?

Wesley had risked his life to pull her back from death's edge, only for Brenden to be hailed as the hero. Billy's chest tightened with frustration. He knew Wesley's pride would never permit him to correct the misunderstanding, even if it meant watching another man steal his due.

But as Wesley's loyal assistant, Billy felt compelled to step in and speak the truth for him. Gathering his resolve, he stepped out from behind Wesley. "Ms. Haynes, the one who actually saved you was—"

“Billy.” Wesley’s voice cut like steel, low and commanding. “Gabriela hasn’t eaten yet. Go prepare something for her.”

Wesley realized it was still not the right time to tell Gabriela everything. Her body was still weak, her spirit fragile. Forcing the truth on her now would only weigh her down. Better to wait until she was stronger—until the right moment came.

Billy bowed his head before slipping out of the room. As he opened the door, he nearly collided with Fiona.

“Ms. Dewitt?” He was caught off guard. “What brings you here?”

Fiona’s lips curved in a pleasant smile. “I just came back from visiting a friend and heard about Ms. Haynes’s accident. I thought I’d drop by to see how she’s doing.”

Suspicion flickered in his mind, because Fiona rarely acted without motive, but Billy kept his tone courteous, stepping aside with a practiced smile. “That’s very considerate of you.”

With that, he excused himself to arrange a meal for Gabriela.

Gabriela’s eyes widened when she saw Fiona. A tangle of surprise and unease stirred inside her. Fiona entered with the air of a well-meaning friend, setting the polished fruit basket on the bedside table.

“Are you feeling any better, Ms. Haynes?” she asked, her smile warm—almost too warm.

“Much better,” Gabriela replied politely, though guarded. “Thank you for your concern, Ms. Dewitt.”

Fiona’s gaze swept over Gabriela’s pale face. With practiced sympathy, she murmured, “I heard your limbs suffered frostbite. You need to take good care of yourself during your recovery.”

Gabriela had braced herself for the usual barb, some sly remark about her being prone to mishaps. But instead, Fiona smiled. “There’s a resort nearby—lovely setting, and their hot springs are especially restorative. Perfect for soothing nerves and relieving fatigue.”

Wesley’s brows knit at once, his instinct to refuse evident in the cool set of his jaw. Yet Brenden’s expression brightened, his eyes gleaming at the suggestion. Hot springs. A vacation. He instantly recognized it as the perfect chance to win Gabriela back. After everything she had been through, what better way to mend his earlier neglect than by whisking her away for a few days?

“Wesley,” Brenden said eagerly, his eyes alight, “I know exactly the place Fiona is talking about. It’s called Stratosphere Hotel & Spa. I’ve stayed there before with—” He caught himself, clearing his throat hastily. “Anyway, the hot springs there are incredible. You’d feel reborn after a soak.”

Fiona’s lashes fluttered with satisfaction at his support, and she quickly piled on. “Yes, and the hotel sits beside a retreat known for bringing peace and safety. The atmosphere there is said to restore both body and spirit.”

Loretta's eyes widened, and she clapped her hands together. "Perfect! Gabriela, you should definitely go. A few days of rest will do you good. And don't worry about expenses. Wesley will take care of everything." She turned to Wesley with a sharp look. "Won't you, Wesley?"

Her tone left him little choice, and amusement flickered in his eyes. With a small nod, he replied, "Sure."

Gabriela could only relent. "Thank you, Mr. Moss," she said softly.

From the corner, Fiona's smile deepened, satisfaction flashing in her gaze.

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A doctor, accompanied by a nurse, entered to conduct rounds and assess Gabriela's condition. All signs pointed to a stable state. Seizing the moment, Fiona asked whether Gabriela was allowed to go to the hot springs. The doctor saw no issue with the idea but cautioned against prolonged soaking.

"We'll monitor her for one more day, and she can be discharged tomorrow," the doctor stated.

The following morning, Loretta and the others arrived early to escort Gabriela home. Even Fiona showed up. Gabriela felt a wave of gratitude.

As a child, a more severe injury had left her reliant on Josh, who handled her discharge paperwork. But Marie had summoned him away with some excuse, leaving Gabriela waiting for hours. When he didn't return, she trekked home alone, arriving after nightfall. That experience cemented her belief that she would always have to face the world alone.

Yet meeting someone as compassionate as Wesley introduced her to a circle of kind-hearted people, defying her earlier expectations.

Fiona approached with a warm smile, looping her arm through Gabriela's. "I've reserved a hotel. Let's head there now," she said, her friendliness so convincing that Gabriela almost doubted the memory of Fiona's earlier hostility.

But Gabriela's sharp recollection didn't falter. She gently pulled her arm free and smiled. "I have a recommendation, Ms. Dewitt."

"What's that?" Fiona asked.

"You might want to try some memory-enhancing supplements," Gabriela replied, her tone dripping with sarcasm.

Fiona recognized that Gabriela was taunting her. They had clashed fiercely in the past, but now she was acting as if they were close friends.

Though fury churned inside her, Fiona swallowed her pride for the sake of her goal: winning Wesley's heart. Once she succeeded, she would teach Gabriela a harsh lesson.

"We had our differences before, but that's in the past. We're acquaintances now, right? Can I call you Gabriela?" she offered.

Gabriela met her gaze with a neutral expression. Since Fiona insisted on playing nice, she had no choice but to go along. After all, she couldn't afford to antagonize the powerful Dewitt family.

The group soon reached the Stratosphere Hotel & Spa, nestled near a tranquil retreat known for its calming ambiance. Fiona had booked six rooms on the same floor, numbered 1811 to 1817—except for 1814, which was already taken.

“Wesley, you're in Room 1811. Gabriela, you take Room 1812. Brenden, you're in Room 1813,” Fiona announced, assigning the remaining rooms to herself, Loretta, and Miriam. After handing out the key cards, she smiled brightly. “Let's drop off our bags, grab a bite, and then head to the hot springs. Sound good?”

Her enthusiasm seemed almost excessive, a fact noticed by Wesley, Loretta, and Miriam. Miriam waved her hand. “You don't need to trouble yourself. We can have the staff handle these things.”

“This hotel belongs to my father,” Fiona explained. “Hosting you here boosts business, so I want to make sure you're well taken care of.” She then linked arms with Gabriela again, adding, “I've felt awful about how I treated Gabriela before. Today's my chance to make it right.”

Her reasoning sounded convincing, but Wesley remained skeptical and quietly instructed Billy to keep an eye on Fiona. Miriam, also wary, sought out Wesley after stowing her luggage to share her concerns, only to find Brenden in his room.

“I don't like Room 1813. Can we swap?” Brenden pleaded.

Wesley had no patience for the request and snapped, “Get lost.”

Brenden persisted. “Remember the company trip? I let you have my room. Now it’s your turn to return the favor.”

Brenden had come with hopes of winning Gabriela back, but to his dismay, he was assigned Room 1813. The number thirteen, regarded as unlucky, unsettled him, so he was adamant about switching rooms.

Wesley, growing increasingly annoyed by Brenden’s insistence, flung his key card at him. “Here you are. Quit pestering me,” he snapped.

Beaming with relief, Brenden thanked Wesley and promptly carried Wesley’s luggage to Room 1813. After settling into Room 1811, he began unpacking. Wesley, now free of Brenden’s nagging, turned to Miriam. “Was there something you wanted to talk about?”

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Before Miriam could share her concerns, Fiona’s voice rang out from the hallway. “Dinner’s ready! I’ve reserved a spot, and trust me, you will all love it,” she announced with enthusiasm.

At a luxurious hotel like the Stratosphere Hotel & Spa, the environment, service, and cuisine were top-notch. The meal was exceptional, satisfying even Wesley, who was notoriously hard to please.

After eating and resting briefly, Fiona ushered the group toward the hot springs. Loretta and Miriam chose to skip it, opting instead for the nearby serene retreat. Fiona instructed the hotel staff to set up two separate hot spring rooms—one for the men and one for the women.

Gabriela appeared in a bathrobe, visibly uncomfortable with the revealing attire. It was her first time dressing like this in front of others. Fiona, by contrast, was entirely at ease, relishing the opportunity to show off her figure. But when her gaze landed on Gabriela's flawless shoulders and graceful silhouette, she froze.

Gabriela's impeccable skin and elegant figure were mesmerizing—no wonder Wesley remained captivated by her after sleeping with her. Fiona caught herself envying Gabriela's allure, briefly imagining she would be just as obsessed.

Snapping out of it, she mentally scolded herself for such foolish thoughts. What nonsense was she thinking? She would never allow Gabriela to end up with Wesley.

The two of them slipped into the hot spring, the water's warmth perfectly soothing. The other day, Gabriela had shivered for hours in icy water, the chill still haunting her. Now, enveloped in the spring's comforting heat, her tension melted, replaced by a rare sense of ease.

After about thirty minutes, a beautiful waitress delivered two drinks. Gabriela hesitated, wary of drinking, but Fiona laughed lightly. "Soaking this long can leave you thirsty. This is the hotel's specialty. It's delicious. Give it a try."

Feeling parched, Gabriela took a tentative sip. It tasted like lemonade, calming her nerves, so she sipped slowly until the glass was empty. Soon after, dizziness washed over her.

Fiona hid her satisfaction and steadied Gabriela. “Let me get you to your room,” she said smoothly. Disoriented, Gabriela didn’t resist as Fiona led her away. With a spare key card, Fiona unlocked Room 1813, quickly scanning the hallway to ensure no one saw them, then guided Gabriela inside.

Billy, shadowing them on Wesley’s orders, froze when he saw Fiona take Gabriela into Wesley’s room. Was it possible that Fiona, having failed to win Wesley’s affection, had shifted her strategy? She was now orchestrating events to curry his favor, since she couldn’t secure his love. Billy’s imagination ran wild, conjuring a narrative of Fiona as a reformed antagonist, redeeming herself through this act. Convinced by this imagined redemption arc, he chose not to interfere.

As Fiona guided Gabriela inside, she heard the sound of the shower, which indicated that Brenden was rinsing off after his soak. Fiona placed Gabriela on the bed, intentionally loosening her bathrobe to reveal a tantalizing glimpse of skin. Knowing Brenden’s reputation as a womanizer, she was certain he would be unable to resist.

If Brenden slept with Gabriela, any chance of Wesley marrying her would vanish, regardless of his feelings for her. Satisfied, Fiona slipped out, leaving the door slightly ajar.

“Brenden, I’ve handed you a perfect opportunity—don’t squander it,” she thought smugly.

Back in her room, she showered quickly and, after confirming through a trusted contact that both Wesley and Brenden were in their rooms, decided the moment was ripe. Feigning panic, she rushed out, shouting, “Oh God, Gabriela’s gone!”

Then she hurried down the hall and frantically pounded on the door of Room 1811. It swung open almost instantly.

“Wesley, after the hot spring, Gabriela just—”

Her words cut off abruptly, shock tightening her features as she saw Brenden standing there instead, fresh from the shower, water still trickling from his hair.

“What’s wrong with Gabriela?” he asked, his voice laced with urgent concern.

Chapter 230

Fiona froze in her tracks. Why on earth was Brenden in Wesley’s room?

A sudden chill pricked her. Without thinking, she hurried down the hall, flung open the door to Room 1813, and stormed inside.

The sight before her stopped her cold. Gabriela lay on the bed, fully covered, a light blanket tucked neatly over her. Wesley sat at her side, calm and composed, gently pressing a cool towel to her forehead.

Fiona’s eyes widened in disbelief. At the doorway, Billy stiffened, equally stunned.

He had heard stories of women who, unable to win a man’s heart, would rather see him ruined than happy with another. But Fiona had taken the opposite route—twisting her schemes not to destroy, but to bind Wesley’s fate with Gabriela’s.

Brenden's shock was different. Rage boiled through him, his eyes burning as they fixed on Wesley. "What is Gabriela doing in your room?" he demanded.

Wesley finally looked up, his eyes narrowing as they met Brenden's.

Brenden flinched. His voice dropped, roughened by unease. "I just want to know why she is asleep in your room."

A gnawing dread took root. Had Gabriela really turned her heart toward Wesley?

Wesley's reply was cool, almost dismissive. "She may have had too much to drink and wandered into the wrong room. Her forehead felt warm; it's likely just a mild fever."

Before Brenden could press further, Fiona leapt in, her words tumbling over themselves. "Yes, that must be it! She mentioned earlier she wasn't feeling well. Perhaps she stayed in the hot spring too long. I was the one who walked her back, but I must've confused the room numbers." She forced a laugh. "The staff checked and said no one was inside. I was flustered. Turns out I brought her here by mistake."

Her excuse was awkward, riddled with cracks, but Brenden took her word for it.

Wesley's eyes narrowed, his gaze turning icy as it settled on Fiona. There was calculation in that look, as though he were weighing her very soul. "So, you're the one who brought Gabriela in?"

Fiona's pulse quickened under his piercing stare. She forced a nervous laugh and raised a hand to her forehead, feigning discomfort. "I had a little too much to drink earlier. I got dizzy and mixed up the room numbers. Honestly, I didn't mean to."

Wesley's lips pressed into a cold, thin line. He said nothing further, though the chill in his silence was sharper than words.

This was a hotel owned by her father. Even if he ordered Billy to pull the surveillance footage, the most it would show was Fiona stumbling into the wrong room. And here, on her family's turf, that evidence would mean little.

Wesley forced himself to hold back. She would be dealt with accordingly—but later.

Brenden, oblivious to the undercurrents, exhaled loudly in relief. It had turned out to be a misunderstanding. There was nothing going on between Gabriela and Wesley. What a relief.

He turned to scold Fiona with gruff irritation. "Fiona, you've got to be more careful next time. If this hadn't been Wesley's room but someone else's—"

His words faltered as a thought hit him squarely in the chest. This room had originally been his. Had he not switched rooms with Wesley, he could have been the one alone with Gabriela. The perfect chance had slipped right through his fingers. Regret gnawed at him, bitter and merciless.

Wesley finally lost patience with their racket and kicked them out. The moment Fiona stepped into the corridor, she leaned close to Brenden.

“Weren’t you supposed to be in Room 1813? What were you doing in Wesley’s room?” she whispered.

Brenden let out a heavy, dejected sigh. “Looks like Gabriela and I are just not meant to be.”

Fiona’s blood boiled. Damn it. She had arranged everything for him, and yet he messed it up.

Just then, Loretta and Miriam returned from the retreat, their faces alight with smiles. Loretta, in particular, seemed radiant. She had visited a fortune-teller who assured her that Wesley’s love life was destined for a happy ending.

But the cheerful atmosphere came to an abrupt halt when she heard the commotion in the corridor. After asking around, she discovered that Fiona had accidentally led the tipsy Gabriela into Wesley’s room. For a fleeting moment, Loretta regarded Fiona with unusual fondness, inwardly thanking her for pushing Gabriela toward Wesley.

Wesley intended to carry Gabriela back to her room, but Loretta immediately stepped in. “What are you doing? She needs to rest. There’s no need to move her. Just let her be.”

Wesley let out a long, resigned sigh. “Fine. Then I’ll sleep in her room.”

“No,” Loretta snapped, her voice firm and unwavering. “You’re staying here. You’re looking after her.”