

His kiss 231

Chapter 231

His eyes narrowed, sharp and calculating. He knew exactly what she was up to. Back at the estate, he might have indulged her whims, but out here, in a hotel, he wasn't about to surrender.

"Grandma, do I have to remind you that we're in a hotel?" he murmured in a low tone.

Loretta's radiant smile faltered, a shadow crossing her face as she met his unyielding stare. "Gabriela cooked for you every day during the New Year holiday, and did she ever complain? No!" Her tone sharpened as she continued, "You're her boss and you brought her here, so if anything happens to her, you'll be held responsible!"

Wesley gave a casual shrug. "That was part-time work. You were already paying her more than enough."

Loretta's hands shot to her hips, her voice cutting. "You run a huge empire, and you're still fussing over a little money?"

Wesley let out a derisive chuckle. "Money has nothing to do with this and you know it."

At the estate, he commanded complete control; whatever occurred there remained sealed within his walls. But a hotel was different. It was full of strangers. Sharing a room with Gabriela could ignite gossip, and in rumors like these, it was always the women who suffered.

He wouldn't let Gabriela shoulder that burden or face the tiniest grievance.

Loretta's gaze softened just a touch. "Then, if it's not about money, we're in agreement."

Brenden, however, wasn't ready to surrender. "Loretta, I would gladly take care of Gabriela..."

Loretta shot him a scolding glare. "And why would any of this concern you? You should just think about yourself, since your health isn't much better. Now that the New Year holiday is over, I'll have Mr. Padilla come by to get you back on track."

Brenden raised his hands in surrender. "Fine, Loretta. I've made up my mind. I'll move back to my condo tomorrow and leave Wesley's peace intact!"

"Good," Loretta said with a nod. "Then Mr. Padilla will train you at your condo instead."

Loretta commanded the highest authority in the family, even above Wesley. Brenden dared not argue, swallowing his frustration in silence.

Under Loretta's firm decree, everyone was ushered out of Room 1813, leaving only Wesley and Gabriela. Wesley felt a dull headache forming as he observed her serene, oblivious sleep.

To his relief, Gabriela stirred not long after. When she opened her eyes, the first thing she saw was Wesley's sharply handsome face, and it took her a moment to process the sight.

“Mr. Moss? What are you doing here? Where am I?”

Wesley, exasperated by her cluelessness, let out a cold snort. “This is my room. You came in while I was showering.”

Gabriela’s face immediately went pale. Did she accidentally end up in his room again? Did something inappropriate happen between them?

Seeing the nervous worry in her eyes, Wesley’s heart softened. He couldn’t bring himself to frighten her further. “Fiona was the one who brought you in,” he said.

Gabriela’s eyes widened slightly as she realized Fiona’s intentions.

“You should be careful and stay away from her,” Wesley added.

“Understood,” Gabriela replied promptly, her obedience immediate.

Seeing her so compliant sparked an unexpected surge of irritation in him. He planted his hands on his hips and began pacing the room, his expression tight with annoyance. Gabriela guessed he was probably upset that she had fallen so easily into Fiona’s trap.

“Did you know that this room originally belonged to Brenden?” Wesley asked.

Brenden was a reckless flirt, and Wesley usually didn’t bother with his dating escapades. However, if Gabriela had stumbled into Brenden’s room drunk, it was entirely possible they might have slept together.

“I do,” Gabriela replied, though her mind faltered at the mention of Brenden’s name. On the company trip, she had already stumbled into the wrong room, leading to a mistake she could never undo. If Wesley hadn’t switched rooms with Brenden this time, would she have repeated the same blunder?

When he saw her flustered expression, Wesley’s gaze softened. In a low, almost hesitant voice, he asked, “If it had been Brenden instead of me, what would you have done?”

Gabriela’s stomach dropped. Why was he asking this now? Did he know about her one-night stand with Brenden?

Wesley frowned. “Is that really so hard to answer?”

“Can I not answer a hypothetical question?” Gabriela shot back, her voice shaky.

“Then let me put it another way.” His eyes, deep and unreadable, bore into hers. “Suppose I weren’t a gentleman, and I found you in my bed—well, and then had my way with you. What would you do?”

Had his way with her?

Gabriela stared at him, frozen in disbelief. Wesley was always so composed, so restrained. Did he really just say that out loud?

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“Still that hard to answer?” Wesley’s voice carried a quiet disappointment. “So, in your eyes, Brenden and I are the same?”

“Of course not!” Gabriela burst out before she could stop herself. “You two are different—completely different. You’re a real gentleman, Mr. Moss. You’d never stoop to something like that.”

“A gentleman?” Wesley’s tone sharpened, a flicker of irritation breaking through. “A gentleman is still a man. Do you even remember what happened at the company retreat...”

It struck him then—Gabriela never really saw him as a man at all. Fury blazed through his veins. Out of concern for her well-being, he had planned to give her time, to wait until she had healed before revealing the truth. But in that moment, patience abandoned him completely. He needed her to understand right now that he was the one who had slept with her that night.

Gabriela’s heart plummeted the instant he mentioned the company retreat. Panic seized her chest, her stomach twisting into knots. She pressed a hand to her mouth, bolted from the bed, and stumbled to the bathroom, retching violently.

Her reflection stared back from the mirror, pale and haunted. A terrible suspicion crept into her thoughts like poison. The retreat had taken place in December. Now it was February. What she had dismissed as ancient history had occurred merely two months ago. Her period hadn't arrived. The possibility struck her like lightning—could she be pregnant?

Fate seemed determined to crush her beneath its heel. She had believed that distance and time would eventually lift the shadows, allowing her one-night stand with Brenden to fade from memory. Yet now, a more serious problem loomed over her.

Gabriela forced air into her lungs, commanding her racing heart to slow. She was stronger than this. She had survived worse. Wesley couldn't know—mustn't know.

But she had lingered too long. His knuckles rapped against the door. "Gabriela?"

She wrenched the door open. Wesley's gaze immediately fixed on her bloodless lips and the way she swayed slightly on her feet. "You look like hell. What's wrong?"

"Just tired." The lie tasted bitter. Desperate to redirect his attention, she added quickly, "I should rest. I have to go now."

She turned to leave, but Wesley caught her arm. "If you're not feeling well, you should go to the hospital."

"I am fine. Thank you, Mr. Moss."

Heat radiated from his palm, branding her skin even through the fabric. Once, she had planned to confess her love to Wesley, but now she knew that ship had sailed. How could she harbor feelings for him when another man's child might be growing inside her?

She fled to her room.

Fiona's elaborate scheme lay in ruins. Unable to maintain her sweet façade any longer, she manufactured an excuse and stormed home.

As for the hot springs, Gabriela couldn't risk returning—not with her suspicions. The decision was unanimous—they would leave the next morning.

Back at Moss Manor, Gabriela announced her intention to move home. Loretta objected instantly. "Gabriela, your kidnapping was tied to Phyllis. If you move back now, it'd be like walking straight into the lion's den!"

Gabriela faltered. Knowing Phyllis's temperament, it wasn't far-fetched to think she might do something reckless.

"My uncle has already promised me they will be moving out soon," Gabriela said softly.

Loretta shook her head firmly. "Until they've really moved out, you're not going back. And I won't rest easy with you living all by yourself."

Each time Loretta remembered Gabriela's miserable past, her heart ached. "How about this—I'll move back to the suburbs, and you can live with me?" she offered.

Gabriela's eyes widened, and she quickly shook her head. "The suburbs are too far from the office. I'd be spending half my life in traffic."

Neither side could budge the other, so Wesley finally cut in. "Gabriela, stay at the manor for a few more days. I'll arrange for an apartment in a secure neighborhood. Once that's settled, you can move in."

Gabriela couldn't refuse. She nodded reluctantly.

But staying at Moss Manor came with a price—she tossed and turned all night, sleep nowhere in sight, and arrived at work the next day worn thin with anxiety. During lunch, she made an excuse and slipped away to a pharmacy to buy a pregnancy test.

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Back at the office, she locked herself in a bathroom stall and took the test. Two red lines appeared. Gabriela's heart turned to ice. She really was pregnant. One single slip, and fate had landed its cruelest blow. Her luck was rotten beyond belief.

She stumbled back to her desk in a haze—only to find a package waiting for her. Gabriela was puzzled. She hadn't ordered anything in ages. Why would there be a package under her name? After a long pause, she tore it open.

Inside lay a women's crossbody bag, vintage in both color and design. Though she didn't recognize the brand, the fine stitching and supple leather left no doubt—it was costly. Beside the bag rested a card. On it was a name that made her breath hitch: Brenden.

Her desk was right next to Tessa's. Whenever Gabriela didn't need to be in the CEO's office, she often worked there instead. At that moment, the office had emptied for lunch—everyone except Tessa, who remained hunched over her keyboard. As the head of the executive office, she bore much more pressure than anyone else. She devoured work with an almost frightening intensity, returning from lunch...

Breaks to attack her tasks with renewed fury. Sometimes her relentless drive made even Gabriela's pulse quicken with secondhand anxiety.

The moment Gabriela peeled back the package tape, Tessa's peripheral vision caught the movement. Her head snapped up, eyes widening as they locked onto the contents. Work forgotten, Tessa spun her chair around with the swift precision of a hawk spotting prey.

Panic shot through Gabriela. She crammed Brenden's card beneath a stack of papers, her movements clumsy with unease.

"Wait!" Tessa's voice pitched higher with excitement. "Is that a vintage luxury bag? That particular model runs tens of thousands! I've been eyeing it for months but can't bring myself to pull the trigger."

Tens of thousands?

The number hit Gabriela like ice water.

“So who’s your generous benefactor?” Tessa leaned forward, practically vibrating with curiosity.

“I—I don’t know,” Gabriela fibbed.

Tessa’s tongue clicked in mock disapproval. “What can I say? Beauty like yours attracts mysterious admirers from thin air.”

“Maybe it was delivered to the wrong person.” Gabriela’s voice sounded hollow even to her own ears.

Tessa finally surrendered and swiveled back to her computer fortress.

Gabriela’s fingers trembled as she unfolded the hidden card. Three words blazed up at her in Brenden’s familiar scrawl: “Love you, Brenden.” Revulsion crawled across her skin like insects. Her stomach churned with fresh nausea.

For crying out loud. What on earth was Brenden thinking? Had he broken things off with Renee and decided she was his next conquest? That blacked-out night haunted her like a phantom limb. She remembered nothing and knew nothing of what had happened between them—and that ignorance left her defenseless against whatever weapons he might wield.

Her fingers flew across her phone screen as she texted “NotASaunders,” asking, “Why did you send me such an expensive bag, Mr. Saunders?”

The response materialized instantly. “What?”

She snapped photos—the bag in all its luxurious glory, the card with its stomach-turning declaration—and fired them into cyberspace.

Elsewhere, Wesley’s jaw clenched as the images loaded. His handsome features twisted into something dark and predatory. That bastard Brenden. He had never cared about Brenden’s revolving door of girlfriends—until now. Until Brenden had dared set his sights on Gabriela.

Wesley texted back with an icy expression: “Wrong recipient. Meant for girlfriend number forty-nine. Delivery error.”

Gabriela stared at her screen, stunned.

Another message appeared. “Well, since you opened it, everything’s been contaminated now. I can’t exactly regift it to my girlfriend. Just throw it away.”

Rage flared in her chest like struck kindling. Throw it away? That bag cost more than most people’s monthly salary. And he had the nerve to call her contamination?

Pure spite crystallized into resolve. She refused to do as he instructed. Her gaze drifted to Tessa, still buried in her work like a woman racing against time itself, and an idea began to bloom.

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Tessa was buried in her work, eyes fixed on the endless stack of papers demanding her attention. The year had barely begun, yet she already had reports to complete, projects to launch, and deadlines piling faster than she could catch them. Coupled with the private storms brewing at home and her finances being stretched thin, she felt herself gasping beneath the strain.

Tightly wound, she clung to composure like a frayed thread.

Gabriela lingered nearby, hesitant to interrupt. But Tessa sensed her presence and lifted her gaze with a weary sigh. "Gabriela, is there something you need?"

"Ms. Ortiz," Gabriela said carefully, "I was wondering if you might know someone interested in buying a bag."

The question caught Tessa off guard. Her eyes flicked to the item Gabriela held. "You're selling it?"

Gabriela gave a small nod.

Tessa didn't pry further. "Alright, I'll ask around. Just send me some photos."

Relief softened Gabriela's face. "Thank you for your help. If the bag sells, I'd like to take you to dinner."

Tessa chuckled. "Deal. Don't expect me to go easy on the menu."

With that settled, Gabriela checked the time. It was nearly time to head back to Wesley's office.

The moment she stepped inside, the air felt heavier, taut with unspoken tension. She kept her gaze lowered, quietly preparing Wesley's coffee before retreating to a corner, careful not to draw attention.

Lately, her interactions with him had shifted into something different. His concern for her strayed past the boundaries of professionalism, edging into something more personal. At times, she even suspected a flicker of affection.

Maybe her appearance had tugged Wesley's interest in ways that surprised even him. But really, what did it matter? Now that she was pregnant with another man's baby, there was no chance they would be together.

Wesley's expression today was darker than usual.

Gabriela had grown used to his mercurial moods and kept silent. Her mind was elsewhere anyway. The pregnancy weighed on her, a secret she carried alone. It hadn't been planned, but the child was blameless. Abortion was unthinkable. If anything, she would simply push herself harder, earn enough to afford the baby's expenses, and raise her child healthy, even if it meant doing so without a father.

As the workday wound down, Tessa leaned close to Gabriela, her voice barely above a whisper. “I’ve asked around. Someone’s interested in your bag.”

Hope flickered in Gabriela’s eyes. “Seriously?”

Brenden had dismissed it outright, telling her to throw it away as though it were nothing. But Gabriela knew better. That limited-edition piece wasn’t just a handbag; it was a ticking time bomb, one she was desperate to unload before it detonated. A sale meant freedom—or at the very least, peace of mind.

Clutching the bag, she joined Tessa in the elevator, only to freeze when the door slid open to reveal Wesley.

His gaze zeroed in instantly, hard and unyielding. The color in his face darkened. He’d told her to get rid of it. Why, then, was it still here?

Gabriela felt the weight of his eyes like a spotlight. On instinct, she shifted the bag behind her back, as though it were contraband she had no right to hold. The gesture made his expression tighten. Was that bag really worth defending so desperately?

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His irritation burned hotter, following him long after the elevator ride, coiling tighter until he reached the parking lot with Billy. Finally, he mumbled, “It’s just a bag. Does Gabriela really need to guard it like it’s crown jewels?”

Billy, sensing the storm brewing, offered a cautious reply. “Mr. Moss, you know how it is. Designer bags—most women can’t resist them.”

Wesley’s lips curved into something between a smirk and a sneer. “So that was Gabriela’s little weakness?”

He turned to Billy, his tone shifting into command. “Handle something for me.”

Oblivious to the orders Wesley had set in motion, Gabriela left with Tessa and soon found herself inside a gleaming resale boutique, all glass and chandeliers.

Their buyer, Lydia Haywood, a woman no older than twenty-five and radiant in her curated opulence, was already waiting. Every inch of her glittered with wealth: diamonds on her fingers, designer in every seam, confidence stitched into every movement. She didn’t just wear brands; she wore the power that came with them.

Tessa made the introductions, but Lydia barely acknowledged her. Her gaze slid to Gabriela, sharp as a blade and laced with disdain.

“So,” she drawled, her lips curving faintly, “you’re the one selling the bag?”

Gabriela inclined her head in a quiet nod.

Lydia skipped over pleasantries, her manicured hand slicing the air like a command as she turned to the store owner. "Do be a dear and confirm its authenticity for me."

The store owner obeyed instantly, laying out his tools with the precision of a surgeon. He inspected the stitching, magnified the logo, and brushed his gloved fingers across the leather.

After a tense silence, he gave his verdict. "Trademark intact. It's brand new in condition."

Lydia bent toward the bag, eyes narrowing as she checked the serial number herself. Satisfied, she leaned back with a regal air, chin tilted high. "Since Tessa vouched for you and the bag hasn't been touched, I'll take it at market price. The listing is two hundred thousand." Her lips curved in a smile that never reached her eyes. "So that's what I'll offer."

Gabriela's eyes darted to Tessa, her chest tightening. Why would a woman dripping in luxury bother with a secondhand purchase at full price? The whole thing reeked of something she couldn't name but felt in her bones.

"I'll need a minute to think about it," Gabriela said carefully.

Lydia's expression soured at once, her words snapping like a whip. "Don't waste my time. Unlike you people, I can't afford to stand around haggling. My minutes are worth more than that bag you're clinging to."

The insult landed like a slap, but Gabriela refused to give her the satisfaction of a reaction. She followed Tessa outside, her voice dropping to a whisper. "Ms. Ortiz, do you actually know Miss Haywood? Can she be trusted?"

Tessa shook her head. "Not really. We're just connected on WhatsApp. Working for Mr. Moss attracts plenty of socialites and celebrities. They add me hoping I'll drop tidbits about him. I don't entertain them much."

Gabriela's unease tightened in her stomach. Every luxury bag carried a unique serial number, as traceable as a fingerprint. Selling this one carelessly could circle back to Brenden in ways she couldn't predict.

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Sensing her doubt, Tessa laid a reassuring hand on her arm. "Don't stress. Once you sell it, the bag will no longer be your concern. If trouble ever comes, it'll land squarely on her doorstep, not yours."

Gabriela nodded, but her instincts screamed otherwise. Since Lydia truly wanted the bag, she decided to test her one more time.

Sliding back into her seat, Gabriela spoke evenly. "This isn't just any bag. It's a limited edition, and you couldn't buy it now even if you had the money. And it's untouched, never carried once."

Lydia's eyes narrowed, her polished smile slipping into a sneer. She recognized the shift immediately. "What kind of game are you playing?"

Gabriela didn't flinch. "I want double the market price."

The words struck the room like a thunderclap. Even Tessa stiffened, her hand darting to Gabriela's sleeve as she hissed under her breath, "That's insane."

But Gabriela's expression remained serene, her gaze locked on Lydia with unnerving calm.

"You're out of your mind!" Lydia snapped, her voice rising. "That's daylight robbery!"

For the first time, regret flickered in Gabriela's chest. She had intended to sell the bag for a bit of money, something to help her prepare for the baby. But Lydia's odd eagerness, her sharp edges cloaked in wealth, made Gabriela hesitate. Selling this so easily could spell trouble for Brenden, and whatever she felt about him, she still had lines she wouldn't cross.

"It's simple," Gabriela said coolly. "If you don't want it, walk away. No one's forcing you."

Lydia hadn't anticipated her doubling the price. Her jaw tightened, fury flashing across her face before she spat, "Fine. Double it is. But you have to know—this is utterly shameless."

Even Tessa felt her pulse quicken, an uneasy chill creeping up her spine. Something about this was wrong.

Gabriela kept her composure. Her voice was steady, almost cool. "There's no need for insults. I've decided not to sell it."

She handed over the service fee to the store owner, tucking the bag firmly under her arm as she turned to leave.

“Wait!” Lydia’s voice snapped like glass. Her jaw clenched. “I’ll throw in another hundred thousand.”

Gabriela froze for a moment, then shook her head. If Lydia was willing to throw around such a sum, then there was surely something suspicious about her. As far as Gabriela was concerned, the deal was off.

Lydia’s eyes blazed. “Then name your price. How much for you to let it go?”

Gabriela straightened, her answer sharp and final. “Not for all the money in the world.”

The refusal only fanned Lydia’s fury. She practically shouted, “A million! That’s my last offer!”

Gabriela had already stepped past the doorway, but her steps faltered. The number hung in the air like a snare. A million. That was enough to change everything for her and the baby.

The deal was sealed before the hour was out. Lydia snatched the bag with a gleam of triumph and swept outside, instructing her driver to deliver it straight home. But she herself didn’t go home. Instead, she turned the car toward Fiona’s place.

Lydia stepped into the Dewitts' house, her eyes immediately drawn to Fiona, who was studying a delicate bracelet on her phone. She smiled, tilting her head. "Yesterday it was luxury bags, and today it's bracelets?"

Fiona glanced up, her expression flickering with mild irritation at the visitor.

Lydia's brother, Lennie Haywood, had been clumsily attempting to win Fiona over, but Fiona regarded the Haywood family with utter contempt. She found him—and the entire pursuit—a nuisance. She had even considered cutting ties with Lydia entirely. Why did Lydia have to make another uninvited appearance?

Still absorbed in the bracelet, Fiona spoke casually, almost as if she hadn't noticed Lydia. "Gorgeous designer bags, sparkling bracelets, necklaces, earrings—if a woman kept receiving gifts like these from a man, wouldn't she fall for him instantly?"

After her hotel scheme had failed, Fiona had begun plotting anew. Gabriela loved lavish things, didn't she? Her plan was to keep Gabriela hooked on luxury, sending designer gifts under Brenden's name. Perhaps the plan was a little costly, and yes, a waste on someone like Gabriela, but once everything played out, getting Brenden to foot the bill would be the easiest part. After all, he had casually spent millions pursuing women in the past.

Fiona was willing to pay any price as long as it helped Brenden win Gabriela's heart. She had already sent Gabriela a luxury bag today. Tomorrow, a bracelet would arrive at her door. The next day, a pair of limited-edition earrings. By then, Gabriela wouldn't need Brenden to make a move; she would be practically throwing herself at him.

And Wesley? There was no way he would challenge his own cousin over a woman.

The more Fiona considered it, the prouder she felt of her clever plan, each calculated move like a domino about to fall.

Lydia, oblivious to the scheming undercurrent, asked with a thoughtful tilt of her head, "Would you fall for it if a man kept giving you gifts?"

In a family as wealthy as Fiona's, getting anything she desired had always been effortless. A simple glance, a word, and it was hers.

"Of course," Fiona replied, her voice casual but her mind elsewhere. "What woman wouldn't like them? Even if she claims she doesn't care, deep down, she can't resist the thrill."

Lydia nodded, feeling a smug satisfaction over the high price she had just paid for that limited-edition bag.

The resale deal made Lydia happy, and Gabriela couldn't have been more pleased either. When Gabriela saw the unexpected surge in her account balance, it felt almost like a dream. Who could have imagined that one bag alone would fetch such a fortune? Even Tessa was stunned.

With a furrowed brow, she asked, "Gabriela, are you sure making so much from just one handbag won't cause trouble later?"

Gabriela only shrugged. "Don't worry. We've got the invoice as proof and the store owner as our witness. If anything happens, none of it will fall on us."

After all, the bag was something Brenden had instructed her to dispose of. If he ever changed his mind, she could always reimburse him at the market price and still pocket the remaining eight hundred thousand without lifting a finger. Needless to say, Gabriela was over the moon. Even the weight of her unexpected pregnancy seemed a little lighter.

She reminded herself she was strong, independent. A pregnancy was something she could face on her own. Her mother had raised her alone, and if not for her early passing, Gabriela might have been the happiest girl alive.

The ache of that loss flickered through her chest, but it lasted only a heartbeat before she steadied herself again. She vowed to work harder, to safeguard her health, to keep up with her checkups. She would live a long life, raise her child well, and give them the kind of joyful upbringing she once longed for.

The bag sold smoothly, without a hitch. But to her astonishment, the very next day, another luxury piece arrived at work.

It was a limited-edition bracelet.

Tessa stared at it, torn between awe and envy. Yet, as whispers about Gabriela and Wesley swirled through the air, unease crept into her mind. She thought about telling Gabriela not to get carried away and to keep her guard up.

“Your admirer is far too generous, Gabriela. Every gift he sends is worth a fortune. And yet he won’t even leave his name. He may have ulterior intentions,” Tessa remarked.

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Gabriela's eyes fell to the card. The same cloying words stared back at her: "Love you, Brenden."

What on earth was Brenden playing at? Yesterday, he had explained it had been a delivery mistake—but today? Twice in a row?

This time, Gabriela didn't even bother messaging "NotASaunders" about it. Without hesitation, she handed the bracelet to Tessa.

"Ms. Ortiz, would you mind checking if anyone's interested in buying this?" she asked calmly.

Tessa forced a practiced smile. Gabriela had treated her to dinner the night before and even gifted her something extravagant in return. Having accepted such favors, she felt compelled to lend a hand again.

And sure enough, it didn't take long before someone came asking about the price. It turned out to be Lydia again.

Tessa couldn't help but wonder if the woman simply had money to burn. Why else would she go to resale boutiques to buy things at twice the market price? It was obvious Lydia took pleasure in flaunting her riches.

"This bracelet belongs to the same person you got the handbag from, Miss Haywood," Tessa said carefully. "Are you sure you want it?"

She wasn't particularly close to Lydia, but she worried Gabriela might pull another last-minute price stunt. Offending Lydia wasn't the last thing she wanted.

"I'm sure," Lydia replied curtly. "Set up a meeting with her."

After work, Gabriela gave Wesley a brief explanation before following Tessa to the same resale boutique that specialized in authenticating luxury goods. At once, the shop owner recognized Gabriela, treating her like royalty by offering the best coffee.

Lydia, however, still felt the sting of yesterday's purchase, even if she had convinced herself it was worth the price. She fixed Gabriela with a frosty stare. "This time," she warned coldly, "I'm only paying the original price."

What idiot of a man kept showering Gabriela with luxury items, only for her to turn around and resell them? Muttering under her breath, Lydia sneered, "How pathetic. You only date men to turn their gifts into cash."

She didn't bother lowering her voice, wanting Gabriela to hear every word. Her posture screamed superiority, a deliberate attempt to intimidate Gabriela into backing down on the price.

Gabriela, irritated by her condescension, gave a short, disdainful laugh. "I set my prices as I see fit. If you can afford it, buy. If not, then shut your mouth."

Lydia's face stiffened. She bit her tongue and said nothing more.

Once the shop owner confirmed the bracelet's authenticity, Gabriela spoke in an even tone. "This time, five hundred thousand."

"Five hundred thousand?" Lydia's voice rose, half outrage, half disbelief. "Are you insane? Wasn't the million you squeezed out of me yesterday enough?"

Gabriela remained unruffled. "Yesterday, you paid five times the value, and no one forced you. Today I'm asking only two and a half times. Consider it a kindness."

The memory of parting with a million still burned in Lydia's chest, and now another half a million felt unbearable. Yet the image of Fiona's admiring gaze at the bracelet on her phone rushed back. Pride battled with reason, and in the end pride won.

"Fine," Lydia said, pouting her lips. "I'll take it."

Gabriela and Tessa exchanged a surprised glance. How did that work again? Unbelievable. Lydia truly was one of a kind.

Then again, if the money came easy and the risk was none, why the hesitation?

Lydia asked, "But I need to know where you got that bag and bracelet from. Who is giving you these gifts?"

Of course, Gabriela couldn't reveal Brenden's name. "No comment," she said coolly. "Let's get back to the bracelet. Take it or leave it."

She began to tuck the bracelet away, but Lydia, afraid Gabriela might change her mind and raise the price, hurriedly blurted, "Fine, I won't ask." She transferred the money in a rush, snatched up the bracelet, and left without another word.

Gabriela paid the shop owner's service fee, then turned to Tessa with a generous smile. "Tessa, thanks for helping me secure a buyer. If something like this happens again, I'll call on you, and we'll split the profits together."

Tessa, hearing Gabriela's sincerity, was moved. As the money from Gabriela appeared in her account, she looked up, eyes brimming with gratitude and rimmed with emotion. The money had come at a time when she needed it most, and she knew she would always remember Gabriela's kindness.

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Lydia burst into the house and headed straight for the study, where she found her brother Lennie. She thrust a box containing a bracelet into his hands, extending her other palm. "Give me five hundred thousand."

Lennie's jaw dropped. "Are you out of your mind? Just yesterday, you blew a million on a bag worth two hundred thousand. And now, half a million?"

Lydia smirked, unfazed. "It's a rare platinum bracelet—limited edition."

Lennie rolled his eyes, clearly unimpressed. "That's no reason to throw money around like that," he shot back, his tone flat.

Lydia huffed, feeling he was dismissing her efforts. "Fiona has impeccable taste. Everything she likes is exclusive—stuff you can't just buy with cash."

Lennie wavered.

"I went to so much trouble getting these luxury pieces for you," Lydia said, stomping her foot in exasperation. "Without my connections, you'd never get your hands on these. You'd be searching for months on your own."

Lennie's brow furrowed. "I still haven't had the opportunity to give that bag to Fiona yet."

Lydia's eyes lit up with a plan. "Simple. I'm heading to Fiona's later, and you can drive me there. Watch for my signal, then present the gift at the perfect moment. If you and Fiona become a couple, you'll owe me a big favor!"

Lennie's pulse quickened at her words. "Fine."

He took the bracelet, wired the money to his sister, grabbed the bag, and they set off for the Dewitts' house.

When they arrived, Fiona was scrolling through images of designer earrings on her tablet. She offered Lydia and Lennie a nod.

Fiona kept Lydia in her circle mainly because they had been high school classmates; Lydia had a knack for flattery and reading the room, which secured her place in Fiona's circle. However, Fiona had no interest in Lennie.

Compared to Wesley's striking looks, confidence, and charm, Lennie was utterly unremarkable, and his presence alone made her recoil in disdain.

Oblivious to her reaction, Lennie glanced at her tablet and asked with a smile, "Fiona, do those earrings catch your eye? How about I buy them for you?"

Fiona's expression soured. "No need. They're limited edition and require connections to even get near them."

The moment Lydia heard that, she exhaled in relief. So that was why Fiona hadn't bought the bag she had been eyeing—it wasn't a change of heart; it simply wasn't available. Even Fiona, with all her wealth, couldn't snap up everything she wanted.

Lydia shot Lennie a smug glance, signaling him to unveil the gift. Lennie caught her hint and pulled out the elegantly wrapped box.

Fiona frowned. "What's this?"

"Lydia mentioned you were admiring this bag a few days ago. I have a friend who got it for me—bought it just for you," Lennie said, his smile overly eager.

Fiona's heart raced as she snatched the bag. This was no ordinary piece—only 134 existed worldwide, with just two in Okburg, one of which she had secured through her network. How did the Haywood family manage to get the other?

Her eyes narrowed at Lennie. "Where did you get this bag?"

Caught off guard by her intensity, Lennie broke into a nervous sweat, glancing at Lydia before lying, "A friend brought it from overseas."

Fiona wasn't buying it. She asked him to show the receipt.

Lennie fumbled, producing it. Fiona cross-checked the serial number against her own purchase—the one she had bought under Brenden's name for Gabriela. They matched. How had this bag ended up with Lydia and Lennie?

Her gaze bored into Lennie. "Be straight with me. Did you steal it?"

Lennie froze under her piercing stare.

Lydia jumped in, sensing the tension. "Fiona, I paid a million for this through a friend. The tag is still on. How could you think Lennie stole it?"

"A million?!" Fiona felt dizzy. "Who sold it to you?"

Lydia hesitated. "A woman named Gabriela Hayes. She's quite pretty and works at Apex Group."

Fiona's suspicions were confirmed: the bag was the same one she had purchased for Gabriela. The realization brought a pang of pain to her chest. Spending two hundred thousand on a bag for Gabriela already felt like a waste. But now, Lydia had bought it back for five times the price.

Chapter 240

Damn it, what was wrong with Lydia?

Fiona's eyes locked onto Lydia. "Did she also sell you a bracelet?"

Startled by Fiona's intensity, Lydia nodded, urging Lennie to fetch it. "Fiona, how did you know there was also a bracelet?"

Fiona grabbed it, checking the certificate. "How much did you get this?"

Lydia replied in a whisper, "Five hundred thousand."

Fiona's rage flared like a wildfire, her glare sharp enough to shatter glass.

Lydia shrank back, mumbling, "Why are you upset? I saw you eyeing both the bag and bracelet, so I thought you wanted them. Lennie just wanted to make you happy, and spending a bit more money was no issue."

The Haywood family wasn't as wealthy as the Dewitt family, but a million and a half was pocket change for them.

"Get out!" Fiona barked. Her face was a mask of fury.

Lydia had never seen Fiona so enraged before and quickly dragged Lennie to leave.

Outside the Dewitts' house, Lennie hesitated, wanting to retrieve the gifts.

Lydia snapped, "Are you blind? Didn't you see how furious Fiona was? You think you can just take them back?"

Lennie frowned. "Lydia, did you buy fakes? Otherwise, why would Fiona be so angry?"

"The store owner verified them! How can you accuse me of that?" Lydia retorted indignantly.

Lennie speculated, "Maybe they were too cheap? Not impressive enough for Fiona."

Lydia nodded, thinking he had a valid point. "That explains why she kept browsing without buying. Lennie, next time, hit up an auction house—get something rare and expensive. That is what Fiona's into."

Lennie nodded thoughtfully. "Fine, let's go home for now."

Meanwhile, Fiona dialed Brenden, her voice sharp with irritation. "Brenden, come to my place immediately. We need to talk."

Brenden arrived shortly, confusion etched on his face as he eyed the designer bag and bracelet spread out before him. "Fiona, what's all this?"

Fiona sneered, her tone icy. "These are the gifts I bought for Gabriela under your name."

Brenden blinked, puzzled. “That was kind of you, but Gabriela doesn’t care for flashy things. She’s not into this stuff.”

“Not into it?” Fiona’s rage boiled over, her voice trembling. “She took these gifts and flipped them to my friend—one for a million, the other for half a million!”

Fiona hadn’t clued Brenden into her scheme, worried that he would inadvertently sabotage it. She never anticipated that Lydia would derail everything. In just two days, Gabriela had pocketed one and a half million.

Brenden muttered, almost to himself, “I told you she wasn’t into those things. But turning them around for that much? She’s really smart and adorable.”

Fiona’s head pounded with frustration. Was Brenden out of his mind? What was adorable about such blatant greed? And did Gabriela possess some mysterious magic that allowed her to gain so easily every time?

Noticing Fiona clutching her chest, struggling to breathe, Brenden quickly added, “Don’t get upset. The bag and bracelet were four hundred thousand, right? I’ll pay you back.”

“It’s not about the money!” Fiona snapped.

Her family’s wealth made the sum trivial, but seeing Gabriela profit so handsomely—without falling for Brenden—drove her to the brink.

Brenden asked, “So, what do you want to do?”

“Just take these things away,” Fiona said, her voice tight. “I can’t stand looking at them.”

Brenden transferred the money, gathered the bag and bracelet, and advised as he left, “Fiona, try to calm down. I’ll make Gabriela fall for me, and I’ll do it my way. That’s none of your business. Don’t send her any more gifts, alright?”

Fiona’s anger surged—she wanted to punch Brenden.

Her plan had crumbled, and now this fool was lecturing her. Screw him.

Fiona was seething with rage, while Gabriela—the very source of that anger—was over the moon. She had pocketed over a million in two days without lifting a finger. Elated, she dragged Tessa on a shopping spree.

Despite Tessa’s own heavy thoughts, she humored Gabriela, browsing shops until the night grew deep.

When Gabriela’s taxi pulled up to Moss Manor past ten, the house was silent. Assuming everyone was asleep, she crept inside, careful not to make a sound.

“You’re finally back.” Wesley’s voice cut through the quiet, laced with a cool edge.

Gabriela flinched, startled.