

His kiss 24

Chapter 24

Aubrey's barbs hit harder than Gabriela's. Phyllis's face went ashen, and Dustin's jaw clenched in rage. "Gabriela, I can't believe you've turned into such a bitter, petty person—and your friend is just as vain as you. I'm really disappointed in you."

He wrapped an arm around Phyllis and pulled away, leaving the sting of his words behind.

Aubrey blinked in disbelief, momentarily caught off guard and speechless. "Seriously, your cousin's something else, Gabriela. So, that guy she is with—he's actually your ex? Were you always this bad at picking men, or did dating that clown scramble your standards?"

A sudden heaviness pressed on Gabriela's heart.

How had she ever fallen for someone like Dustin? She'd tried a hundred times to untangle the reason, but every attempt just made her mood worse—so this time, she let it go.

Seeing Gabriela's mood suddenly drop, Aubrey wasted no time cheering her up. "Ugh, who cares about that loser? You've totally leveled up. Let's just forget about him and focus on the real win—SK Elite Boutique! That's what I want to talk about."

She dove right in, regaling Gabriela with animated stories about the boutique's wild popularity, and insisted she take a million photos at the banquet to share later.

A bus rumbled up to the curb. After a round of cheerful waves, Gabriela boarded, swept into the evening rush.

By the time she made it home, the house was quiet—no sign of Phyllis. Instead, she found Josh pacing the living room. The second he spotted her, he hurried over. “Gabriela! How could you suddenly leave and head back to work while you were on a blind date? And you didn’t come home or pick up your phone all night! Rhys was furious. Phyllis said he complained about you a lot after coming home.”

Gabriela steadied herself, then announced, “Uncle Josh, I have a boyfriend now.”

Josh stood there, momentarily stunned, his mouth opening and closing as if searching for words. Then he snapped back to life, rattling off questions, “What’s his name? What kind of work does he do?”

Just yesterday she’d been fussing about a blind date, and now she suddenly had a boyfriend? Was she just making up stories to dodge the whole thing?

Gabriela calmly replied, “I’ll bring him to Phyllis’s wedding. You’ll get to meet him yourself then.”

That seemed to finally put Josh’s suspicions at ease—at least for now. Once she’d escaped his interrogation, Gabriela slipped away to her room and lifted the lid of the gift box.

No matter how many times Aubrey had warned her about SK Elite Boutique’s jaw-dropping prices, Gabriela was still stunned when she finally saw the dress up close. The gown was a breathtaking shade of deep blue, falling to her knees, with rows of tiny, real diamonds glittering around the hem. Wearing it was like being draped in a patch of sunlight sparkling on the ocean.

She might not know much about designer labels, but even she could tell this dress cost an outrageous fortune.

A jittery thrill swept over her, quickly edged out by a prickle of anxiety she couldn't quite shake. Once she slipped into the dress, Gabriela hesitated for a moment, then reached out to "NotASaunders" with a text. "Mr. Saunders, it's just a banquet. Did you really have to go all out on a dress like this?"