

## His kiss 241

### Chapter 241

Gabriela shifted her gaze and caught Wesley lounging on the sofa a short distance away. His lips carried the ghost of a smile, yet the tightness in his striking features revealed the irritation simmering beneath.

In a cautious tone, she murmured, "Oh, Mr. Moss, you're still up."

He rose slowly, his gaze locking on her with an intensity that made her chest tighten. Something unspoken lingered in his eyes—too heavy, too sharp—and Gabriela instinctively edged backward.

Wesley advanced in deliberate steps, a low, cold snort escaping him. "How am I supposed to rest when you haven't even come back yet?"

She stumbled until the sofa stopped her, her legs giving way as she sank into the seat, dazed and unsteady. What connection could there possibly be between his bedtime and her return?

But with his temper running short these past few days, she dared not challenge him. Instead, she answered with quiet honesty, "I went to the night market with Tessa."

Wesley bent lower, one arm braced on the sofa behind her, his sharp gaze fixed on her face. Pinned by the chill of his presence, Gabriela sank back until she nearly flattened herself against the cushions, scarcely daring to breathe. Her heartbeat thundered so loudly she worried he could hear it echoing in the silence.

Catching the unease in her eyes, Wesley's expression softened slightly. A low exhale slipped from his chest. "The person who took you last time is still out there. You shouldn't be wandering around at night."

His words struck her deeply, and she murmured, moved, "Thank you for worrying about me, Mr. Moss."

Without warning, Wesley demanded, "Where's your bag?"

"What bag are you talking about?"

"The one Brenden gave you."

Annoyance pricked at her chest.

How ridiculous. Brenden had even gone so far as to report that to Wesley?

She steadied herself and answered truthfully, "Well... the bag Mr. Saunders gave me was actually meant for his forty-ninth girlfriend. Since I opened it first, he asked me to toss it. It was brand new, though, and throwing it away felt absurd, so I ended up selling it instead."

"You sold it?" Wesley's brows lifted, genuine surprise flickering across his face. "You could actually let it go?"

Weren't designer bags supposed to be every girl's fatal weakness?

"Of course I could," Gabriela muttered with a trace of irritation. "That bag was tiny, stiff, and not even good-looking. You could barely squeeze a phone inside. Totally useless. And carrying something that expensive only made me feel on edge. Selling it gave me cash, and with that money I can buy plenty of nicer, more practical things."

"You made the right choice." The hardness in Wesley's features faded, leaving behind a subtle smile. Drawing himself upright, he spoke with measured calm. "It's late. Go get some rest."

Within moments, Gabriela sensed the storm that had weighed on him for days had finally cleared, as though a heavy chain had been unfastened from his chest. Seeing the change in him, she felt her own mood lift. "Alright. Then you should rest too, Mr. Moss. Good night."

And with that, she slipped away quickly to her room. Left alone, Wesley let out a low, amused chuckle.

The following afternoon, Tessa called the entire executive office together. Her eyes sparkled with mischief as she announced, "Last year's revenue exceeded expectations, so to thank everyone, Mr. Moss has prepared a special surprise."

With a crisp clap, she signaled a male colleague, who rolled in a cart stacked high with ribboned boxes. With a bright smile, she declared, "Every one of you will be getting a designer bag as your reward."

A chorus of delighted shrieks rose from the female colleagues. “Mr. Moss really is the best!”

Tessa’s grin widened as she went on, “Gentlemen, you’re not left out either. Think of it as a gift you can pass on—to your wife, your girlfriend, even your mother.”

She picked up the box at the very top and handed it straight to Gabriela. “This one’s yours.”

The rest of the gifts were quickly passed out, filling the room with excited chatter and laughter.

Back at her desk, Gabriela carefully opened her box. The moment she peeled back the wrapping, she was struck by a wave of unmistakable luxury. The bag inside was roomier than the one Brenden had once given her, its clean lines and understated elegance making it even more refined. Not only could it hold far more, its graceful design was every bit as stylish as the previous luxury piece. Though she had no idea of the exact cost, the craftsmanship alone told her it wasn’t cheap.

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What unsettled her was the timing. Just yesterday Wesley had asked about the bag from Brenden, and today he had gifted everyone in the company a designer bag. Could that really be a coincidence?

Leaning closer to Tessa, she queried, “What kind of bag did you get, Tessa?”

Tessa flipped open her own box for Gabriela to see. Hers was a smaller piece, still elegant, but in a completely different style. Tessa gave her a mischievous wink. “Yours is definitely a limited edition—completely one of a kind.”

Gabriela's lashes flickered, her gaze uncertain. "Why is mine a limited edition?"

Noticing Gabriela's puzzled look, Tessa's thoughts spiraled back to the two designer gifts Gabriela had sold. Could Gabriela have realized she was strapped for cash and quietly asked Wesley to send that luxury bag and bracelet her way, then let her handle the sales herself? Perhaps it had been Gabriela's way of helping without making a show of it. Otherwise, why was it always Lydia who conveniently turned up to buy them? And Gabriela had even marked up the prices absurdly high—yet Lydia had purchased them without the slightest hesitation. It almost felt as though Lydia was part of the plan from the start.

The moment the thought struck, Tessa's vision blurred with tears again. Gabriela had treated her with such unexpected generosity.

From that moment on, Tessa resolved to do everything in her power to repay Gabriela's kindness.

Gripping Gabriela's hands with fierce determination, Tessa said solemnly, "Don't sell the bag Mr. Moss gave you this time. Keep it safe. That's his way of showing he cares."

His way of showing he cared?

Remembering how close Wesley had stood last night, his gaze so intense it made her dizzy, her cheeks warmed at once. Wesley had picked up on her grumbling that the bag Brenden had sent was a waste, so he cleverly used the excuse of rewarding the entire company just to give her one she could actually use.

Wesley turned out to be surprisingly kind-hearted.

All throughout Apex Group, the mood turned celebratory, the entire building buzzing with delight. Employees from nearby companies glanced over, their eyes filled with undisguised envy. Beauty sets and sleek designer bags—who wouldn't want such perks under a striking, benevolent boss? Some even wondered aloud if it might be worth taking a pay cut just to transfer here.

Inside the CEO's office, Billy delivered his report with a trace of satisfaction. "Mr. Moss, everyone's thrilled with the bags, and Ms. Hayes looks especially pleased."

Wesley's expression softened, clearly in high spirits.

Billy added smoothly, "Well, her gift was personally picked out by you—no wonder she's so overjoyed."

Wesley had ordered Billy to distribute the same style to every employee. The Apex Group headquarters alone had more than a hundred staff. That kind of extravagance didn't come cheap.

A little math revealed the risk—if each bag ran thirty thousand, the expense would balloon into several million. As Wesley's right hand, Billy had to save money for him. So after careful consideration, he selected a luxury brand priced around eight thousand apiece—still premium, but far less damaging to the company's finances.

Only Gabriela's bag stood apart from the rest. It wasn't just a luxury brand—it was a handcrafted custom piece by Presley Crawford, one of a kind and impossible to price.

Wesley said evenly with a small nod, "You can get back to work."

The moment Billy exited, Gabriela slipped inside. She caught sight of Wesley's unusually light expression and couldn't resist saying softly, "Thanks for the bag, Mr. Moss."

The thought felt a little self-indulgent, but deep down she suspected the sudden decision to hand out designer bags had something to do with her.

Without lifting his eyes from the papers in his hand, Wesley answered flatly, "Every employee received one." He idly flipped through a few more pages, then went on in a detached tone, "You're my secretary. I can't have you looking second-rate."

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Gabriela hesitated, her fingers trembling against the bag's smooth leather. Had she misread the situation entirely? Still, warmth flooded through her chest.

She unleashed a torrent of praise, her voice bright with genuine delight. "Mr. Moss, this bag will never leave my side. The design is absolutely stunning—elegant yet functional."

Wesley fought against the smile threatening to break across his features. "I'm pleased it suits you." Then he changed the topic. "I'm flying to Athea tomorrow."

Gabriela inquired, "A business trip, Mr. Moss?"

Wesley's nod was curt. "Three to four days. Reschedule everything accordingly."

"Of course," she replied, her professional mask sliding into place. Her deference felt sharper now, more pronounced than any ordinary employee addressing their superior. Wesley's grip tightened on his documents as he studied her face with piercing intensity.

After everything—every gesture, every moment between them—she still viewed him as nothing more than her employer. He was departing for days, yet she displayed no hint of reluctance or sorrow. The realization burned through him like acid.

Wesley pressed his fingers to the bridge of his nose, then posed an unexpected question. "Gabriela, do you understand why I transferred you to the executive office?"

His voice dropped to that magnetic register that made her pulse stutter. Panic fluttered in her chest as memories crashed over her—the complaint she'd made to 'NotASaunders,' the careless words spoken behind Wesley's back. How foolish she'd been then. The executive position had doubled her salary. This generous, devastatingly attractive man had shown not a trace of vindictiveness.

Her voice emerged as barely a whisper. "Mr. Moss, I'll never speak against you again."

"Then explain why I brought you to the banquet, why I acted as your boyfriend at your cousin's wedding, and why I let you into my home."

Each word fell between them like a stone dropped into still water. His eyes burned with raw emotion, making his feelings unmistakably clear.

Gabriela was flustered. Why did it seem like he was about to confess his love to her?

The mortifying beach incident blazed through her memory, and heat flooded her cheeks. Words abandoned her completely.

Wesley watched confusion cloud her features, and his voice turned gravelly with emotion. “When you gave me that scarf you knitted yourself, something inside me shifted.”

Gabriela’s eyes widened until they seemed to swallow her face. He actually cared for her?

Her mind raced back to the Deluxe Hotel, where Phyllis and her cruel friends had cornered her with their mockery. Wesley had appeared like a guardian angel, his presence commanding the room before his hand settled gently on her head. Her heart had hammered against her ribs like a caged bird desperate for freedom. What woman could resist a man who possessed such wealth, devastating looks, and unwavering strength?

Yet Gabriela understood the harsh truth: their worlds were too far apart, and she was no match for a man of his stature. This wasn’t about self-pity or inadequacy. Despite her modest background, she possessed kindness, professional competence, and fierce determination—qualities that made her Wesley’s equal in every way that mattered. She simply recognized the truth of their situation.

Even as Wesley’s intentions blazed between them like a beacon, Gabriela continued her charade of obliviousness.

A bitter laugh escaped his throat, frustration bleeding through every syllable. “Gabriela, you know exactly what I’m telling you. Stop this pretense.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” she insisted, her mind genuinely reeling from his unexpected interest in her.

“Still lost?” Wesley’s directness cut through the air like a blade. “Then let me illuminate the situation—I’m in love with you.”

His words detonated in Gabriela’s skull like a bomb. He was in love with her.

The untouchable CEO, who had never pursued a single woman, claimed he cared for her.

Her legs buckled, sending her crashing to the floor in a graceless heap. She was pregnant with Brenden’s child. How could she possibly accept his love now?

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Wesley hadn’t expected such a violent reaction to his declaration. He lunged forward to assist her, but she scrambled backward like a frightened animal.

“Mr. Moss, please keep your distance. I just need a moment to collect myself.”

His expression turned thunderous. “You intend to gather your wits while sprawled on my office floor?”

Gabriela hauled herself upright, her movements clumsy with shock. “I’m leaving now.”

Wesley made no move to stop her retreat.

The afternoon crawled by in agonizing slow motion. Gabriela’s thoughts churned like storm clouds, and when evening arrived, she fled the building without waiting for Wesley, hailing a cab with desperate urgency. Her decision crystallized with brutal clarity—she would pack her belongings and disappear from Moss Manor tonight. She could impose on Aubrey’s hospitality for several nights, or return to Rosemont Gardens to face Phyllis. Any choice was better than facing Wesley again.

Upon entering the house, she found a guest in the living room. A middle-aged woman occupied the sofa, her age artfully concealed through meticulous care. The dark green dress she wore created an aura of refined gentility.

Both Miriam and Loretta beamed as they presented the introduction. “Mrs. Crawford, please meet Gabriela.”

Presley’s gaze swept over Gabriela with calculating precision. Her eyes lingered on the bag draped across Gabriela’s shoulder, then dropped to the delicate bracelet encircling her wrist. Recognition flickered in her expression like a flame catching kindling.

“Gabriela, your beauty is truly remarkable.”

Gabriela offered a gracious smile. “Your words are too generous, Mrs. Crawford.”

Fiona’s presence in the room struck Gabriela like a discordant note.

Furious that Gabriela had profited one and a half million from the gifts she’d sent under Brenden’s name, Fiona had come to Moss Manor to confront her. Yet Presley’s unexpected arrival derailed her plan. She suppressed her wrath and performed elaborate displays of deference, each gesture dripping with calculated charm.

Presley barely acknowledged Fiona’s existence. But the moment Gabriela entered, the older woman’s attention shifted to her with laser focus.

Fiona’s gaze zeroed in on Gabriela’s bag. Her voice dripped with false sweetness. “Gabriela, I heard you sold that designer bag and made quite the profit. What’s with the flea market replacement?”

Gabriela pressed, “How did you find out about that?”

Fiona smirked. “Brenden told me everything.”

Since the gift bore Brenden’s name, Fiona wielded complete narrative control—the perfect weapon to poison Loretta’s mind with the implication that something was going on between Gabriela and Brenden.

Gabriela's temper flared at Fiona's insult regarding the bag she was carrying. This bag was a gift from Wesley, who had just confessed his love to her. Even if she couldn't reciprocate his feelings, she would never allow anyone to diminish his gesture.

Her voice turned arctic. "Ms. Dewitt, this bag is a unique masterpiece worth more than you could imagine."

Amusement danced in Presley's eyes as she observed their verbal sparring.

Fiona's confusion was palpable. She scrutinized the bag with predatory intensity, noting its undeniable elegance but finding no obvious luxury branding. Convinced Gabriela was lying about its value, she released a derisive snort. "That gaudy embroidery screams amateur hour. It's an absolute eyesore. And you have the audacity to call it unique!"

Gabriela's eyes blazed with fire. "Gaudy? This is a four-leaf clover—a symbol of fortune and prosperity. Examine the stitching, the intricate details, the color harmony—this represents craftsmanship you couldn't purchase for a million. The designer bag you mentioned cost a mere two hundred thousand and pales beside this quality."

Loretta nodded in approval. "Four-leaf clovers attract good fortune—how could you call such embroidery gaudy, Fiona?"

Fiona's eye twitched with barely suppressed rage, but she retreated into strategic silence, unwilling to risk Loretta's displeasure.

Presley's voice cut through the tension, her eyes sparkling with amusement. "Gabriela, do you genuinely believe this bag surpasses those designer ones?"

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"Of course!" Gabriela settled beside Presley, eagerly displaying her bag. "That high-end designer bag is pricey and rigid, hardly comfortable to carry around. And it's barely big enough for a phone, which isn't very practical."

From nearby, Fiona scoffed, "Those obsessed with practicality often overlook the allure of opulent treasures like gemstones."

Ignoring Fiona's jab, Gabriela went on, "Mrs. Crawford, check out this. It's not only fashionable but also soft to the touch and easy on the shoulder. The standout feature is this four-leaf clover emblem. Its vibrant hue is delicately stitched from the bottom left, radiating a sense of growth and energy without being over-the-top. The sight of it instantly lifts the spirits." Pointing to a spot, she added, "A richer shade here could make it even more vibrant."

Presley's grin widened. "I'm thrilled to see my secretary so fond of the gift I chose for her."

Just then, Wesley's commanding voice filled the room as his imposing figure entered the living room, trailed by Billy and six think tank members. Gabriela instinctively took Wesley's coat to hang it up as he exchanged pleasantries with Presley.

Turning to Miriam, he announced, "I'm heading to Athea tomorrow. Billy and Aaron's team will stay overnight, and we'll depart for the airport together."

Miriam promptly set off to ready the guest rooms.

Wesley then turned to Presley, smiling apologetically. “Mrs. Crawford, I didn’t realize you would be visiting. Otherwise, I would have returned sooner.”

Presley waved it off, chuckling. “No worries. I’m just here to chat with Loretta and find out who this young lady is that you went to such lengths to get a bag from me for.”

Her comment hushed the room. Fiona’s eyes locked onto the bag in Gabriela’s hands.

Presley was a globally celebrated designer who had once crafted an exquisite handbag for a queen from Ewraso. The queen repeatedly praised Presley in public, professing her admiration for the creation, which elevated Presley’s status in the fashion industry.

In her youth, Presley adopted a relaxed approach, rarely unveiling new pieces. Her designs were exceptionally rare, and as she grew older, she produced even fewer bags annually, rendering her works virtually invaluable.

The fact that Gabriela held a custom-made piece from Presley was astonishing. Fiona struggled to mask her envy. Then a cold realization dawned on her: she had just criticized the bag in front of its creator. A wave of panic hit her. She opened her mouth to apologize, then thought better of it, terrified of making matters worse. Noticing Presley’s apparent indifference, Fiona chose to act oblivious, hoping Presley would overlook the incident. She resolved to steer Presley’s attention elsewhere as quickly as possible.

But Gabriela, almost as if to challenge Fiona, said remorsefully, “Oh, I’m sorry, Mrs. Crawford. I had no idea this was your design.”

She felt awkward to have criticized the bag right in front of its designer.

Presley smiled gently and shook her head. “No worries, your observation was insightful. I’ll think about adjusting the color when I go back.”

Gabriela apologized again, and Presley, studying her thoughtfully, asked, “Did you study painting before, Gabriela?”

Gabriela nodded modestly. “A bit.”

Presley turned to Wesley with a grin. “You’ve got yourself a remarkable secretary.”

Wesley agreed with a nod. “Indeed.”

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Fiona’s face twisted with bitterness, her eyes burning with resentment, before she quickly looked away, hiding her feelings.

Presley lingered briefly before taking her leave, declining Wesley’s dinner invitation.

Fiona jumped in, “Mrs. Crawford, I’m heading out too—mind if I join you?”

“Of course not,” Presley replied, her expression neutral, betraying no emotion.

After dinner, wary of another conversation with Wesley, Gabriela joined Loretta for a stroll in the back garden. After some chatter about Presley, Loretta let out a heavy sigh, lost in thought. Concerned, Gabriela asked what was troubling her.

Loretta sighed. “Recently, I visited a fortune teller. I requested a reading for Wesley, and the cards revealed the most favorable outcome possible.”

Puzzled, Gabriela replied, “That sounds like great news.”

Loretta’s face fell. “The fortune teller told me that Wesley would start a beautiful family soon. Yet he doesn’t even have a girlfriend. I don’t think I’ll ever live to see him settle down.”

Gabriela stayed quiet, unsure how to respond.

“You’re around him all the time, Gabriela—he seems like such a typical young man,” Loretta continued. “Why is he not interested in women? It’s driving me crazy.”

Unease surged through Gabriela as she recalled Wesley's recent confession and her own pregnancy. Trying to ease Loretta's worries, she said, "Maybe Mr. Moss will soon find the one. Try not to worry too much."

Loretta softened, murmuring, "I just want him to marry someone soon so I can finally be at peace. All I dream of lately is holding a great-grandchild."

Gabriela bowed her head, at a loss for words.

That night, she lay restless in bed, unable to find sleep. Her thoughts swirled around the baby she was carrying and Loretta's heavy sighs. Despite her efforts to focus elsewhere, her mind kept drifting back to Wesley. He had opened his heart to her, admitting his feelings.

Overwhelmed, Gabriela buried her face in her hands. She couldn't return his affection, yet as his personal secretary, she faced him daily at work—an uncomfortable predicament. Worse still, her morning sickness was intensifying, and working so closely with him, it was only a matter of time before he noticed. What was she to do?

Sleepless, she tossed through the night, only drifting off as the first light of dawn crept in.

A sudden ring from her phone jolted her awake. Groggy, she answered, and Wesley's warm voice cut through her haze. "I'm heading out soon. Come say goodbye."

Startled, Gabriela stammered, "Mr. Moss, I'm exhausted..."

But his firm reply left no room for argument. “I’m in the living room. Come down.”

Reluctantly, she threw on clothes and hurried downstairs. Wesley stood poised in the center of the living room, surrounded by Billy and sharply dressed think tank members, his presence commanding the space.

Gabriela greeted each person politely.

Wesley motioned to her. “Gabriela, check my luggage for anything I might have missed.”

As the others carried their bags outside, leaving them alone, Gabriela knelt and unzipped his suitcase.

“Mr. Moss, you forgot your medication. And Athea’s weather is chilly and wet—you’ll need warmer coats.”

“Oh, I forgot,” Wesley replied coolly. “Please repack for me.”

Gabriela added the missing items. As she worked, Wesley’s gaze followed her, his throat tightening.

“Gabriela, I meant what I said yesterday,” he said softly.

## Chapter 247

Though Wesley had left hours ago, his words still lingered in Gabriela's mind: "I want a clear answer from you." Even during lunch, her thoughts wandered, barely touching her plate.

Aubrey nudged her arm. "What's with you and that pork knuckle? You're stabbing it like it's a pincushion. It's practically shredded."

Gabriela blinked back to the present. She dropped her fork and knife with a clatter, took a deep breath, and said, "I've decided!"

Aubrey, startled by her sudden resolve, asked, "Decided what?"

"I'm moving back to Rosemont Gardens today!" Gabriela declared.

She had meant to leave yesterday, but with guests around, the timing wasn't right. Today was perfect. Wesley was off on a business trip, and tomorrow was the weekend.

"Moving back to Rosemont Gardens?" Aubrey raised an eyebrow. "Where have you been staying over the New Year holiday if not at home? Don't tell me you've been at Mr. Moss's place."

Gabriela quickly shoved a piece of food into Aubrey's mouth. "No more questions!"

After work, Gabriela rushed to Wesley's place by cab to pack her belongings. Loretta and Miriam urged her to stay.

"At least wait until Wesley returns," they pleaded.

Gabriela fibbed, "My uncle said they are moving out tomorrow, so I have to head back today."

Loretta and Miriam couldn't argue further and reminded her to reach out if she needed anything.

As Gabriela left with her suitcase, Loretta said to Miriam, "Gabriela is the only one who gets close to Wesley. If he misses a gem like her, he might end up alone forever."

Miriam felt a pang of worry but reassured her, "Don't worry. Gabriela works at Mr. Moss's company. There's still hope."

Loretta sighed and dialed Wesley's number.

Wesley, groggy from jet lag, found it odd to hear from Loretta. She never called him when he was overseas, always grumbling about the cost of international calls.

“Wesley, Gabriela’s gone,” Loretta sighed.

Wesley’s face darkened. “Where did she go?”

“She went back to her place,” Loretta said, her voice thick with distress.

Wesley offered a few consoling words, then called Billy, instructing him to speed up their work schedule. Giving her a whole week to decide whether to be with him was a mistake—that was far too long.

Gabriela soon arrived at Rosemont Gardens. Josh and his family were all there. When he saw her, his eyes welled up. “You’re finally back, Gabriela.”

After her falling-out with Phyllis, Gabriela hadn’t returned home. And after her kidnapping, Wesley had forbidden them from visiting her. It had been over two weeks since Josh last saw her.

Gabriela greeted Josh politely.

Marie scoffed, her voice dripping with scorn. “Didn’t you already cling to Wes—why bother coming back?”

“This is my house,” Gabriela said flatly. “You all need to move out tomorrow.”

Marie's face twisted with anger. "Ungrateful little wretch! The second you latch onto someone powerful, you're eager to kick us out."

Gabriela's expression remained cold. "You're still under intense public scrutiny. Moving out is your best choice."

Marie seethed, unable to grasp why internet strangers were so fixated on their situation.

"Who do you think you are?" Phyllis lunged forward, her eyes blazing with hatred. "Why did you have to air our family matters for the world to see? Aren't you embarrassed to show your face in public?"

Gabriela gave a cold laugh. "The only ones who should feel embarrassed are you."

"You bitch!" Phyllis raised her hand to strike, but Gabriela avoided it.

## Chapter 248

Phyllis glared venomously. "Even if I wronged you before, you're perfectly fine now. What more do you want?"

"Perfectly fine?" A cold spark flashed in Gabriela's eyes. She swung her hand, landing a sharp slap across Phyllis's face.

Phyllis shrieked like a madwoman, clutching her cheek. “How dare you hit me!”

“This slap won’t hurt for more than ten minutes,” Gabriela said with a casual smile. “It’s just a fleeting sting. You will be perfectly fine, so why are you so angry?”

Phyllis’s face flushed with fury. Gripping her cheek, she spat, “I know you hate me, but my parents are innocent. I’ll move out as you request. Just don’t kick them out.”

Phyllis had thought long and hard before coming up with this plan. She would leave, but her parents would stay. Later, she could use an excuse, like an injury or illness, to slip back in and deal with Gabriela for good.

“Well, Uncle Josh has always been kind to me. He can stay,” Gabriela said, turning her gaze to Marie. “But you, Aunt Marie—if you won’t leave, should I share the medical report from when you ‘accidentally’ broke my wrist before that painting contest?”

As a child, Gabriela loved painting, earning praise from her teachers. One had even nominated her for a competition. But days before the event, Marie had locked her up at home and beaten her.

Marie’s face stiffened. “You were reckless, running with delinquents. I was just trying to steer you right...”

“No excuse justifies abuse,” Gabriela cut in coldly. “Even though years have passed, I could still press charges. I kept the photos as proof.”

Marie's expression darkened. "You took pictures of that? You never saw me as family."

Gabriela didn't bother arguing. "So, are you leaving or not?"

Marie, having learned Gabriela's resolve the hard way, didn't dare push further. Grinding her teeth, she muttered, "I'll go."

Gabriela exhaled quietly in relief. In her freshman year of high school, she had hoped to enter a painting contest, but Marie's violence crushed that hope, ending her ability to paint. That incident taught Gabriela to preserve evidence. But in this case, she hadn't actually kept photos—she was bluffing.

Josh, standing aside, was stunned. He had read about Gabriela's fallout with Phyllis online, but the words had left him largely unmoved, eliciting only a faint pang of guilt.

However, hearing Gabriela's accusations now, he realized his family's harmony was a delusion. He had believed Marie cared for Gabriela, and Phyllis was kind. He had never recognized Gabriela's silent suffering until now.

Tears streaming down his face, Josh said, "I'm sorry, Gabriela. We'll move out tomorrow and return the house to you."

Seeing his grief softened Gabriela's heart briefly, but memories of her painful childhood steeled her resolve. "If you're leaving, give me the keys."

Phyllis, accepting defeat, yanked out the keys and threw them at her with a hateful glare. "You can keep your damn keys, you bitch!"

Ignoring the taunt, Gabriela calmly retrieved the keys from the floor.

Josh snapped out of his daze, tears in his eyes as he turned and slapped Phyllis. "I raised you to be kind. How could you treat your cousin so cruelly? You've let me down!"

Gabriela glanced at Josh's pale, anguished face. She opened her mouth but said nothing, turning to her room.

Inside, she found it ransacked, her bed covered in vile filth.

## Chapter 249

Gabriela swiftly took a picture of the cluttered room and summoned Phyllis upstairs to clean it.

Phyllis scoffed. "Have you lost it? Why should I clean your room?"

Exhausted from a long day and the confrontation upon her return, Gabriela's patience was razor-thin. "Are you going to clean or not? If you don't, I'll post the picture online."

She had been gone for over two weeks, only to find her room turned into a garbage dump. If that image hit the internet, Phyllis would face another storm of public backlash.

Phyllis smirked, unfazed. "Is that your only trick? Rallying those stupid netizens to stand up for you?"

Gabriela's lips curved faintly. "If it gets the job done, one trick is plenty. I'll count to three. One, two..."

Knowing Gabriela wasn't bluffing, Phyllis relented, grumbling, "Fine, I'll do it!"

Gabriela beckoned a maid over. "Watch her closely."

"Understood!"

The maid, now fully aware of who held the reins in the house, didn't dare slack. She monitored Phyllis meticulously, ensuring every corner was spotless. Phyllis, who always carried herself with an air of superiority, seethed at being bossed around by a maid. Her face was a mask of icy rage as she cleaned and even sprayed disinfectant under the maid's watchful gaze. Humiliated, she silently swore to bide her time for revenge.

The next day was Saturday. Early that morning, the movers Josh had arranged arrived and began clearing out the house.

From the second floor, Gabriela observed quietly, saying little. Phyllis shot her a venomous glare but, heeding Josh's warning, held her tongue.

Josh and his family moved out swiftly, leaving the house feeling bare. The heavy, oppressive air that had lingered for so long seemed to lift with their departure.

Gabriela called Farley to share the good news. Overwhelmed with joy, Farley's voice cracked.

After ending the call, Gabriela instructed the maid to give the house a thorough cleaning and bought vibrant flower arrangements to liven up the space. Then she invited Aubrey and Tessa over for a meal.

The maid stood by cautiously, awaiting orders, terrified of being let go. Back when Phyllis had stirred up trouble online, Aubrey had been the most outraged. Now, seeing things resolved, she was genuinely happy for Gabriela. Still, glancing at the maid, she whispered, "I heard this maid used to help Phyllis make your life miserable. Why keep her around?"

Gabriela shrugged calmly. "It's fine. Where the money flows, loyalty follows." Besides, Ken was there to keep things in check. Though originally hired by Marie, Ken was a good man who had quietly looked out for Gabriela in the past. Now, she entrusted him with overseeing the household.

Tessa, her face etched with concern, chimed in, "Aubrey's got a point. You should replace her."

Gabriela nodded, brushing off the topic. Reclaiming the house was her biggest victory, and she didn't want to dwell on minor issues.

Ken whipped up a lavish meal, cheerfully encouraging everyone to dig in. But when a dish of braised lamb hit the table, Gabriela clamped a hand over her mouth and bolted to the bathroom.

Aubrey and Tessa exchanged knowing looks. When Gabriela returned, pale from vomiting, Aubrey leaned in and murmured, “Are you... pregnant?”

Though Gabriela didn’t respond, her silence all but confirmed the speculation. She had no plans to end the pregnancy, and it would show soon enough, so she saw no point in hiding it from them.

Tessa’s eyes widened. “Is it Mr. Moss’s?”

Gabriela’s jaw dropped. “Why would you assume the child is his?”

Tessa shrugged. “Everyone at the office would think so. You’ve been riding to work with him every day lately, and he treats you differently. It’s clear he’s into you.”

Was it that obvious?

A wave of sadness hit Gabriela. Wesley was an incredible man, but she wasn’t lucky enough to be his match.

Aubrey pressed, "Does Mr. Moss know?"

"No, he doesn't," Gabriela said quickly, shaking her head. "You both have to swear not to tell anyone."

"Why not?" Aubrey asked, puzzled. "Mr. Moss likes you. If he knew about the baby, he might propose on the spot."

That was exactly why she couldn't tell him. He liked her, but she was carrying another man's child. He would be let down—maybe even repulsed.

"Just promise me, not a word to anyone," Gabriela insisted.

Aubrey sighed but nodded. "Fine, my lips are sealed."

Despite being a gossip enthusiast, she held a firm line: she would never betray a friend's secret. Tessa, naturally more reserved, was even less likely to spill.

Aubrey and Tessa stayed most of the day. After a few glasses of wine, Tessa suddenly leaned on Gabriela, sobbing. "If I end up with nowhere to go, would you take me in?"

Her outburst stunned Gabriela and Aubrey.

Gabriela gently patted her back. "Of course I would."

It took a while to soothe Tessa, who eventually dozed off on the living room couch, sleeping soundly as if she hadn't slept in ages. Gabriela let her sleep, tucking a blanket over her.

As night fell, Aubrey asked Gabriela to look after Tessa and headed home.

Moments later, Tessa's phone rang. Still deep in sleep, she didn't stir, so Gabriela reached for it, but Tessa jolted awake, fumbling to answer. She repeated apologies into the phone, her voice frantic as she promised to rush home immediately. Then she said a quick goodbye to Gabriela.

Concerned by Tessa's rattled state, Gabriela offered to drive her, but Tessa declined politely.

On Monday at work, Gabriela noticed a glaring bruise under Tessa's eye.

"What happened to your face?" she asked.

Tessa averted her gaze, nervous. "Oh, it's nothing. I drank too much that night and tripped down some stairs."

Her story felt off, but since Tessa clammed up, Gabriela didn't push.

She had her own worries brewing. Everywhere she went, whispers about her and Wesley followed. She couldn't fathom why her coworkers loved gossiping in the restroom, of all places. If they weren't scared of being overheard, they might as well shout it in the halls. And if they were, they should have known someone could be in a stall—like Gabriela was right then.

She overheard their hushed voices.

"Gabriela's got some luck, snagging Mr. Moss like that."

"He's just playing with her. What is there to envy?"

"A fling's still something. But Mr. Moss doesn't strike me as the type to mess around. Maybe he's serious."

"Gabriela recently had a public dispute with her uncle's family over a house. It was pathetic. Someone who cuts off family like that? No respectable family would accept her."

"Her uncle's family was awful, though."

"Awful or not, they raised her. Mark my words, even if Mr. Moss wants to marry her, his family won't allow it."

“She’s dreaming if she thinks she can climb that high.”

“Exactly. She’s got nothing to match Mr. Moss, yet she’s shamelessly chasing him. It’s cringe-worthy.”

In the past, Gabriela would have stormed out to confront them. But now, it was different. She touched her stomach, fully aware of the chasm between her and Wesley.

His genuine feelings couldn’t bridge their differences.

The gossip stopped as someone else entered. Gabriela stepped out, washed her hands, and forced a smile in the mirror. It was fine—gossip like this wasn’t worth her frustration.

When she was back at her desk, Tessa said, “Mr. Moss is back. He wants you in his office now.”

Gabriela’s smile vanished. Wasn’t Wesley supposed to be gone for a week? Why was he back earlier than expected?