

His kiss 261

Chapter 261

Mason smiled. “Absolutely, come anytime.”

After lunch, Gabriela returned to the office, only to cross paths with Jaylene.

Jaylene smirked. “Well, look at you, already slacking off in your new team? You have barely settled in, and you’re already wandering around.”

Gabriela ignored her and hurried back to her team. She knocked on Nina’s door and stepped inside. “Miss Gibson, I would like to visit Alphacom Electronics’ old factory tomorrow.”

Nina, surprised by Gabriela’s drive, said, “I wasn’t kidding when I said you don’t need to overwork here. You don’t have to push so hard.”

Gabriela shook her head. “I set it up with Mr. Garner for tomorrow. Would you join me?”

Seeing her resolve, Nina sighed and agreed. “Fine.”

Afterward, she called Wesley to update him. “Your little girlfriend is impressive—she even knows Mr. Garner, the CEO of Alphacom Electronics.”

Wesley had tasked Nina with looking out for Gabriela, leading to Nina's assumption that they were romantically involved. After all, Wesley rarely showed interest in women, so the misunderstanding was understandable.

Wesley instructed, "Just make sure she's supported and not mistreated."

"Got it," Nina replied.

After hanging up, a spark of ambition flickered in her. Her team had long languished at the bottom, and though Wesley protected her, the constant mockery for their poor performance stung. She yearned for a chance to turn things around. In the past, with only one salesperson remaining, her options had been limited. Now that she had Gabriela on board, it seemed like a perfect opportunity to accomplish something together.

Nina took a deep breath and dove into Alphacom Electronics' files with renewed focus.

The next day, Gabriela, Nina, and Aubrey traveled to Alphacom Electronics' factory on Okburg's outskirts, a half-day drive from the city.

No sooner had Gabriela arrived than she received a call from Mason. "Gabriela, I'm so sorry—an urgent meeting came up. I'll join you later," he apologized.

"It's alright. I'll take a look around on my own first," Gabriela replied.

Mason arranged for the factory manager to guide them. The manager, courteous and thorough, walked them through the production lines, detailing each step. The sprawling facility employed over thirty thousand workers. Touring it took half a day, yet Mason still hadn't arrived by the time they finished.

Nina felt a twinge of disappointment. She hadn't held high hopes, but Gabriela's confidence had kindled some optimism. Despite the exhausting day, Nina voiced no complaints.

"I bet you're all starving after walking around all day. Come on, dinner's on me," she offered.

Gabriela, feeling guilty, said, "I'm sorry, Miss Gibson, for dragging you out here with no results."

Nina chuckled, dismissing the apology with a wave. "Don't be silly. This is a billion-dollar contract. Jaylene's team chased it for months and got nowhere. Meeting the factory manager in just half a day is a solid win."

Aubrey jumped in, her voice brimming with enthusiasm. "Totally! Gabriela, you're incredible. Since starting at Apex Group, I've been on tons of sales visits, but the highest-ranking person I ever met was some mid-level supervisor at a small firm. Today, thanks to you, we met Alphacom Electronics' factory manager!"

Gabriela gave a faint smile but stayed quiet. Inside, a sense of unease gnawed at her; the rocky start left her doubting the deal's success.

After dinner, they headed back to the city, the hour already late. The three women parted ways, each returning home. Gabriela boarded her usual bus, but when she stepped off, the street felt eerily silent.

As she walked, she sensed someone trailing her. When she sped up, the footsteps behind her quickened. When she slowed, they matched her pace.

The street grew more desolate, and memories of a past kidnapping sent a chill of fear through her. She discreetly reached into her bag, where Miriam had stashed a can of pepper spray and a stun baton for emergencies.

On a particularly isolated stretch, the footsteps drew closer. Heart pounding, Gabriela took a steadying breath, whipped out the pepper spray, and sprayed it wildly behind her.

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The man following Gabriela was caught off guard by her sudden movement. His eyes burned from the pepper spray as he let out a furious roar and lunged at her with terrifying speed. Gabriela didn't even have time to grab her stun baton; she bolted, legs pumping as fast as they could.

Though his vision was blurred and his movements slowed, the distance between them began to close. Rosemont Gardens still lay some distance ahead, yet the gap was shrinking. In desperation, she fumbled through her bag for her phone to dial the police. Her fingers couldn't find it, and the man drew nearer.

A sudden twist of her previously injured ankle sent a sharp, searing pain up her leg. Though every nerve screamed to stop, Gabriela gritted her teeth and pushed forward, the shadow of the man looming ever closer.

Out of nowhere, she was caught in a firm, steady embrace that carried an unmistakably crisp, masculine scent.

“Hey, it’s fine now. I’m right here with you. No need to be scared.” Wesley’s voice was husky as he murmured, his mind still haunted by how close she’d come to danger. He was deeply relieved that he’d decided to check on her on a whim. Without him, she might have already been kidnapped again.

Gabriela shivered violently, pain radiating from her stomach and ankle, fear clinging to her like a second skin. Her hands gripped him instinctively, pressing her face into the warmth of his chest as if letting go would mean losing herself.

Noticing how tightly she clung to him, Wesley felt the last remnants of his anxiety transform into joy. He tightened his hold, murmuring against her hair, “It’s okay. I’ve got you. Don’t be afraid.”

Meanwhile, Billy had already wrestled the man to the ground, pinning him firmly. As Gabriela’s mind cleared, she realized she’d been clutching Wesley and hastily pulled away.

Before she could fully step back, Wesley grasped her hand and gently drew her into his embrace again. “You like me, Gabriela!”

His words carried certainty. He could tell she felt something for him; otherwise, she wouldn’t have held onto him so tightly.

Being held in his strong, protective arms sent a flutter through her chest. The sensation was both sweet and aching, a tender sorrow she couldn’t shake. Even before she had known she was pregnant, she had

never stood on equal footing with him. Now, as she carried another man's child, the gap between them felt even wider.

It took a moment for her to gather her composure, but when she spoke, her tone was deliberately neutral. "Mr. Moss, I really appreciate you saving me. Would you like to have a coffee at my place?"

Wesley's smile faltered, the light in his eyes dimming at her detached tone. He studied her carefully, noting the serene composure etched across her face. He was growing increasingly frustrated by her indifference.

"I'll have a coffee," he answered with a faint nod. "Let's go in."

Gabriela froze, surprise flickering across her features. She had assumed that, given Wesley's pride, he wouldn't give her a second thought after so many rejections. Yet here he was, agreeing to coffee without hesitation.

Gabriela's ankle throbbed, and her stomach churned with pain. She cast a quick glance at the man pinned under Billy's hold and forced a small, uneasy smile. "Mr. Moss, I was scared just now. I don't think I can host you properly at the moment."

Wesley's jaw tightened, a sharp line cutting across his face. He noticed the subtle distance in her posture, the way she tried to pull away. Gradually, his arms relaxed, and the familiar chill of his usual detached demeanor returned.

“Take this bastard to the police,” he instructed Billy, his tone flat but commanding. “Make sure you dig up who put him up to this.”

“Got it, sir!” Billy nodded. He moved swiftly, hauling the man toward the police station.

Wesley’s gaze returned to Gabriela as he inquired gently, “Are you able to walk? Go on ahead—I’m not leaving until you’re inside.”

“You really don’t have to, Mr. Moss,” Gabriela murmured, her voice barely above a whisper.

A cold edge sliced through Wesley’s gaze, a faint smirk tugging at his lips. “I’d rather not wake up to tomorrow’s headline: ‘Apex Group Employee Found Dead on the Street After Being Followed Home from Overtime Shift.’”

Gabriela bit back a response, choosing silence instead. Some things never changed—his words still cut sharper than anyone else’s.

Without acknowledging him, she turned and hobbled toward Rosemont Gardens, each step deliberate and painfully slow. She tried masking the limp, but the agony in her foot betrayed her—she could barely manage the walk.

In an instant, Wesley swept her off the ground and deposited her into his car, the locks clicking shut.

Startled, Gabriela gasped, “Mr. Moss, what on earth are you doing? Let me out.”

His eyes hardened as he muttered, “You’re this badly hurt, and you thought you could hide it?” He started the engine, his jaw set. “Your face is losing all its color—let’s get you to the hospital.”

The mention of the hospital made Gabriela’s chest tighten. Her pulse spiked with a sudden wave of dread.

“I don’t want to go there,” she blurted, panic creeping into her tone. “Please, just unlock the door. I need to get home.”

The engine hummed louder as the car picked up speed. Wesley’s reply came clipped and dismissive. “You can rest easy—the company has the medical bills covered.”

That wasn’t what she feared at all. Her anxiety mounted as she tried to explain, words tumbling out in a rush. “It’s only a sprain, the same ankle I hurt before. I don’t think it fully healed, so the pain is sharper this time. I just need to put some ointment on at home—it’ll be fine.”

He gave no response, his profile unreadable, expression carved into ice.

Within minutes, the car rolled to a stop outside the hospital. Wesley stepped out, opened her door, and his voice cut through the night like a blade. “Get out.”

Gabriela lingered in her seat, stubbornly refusing to budge.

He leaned closer, his voice low and precise. “Should I carry you inside?”

A shock ran through her, stiffening her limbs as she scrambled out of the car. Yet when her eyes met the hospital’s looming sign, she froze, unwilling to advance a single step.

Wesley came around to her side, his shadow falling over her. “Would you rather I carry you inside?” he queried, lowering himself as if preparing to scoop her up.

Her jaw tightened as she remarked, “Mr. Moss, I may be your employee, but you can’t force me into the hospital, can you?”

His reply was steady, edged with authority. “As your employer, it’s my responsibility to see that my people are cared for when they’re hurt.”

Realizing resistance was pointless, Gabriela gave in and followed him reluctantly through the sliding doors.

Once inside, Wesley procured medication for her ankle before summoning a doctor. His tone softened slightly but remained firm. “She was locked in a refrigerated truck not long ago and suffered frostbite. Her complexion doesn’t look right now—I’m concerned there may still be aftereffects. Make sure she gets a thorough checkup.”

The words struck Gabriela with an uneasy shock.

“Doctor, I really feel okay. Could we... skip the examination?” she asked hesitantly.

The doctor tilted his head. “Maybe you should discuss that with your boyfriend first.”

Heat rushed to Gabriela’s cheeks. She considered correcting him, insisting Wesley wasn’t her boyfriend, but decided the clarification was unnecessary. Wesley’s expression eased slightly when the word “boyfriend” slipped into the conversation.

Sensing a chance, Gabriela hurried to explain, “Mr. Moss, my ankle was in terrible pain earlier, which probably made me look worse than I am. I really am fine now. I spent the entire day at Alphacom Electronics’ old factory and I’m completely drained. I just need to go home and sleep.”

Her weary, almost pleading look seemed to tug at something in Wesley. “You really are okay?”

With a firm nod, she assured, “Absolutely! I know my own body.” Finally, Wesley gave in and drove her back to her place.

When they arrived at Rosemont Gardens, Gabriela didn’t dare suggest he come inside. She offered a sincere thank-you and slipped out of the car as quickly as she could. Wesley lingered for a moment, watching her enter the house, before turning his car around and driving off.

Gabriela sank onto her couch at home, swallowing her prenatal vitamins with a warm sip of water that gradually eased the knots in her belly. What a scare that had been! She shivered at the thought—if she'd actually gone for a checkup and Wesley found out about her pregnancy, she could only imagine his reaction. Tucking her hands over her belly, she decided to take a much-needed rest for both herself and the baby. Soon she drifted into a deep, healing sleep.

The next morning, she limped into the office, favoring one leg with careful precision. As the elevator doors slid open, she ran into Jaylene. Jaylene's eyes gleamed with malice as she looked Gabriela up and down, her lips curling into a sharp smirk.

"Weren't you supposed to meet Mr. Garner from Alphacom Electronics yesterday? Tell me, how did that turn out? Did you finalize the deal?"

Gabriela didn't waste her breath on a reply.

Jaylene leaned closer, her tone dripping with disdain. "Do you even realize your own worth? Mr. Garner's standing is worlds beyond yours. Just because you once hovered around Mr. Moss, you actually believe you can waltz into a meeting with Garner? Landing a billion-dollar contract—what a ridiculous fantasy."

The elevator chimed and slid open on the fourth floor. With exaggerated sweetness, Jaylene extended her hand. "Need a hand walking, Gabriela?"

Gabriela's ankle throbbed painfully, so she placed her hand in hers. "Thank you, Jaylene."

A flash of annoyance darkened Jaylene's features.

How the hell could Gabriela be so unfazed? Didn't she realize she was being taunted—and still accepted the gesture with a polite smile?

With colleagues milling around outside the elevator, Jaylene found she couldn't simply shove Gabriela aside and ended up guiding her toward her office.

Before they reached the doors, a familiar figure rushed toward them. "Gabriela, I really had an emergency yesterday and couldn't make it. I came today to apologize in person."

It was Mason—the very same one who had stood Gabriela up the day before. Jaylene was stunned.

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Jaylene did not expect that Gabriela actually knew the CEO of Alphacom Electronics. For a fleeting instant, she froze, her smile faltering in the slightest twitch as she fought to keep her poise.

Mason's sharp eyes, however, caught on something else entirely—Gabriela's injured foot. He stepped toward her, his voice carrying a note of concern. "Have you had it checked by a doctor? How bad is it?"

Gabriela assured him that it wasn't serious, offering a soft smile of gratitude for his attentiveness.

Just then, Aubrey arrived, and the moment she caught sight of Mason, she rushed forward with coffee in hand, eager to serve. Nina soon arrived at the office.

Mason didn't stay long. After briefly discussing his factory's restructuring with Gabriela, he prepared to leave. Throughout their exchange, Jaylene observed silently. Though no one spared her a glance, she remained unfazed, rooted firmly in place.

When Mason rose to go, she seized the chance to escort him out herself. Having seen her assist Gabriela earlier, Mason naturally assumed the two women were close friends, so he made no objection.

Out in the parking lot, Jaylene seized her chance. With a polished smile, she slipped Mason her business card. "Mr. Garner, I'm Jaylene Ryan from the sales department at Apex Group. I've been closely tracking your company's restructuring project—"

Before she could finish, Mason's brows drew together. His interruption was curt, almost dismissive. "Aren't you a close friend of Gabriela's? Why fight her over this project?"

Those questions hit her like a slap. Jaylene faltered but quickly tried to recover. "Mr. Garner, Gabriela has only been with the company for a few months. I've worked on multiple projects and have a stronger grasp of the specifics of your project. I believe—"

"Experience can be gained," Mason cut her off, his voice edged with frost. "And if Gabriela needs guidance, Mr. Moss will provide it."

er nails dug into her palm as her smile faltered, teeth clenched in seething frustration. Gabriela was nothing more than a recent graduate—no pedigree, no powerful connections—and yet Mason openly favored her. Jaylene was convinced there was something between them.

When Jaylene returned, she was immediately surrounded by curious colleagues, hungry for answers.

“Jaylene, I heard Alphacom Electronics’ CEO actually came to see Gabriela today!”

“Do you think she might secure the billion-dollar deal?”

Jaylene’s expression was ashen, her silence heavier than words. The very thought made her blood boil. How could a rookie like Gabriela presume to challenge her, the top salesperson?

That afternoon, a short video clip of barely ten seconds began spreading like wildfire across the company. In it, Mason was seen personally visiting Gabriela, his hand steadying her with quiet care as he noticed her injured foot. Though there had been others present in the room, it wasn’t the video itself that caused a stir—it was the whispers that came with it.

“Mr. Garner treats Gabriela with such tenderness. It’s unexpected. Why would a powerful CEO like him treat a nobody like her so well?”

“Can’t you tell? That’s how a man looks after his sugar baby.”

“Don’t be ridiculous! Mr. Garner’s old enough to be her grandfather.”

“Think it through! Jaylene has been killing herself to close that deal, and yet Mason favors Gabriela. Why? Because Gabriela is an amazing salesperson? Obviously not! It’s because she has a pretty face.”

The rumors swirled like a storm cloud until they finally breached the walls of the executive office itself.

Billy, unsettled by the escalating rumors, immediately ordered the tech department to track down the source of the leaked video. He had originally planned to shield Wesley from the matter, but with gossip spreading like wildfire, secrecy was no longer an option.

Meanwhile, Jaylene, carrying next month’s sales plan, made her way to the CEO’s office. Inside, Wesley sat at his desk, sleeves rolled up on a crisp white shirt, a sleek silver watch glinting at his wrist. His refined focus and the quiet elegance in his every movement were simply mesmerizing.

Jaylene’s pulse quickened. How could a simpleton like Gabriela ever be worthy of a man like Wesley? If only he weren’t so exacting about background and status, surely she would be the far better match.

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Today she had dressed with painstaking care: flawless makeup, a soft pink tailored ensemble paired with a chic jacket, projecting just the right balance of intellect and grace. With a confident toss of her hair, she glided forward. “Mr. Moss, here’s next month’s report,” she said smoothly.

Wesley didn’t even glance up. “Just leave it on the table.”

Not ready to be dismissed, Jaylene lingered, her tone dipping into something sweetly suggestive. “Mr. Moss, there’s... something I’m not sure I should say...”

“Then don’t.”

The reply was as cold as it was curt. He didn’t lift his eyes, his attention chained to his work. Her perfume clung to the air, sharp and cloying, making him grit his teeth in irritation. “Leave,” he said flatly.

Jaylene clenched her teeth, determination hardening her resolve. Pulling out her phone, she said with feigned earnestness, “Mr. Moss, this concerns Gabriela. Since she was once your secretary, I thought you should see it.” She pressed play. The short clip filled the silence. Wesley’s gaze sharpened as he watched, his expression darkening, a dangerous edge flashing in his eyes like steel unsheathed.

“What exactly are you implying?”

Jaylene lowered her voice, as though reluctant. “Rumors are spreading, sir. They say Gabriela has secured the Alphacom deal by getting too close to its CEO.”

“CEO. Of course, I shouldn’t be telling you such things. She’s my colleague, after—”

Wesley’s head lifted slowly, his stare piercing. “And who exactly are you?”

The question caught her completely off guard. She straightened. "My name is Jaylene Ryan."

A hint of recognition flashed in his eyes as the name registered. Wesley's expression iced over, his tone cutting. "Get out."

Panic flickered in Jaylene's chest; her bravado collapsed. She hurried out, not daring to remain any longer, the echo of his voice still chilling her spine.

The moment the door closed, Wesley called Billy in. Billy entered nervously, already sensing the storm.

Wesley demanded, "What's going on? Why hasn't Jaylene been fired yet? And how did a video of Mason's visit end up circulating?"

Feeling the weight of his fury, Billy rushed to explain, "Mr. Moss, we've launched a full investigation. We'll identify the source within two days."

"Good. Bring Gabriela here."

Meanwhile, in Nina's office, Aubrey had already rolled up her sleeves, fire in her eyes. She hissed, "When Mr. Garner showed up, Jaylene was the only one who remained with us. Who else could have spread the rumors? I'm going to confront her."

Gabriela quickly caught her arm, voice calm but steady. “And if it’s confirmed she spread the video, what exactly do you plan to do?”

“I’ll give her a piece of my mind!” Aubrey snapped, her voice brimming with frustration. “I used to admire her, you know. She was young, already a sales queen, even bought her own place with her own money. I thought she was someone worth respecting. But now? She’s just malicious. I bet every deal she closed was won with underhanded tricks like this.”

Nina shifted uneasily, her expression conflicted. Their team had never been fiercely competitive, as most of them weren’t even concerned with chasing deals. But with gossip spreading like wildfire, Nina felt a responsibility as supervisor to stand up for her team.

She suddenly rose, palm striking the table with a sharp crack. “Aubrey, I’ll go with you!”

Aubrey’s eyes lit up. “Thanks, Miss Gibson! You’re the best!”

Gabriela blinked in surprise. Nina, usually the picture of calm composure, was ready to march into battle. It was a side of her she hadn’t expected to see.

“Wait,” Gabriela interjected. “Let’s hold back a little longer.”

Since the day Wesley first introduced her to Mason, Gabriela had harbored a faint suspicion that he meant to elevate her. Yet after her move to the executive office, that possibility had remained suspended. Now, with the swirl of rumors pulling her into the spotlight, she could sense a turning point approaching, as if something were about to change.

Just then, while she was still persuading Nina and Aubrey, Billy appeared at the doorway and called her to the CEO's office.

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The moment Aubrey spotted Billy, she fell silent.

Gabriela followed Billy into the CEO's office. Wesley set aside his paperwork and signaled for Billy to leave. Gabriela stood respectfully, waiting for instructions.

Wesley glanced at her and said, "Have a seat."

Gabriela settled into the chair as directed.

Wesley, keeping his tone measured, asked, "Why didn't you take some time off?"

"I'm fine," Gabriela replied promptly. "I just need to walk a bit slower." Her demeanor was polite, treating him with the respect due a boss. Wesley felt a twinge of annoyance, though his face remained impassive.

"What did Mason want with you today?" he asked.

Gabriela quickly clarified, “I’m working on closing a deal. Mr. Garner invited me to tour Alphacom Electronics’ factory yesterday, and I went. He had to cancel at the last minute and came today to apologize. Mr. Moss, you’re the one who introduced me to Mr. Garner. You don’t believe those rumors, do you?”

Wesley gave a dry chuckle, almost incredulous. Did Gabriela really think he was so gullible as to fall for gossip?

He asked directly, “Are you set on landing that billion-dollar contract?”

Gabriela nodded eagerly. She wasn’t sure if the commission would buy her a mansion, but securing the deal would be a major feather in her cap. Then, a thought struck her, and she asked, “Is there an issue with this deal? Or do you prefer I not pursue it?”

Many big firms were after the same contract, yet Wesley had seemed unbothered.

“You can go for it,” Wesley said with a nod. “Tomorrow afternoon, have Mason and his assistant come to the office for a meeting.”

Gabriela beamed. “Thank you, Mr. Moss!”

It surprised Wesley—how genuinely excited she seemed over closing this deal. Well, she was in for some challenges later on.

He offered a faint smile, his tone softening. "Today, you're not allowed to wander around."

Gabriela nodded cheerfully and returned to her office with a spring in her step. Seeing her upbeat mood, Nina knew Wesley hadn't called her in for a lecture. Aubrey sighed in relief. "I was so nervous; I thought Mr. Moss was going to chew you out."

Not just them—everyone assumed Gabriela had been summoned for a reprimand. Jaylene's assistant smirked spitefully. "Just wait. Gabriela's probably getting sacked this time, and even Nina won't save her."

"She has no shame, messing around with that old man. It's disgusting!" another person spat.

Jaylene's eyes glinted with malice. "Gabriela, you dug your own grave trying to snatch my deal," she muttered under her breath.

But no matter how long they waited, news of Gabriela's firing never came. Instead, the next day brought a surprise visitor—Whitney Garner, Mason's wife. Her arrival sent ripples through Apex Group.

Jaylene and her sales team buzzed with excitement, certain that Whitney's visit was to challenge Gabriela. Though they had no direct feud with Gabriela, the earlier computer password fiasco had left the company holding a grudge against them. If Gabriela were to be involved in a scandal now, it would vindicate their actions.

Cali overheard their nasty comments and quietly texted Aubrey: “Aubrey, Mrs. Garner is here. Should Gabriela steer clear?”

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Aubrey, surprised by Cali’s heads-up, showed Gabriela the message. “Do you want to avoid her?”

Even with Wesley’s backing, the rumors from yesterday and Whitney’s presence made things awkward. Gabriela stayed composed. “No need to worry—I know Mrs. Garner.”

While they spoke, the receptionist was guiding Whitney to the office. Gabriela rose to greet her.

Whitney smiled kindly. “Mason mentioned your foot injury. Don’t strain yourself walking.”

Aubrey hurried to fetch coffee for Whitney.

Whitney looked at Gabriela with warmth. “I saw you at the hospital just days ago, and now you’ve sprained your foot. You need to take better care of yourself.”

Gabriela thanked her for her concern.

Whitney’s visit was brief—just to drop off some fruit and health supplements for Gabriela. She didn’t stay long before leaving.

“No need to walk me out. I only came to check on your injury. With no one at home to care for you, I’ll have my chef send over some nourishing soup.” Her maternal affection toward Gabriela was evident.

The company’s rumors collapsed instantly. Now, the video clip seemed like nothing more than Mason showing care for Gabriela. There was nothing going on between them.

In Jaylene’s office, a colleague whispered, “Who leaked that video? It’s vile to spread rumors just to hurt an innocent woman.”

“Gabriela is gorgeous and is somehow connected to the influential Mr. Garner. Of course someone is jealous.”

Jaylene’s face twisted with fury. She had taken a huge risk by leaking the video, yet it barely ruined Gabriela’s reputation as she’d anticipated. That infuriated her.

In her frustration, Jaylene sneered, “Maybe Mrs. Garner doesn’t know about their affair. Or she’s just playing smart, covering for her husband.”

Her assistant chimed in, “Exactly! Mrs. Garner seems so kind-hearted. Maybe she knows but won’t call it out.”

Unable to stay silent, Cali retorted, “Jaylene, it’s just an innocent video. Why do you have to twist it into something vile? Gabriela is our colleague!”

Jaylene's eyes narrowed. "Cali, have you lost your mind? Defending someone who doesn't belong here?"

"I'm just speaking the truth," Cali replied sharply, before turning back to her desk, done with the argument.

Jaylene's expression grew stormy. Her assistant tried to soothe her. "Don't let it get to you, Jaylene. Cali probably thinks she'll gain something by standing up for Gabriela. Too bad Gabriela might not even care."

Amid the tense exchange, Billy strode into the office, his face grim as he scanned the room. As Wesley's special assistant, Billy's mere presence demanded attention. His severe look sent a wave of unease through the team, hinting at something major on the horizon.

Bryn rushed over. "Billy, what's going on?"

Billy spoke directly to Jaylene. "Jaylene, go to HR and process your resignation. You're leaving today."

His cold, emotionless words hit like a thunderclap, stunning everyone.

Jaylene, reeling, stammered, "W-what? Why am I being fired?"

Billy sneered. “The tech department traced the video leak back to you.”

Jaylene’s face drained of color—she hadn’t anticipated the video’s origin being traced.

Billy added, “Mr. Moss also wants it made clear that he was the one who introduced Gabriela to Mason.”

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Jaylene’s hands quivered ever so slightly. Gabriela’s helpless act and refusal to fight back had convinced Jaylene she’d lost Wesley’s protection—but it was all a clever deception. Damn it, that cunning bitch!

Bryn, startled, quickly interjected, “Billy, you must be mistaken. Jaylene’s tongue may be sharp, but her heart is gentle. Wouldn’t it be wiser to look deeper into the truth before passing judgment?”

Billy cast a glance at Bryn. “The technical department has already investigated. The evidence is solid.”

At the stern set of Billy’s jaw, Bryn realized he had spoken out of turn. He quickly bowed his head, swallowing back further protest.

Jaylene, however, refused to yield so easily. Her teeth clenched, voice strained. “Billy, you can’t cast me aside before the billion-dollar deal is signed. If I can prove I outperform Gabriela, shouldn’t I be granted another chance?”

Billy hesitated, then gave a slow nod. "Mr. Garner will be here this afternoon. You'll attend the meeting as well."

After leaving the sales department, Billy went straight to Wesley to report the matter.

Wesley arched a brow, surprise flickering in his eyes. "You allowed Jaylene into the meeting?"

A chill slid down Billy's spine under his boss's gaze, but his face remained steady. "Jaylene's record in sales is excellent. To dismiss her outright over her conflict with Ms. Haynes might draw unnecessary criticism toward Ms. Haynes." He believed it was for Gabriela's benefit and that Wesley would have no choice but to relent.

"So," Wesley drawled, a faint, incredulous smile tugging at his lips, "you took it upon yourself to grant her a fair competition with Gabriela?"

Wesley let out a snort. Was he growing too indulgent? Even his assistant had started to make such calls on his own.

Billy's composure cracked slightly. "Mr. Moss, did I misstep?"

"Forget it." Wesley flicked his hand dismissively. "Let's see if Jaylene can secure this billion-dollar deal."

That afternoon, Mason arrived on schedule with his secretary in tow. Nina's entire sales team was present at the meeting—along with Jaylene. To Gabriela's surprise, the six-member think tank also filed in. The meeting promised to be far grander than anyone expected.

Wesley opened the meeting but kept his remarks brief, quickly handing the floor to Mason.

Mason powered on his laptop, his voice steady as he unfolded the story of Alphacom Electronics. The company's roots stretched back over half a century. It had expanded beyond electronics into schools, hospitals, food, and clothing, becoming a lifeline for more than thirty thousand employees. Nearly half of those workers came from families who had served Alphacom for three generations. For them, the company wasn't just an employer; it was their very survival.

Yet beneath its venerable history lay a fatal flaw. Alphacom's system was old, stagnant, unable to sustain growth. It kept people from starving, but only just. Now, the corporation was tottering on the brink. Without drastic reform, the once-mighty enterprise would inevitably collapse.

The billion-dollar fund earmarked for Alphacom wasn't a lifeline so much as a bandage. It couldn't even clear the debts, let alone cover the costs of upgrading machinery, shoring up pensions, and providing workers' social security. Any partner seeking collaboration would have to find a way to revive Alphacom without relying on that billion.

As Mason's words sank in, Jaylene felt her confidence falter. She had always thrived on straightforward deals: money in exchange for goods. But this was different—a deal entangled with morality, social responsibility, and the livelihoods of tens of thousands.

According to Mason, anyone wishing to take on the billion-dollar project with Alphacom Electronics would first have to carve out a path capable of generating that billion. The audacity of it! Shameless!

Jaylene bit back a curse, her eyes flashing. Still, this was a billion-dollar project.

Profitable or not, that wasn't her concern; it was Apex Group's burden to bear. If she could clinch this deal, it would be the crown jewel of her career—a triumph she could flaunt for the rest of her life, no matter where she ended up. Even as Mason spoke, Jaylene's mind was already racing, shaping the beginnings of a plan.

Wesley and the think tank members sat unruffled, as if they had anticipated Mason's gambit all along.

When Mason finally concluded, he turned directly to Gabriela, his expression earnest. "Gabriela, now that you understand our predicament, do you still wish to move forward with us?"

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The weight of his words struck her like a stone. Gabriela instantly saw through him. A sly, seasoned fox—that was what Mason was. And suddenly, Wesley's refusal to sign made perfect sense.

She wouldn't sign either.

Though inwardly scornful, she kept her smile calm and polished. "Mr. Garner, this project touches on many complex aspects," she replied evenly. "I'll need to confer with Mr. Moss before making any decision."

After all, this wasn't just about business; it was about the livelihoods of tens of thousands of people. Some choices could not be rushed.

Mason looked a touch disappointed but leaned forward, his tone sincere. “Gabriela, I only ask that you give it careful thought.”

Gabriela’s lips curved in a polite smile, though her mind was seething. Careful thought? Absolutely not. Her boss had more than enough major projects in hand; income was hardly an issue. Risking everything on such a precarious deal would be reckless, and she had no intention of jeopardizing the company for her own ambition.

Across the table, Jaylene fidgeted with unease. Wesley hadn’t even said anything yet. So why would Mason favor Gabriela over her, someone with proven experience? Gabriela was just a newcomer! In a rush, she stood. “Mr. Garner, I actually have a preliminary plan that might address some of your concerns—”

But Mason brushed her off without so much as a glance. “Thank you, but I would prefer to work with Gabriela.”

The dismissal cut deep.

Jaylene’s eyes blazed as she shot Gabriela a venomous glare, but Gabriela, still processing Mason’s audacity, didn’t bother to acknowledge her rival’s hostility.

When the meeting adjourned, Jaylene stalked back to her office, her face dark as a thundercloud. Bryn hurried over to ask how it went. Jaylene sneered as she explained Mason’s demands, spitting out her contempt. “Mason is daydreaming! They’re dangling a billion like bait, hoping to snare a capable company into saving their sinking ship without putting in a dime of their own.”

If Mason had chosen her, at least there would have been a chance. But Gabriela? That empty-headed doll? He was steering straight into a dead end.

Bryn frowned, uneasy. Something didn't add up. Both the Williams Group and the Vasquez Group were clawing tooth and nail for this very project. If it were really a sham, why would such giants be fighting over it? He suspected Jaylene had failed to present anything solid and Mason had rejected her outright. Now she was tearing others down to mask her humiliation.

The other salespeople shared the same thought. Cali leaned toward her neighbor and whispered with a smirk, "She couldn't pull it off, so now she's making excuses."

Jaylene's face darkened, fury rising hot in her chest as the quiet snickers spread through the room. Inwardly, she clung to the desperate hope that Gabriela would turn down Mason's project. Losing to that woman would be unbearable, a disgrace Jaylene could never swallow.

But fate mocked her. The very next day, word swept through the company that Gabriela had struck a deal with Alphacom Electronics. Before the cameras, with Wesley and Apex Group's top executives as witnesses, Gabriela and Mason signed the contract and shook hands, sealing the partnership. Bryn's sales team erupted in shock.

Standing amid the chaos, Bryn remembered the day he'd driven Gabriela off his sales team. Regret hit him like a stone to the chest. Had he known Gabriela's true potential, he would never have backed Jaylene. Now the chance was gone, and Nina had claimed the spoils.

To rub salt in the wound, Nina arrived with Aubrey in tow, both radiating smugness.

“When Gabriela was transferred, she left a few documents behind,” Nina said smoothly. “I’m just here to collect them for her.”

Bryn’s lips curled into a sarcastic smile. “Miss Gibson, how is it that an ordinary salesperson like Gabriela has you running her errands?”

Nina remained composed, her smile unshaken. “Gabriela’s tied up at the moment; she’s about to leave for a meeting at Alphacom Electronics.”

Aubrey, hands planted firmly on her hips, jumped in gleefully. “She told us that once this deal is finalized, we’ll share the commission! She lands a massive contract, and we’re only running errands. Seems fair, doesn’t it?”