

His kiss 291

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Josh poured his heart into the plea, desperate to guide Marie toward redemption.

The live camera continued rolling, broadcasting his confession to thousands of viewers.

Wesley watched the livestream, his expression hardening into steel.

Gabriela had endured countless wounds, yet her smile never faltered. Even when Marie orchestrated her twisted suicide charade to destroy her reputation, Gabriela stayed composed. She refused to lean on anyone—including him.

After escaping the hospital's suffocating atmosphere, Gabriela made her way to Wesley's parked car.

He pocketed his phone and moved toward her.

Something in his expression made Gabriela frown, and she retreated a step. Had Wesley forgotten her rejection so quickly? Would he dare confess again with witnesses surrounding them?

Her muscles coiled, ready to flee, but Wesley merely lifted his hand and brushed her hair with unexpected gentleness.

“Hungry? Let me buy you dinner.”

Relief flooded through her. “That’s unnecessary. A feast is waiting for me at home.”

She had deliberately transferred to the sales department to put distance between herself and Wesley, yet the negotiations with Alphacom Electronics had brought her back to him. Now, she had to pretend to have forgotten his love.

Her confession to interact with him professionally.

Now that the deal was secured and Marie’s plot had crumbled to dust, she would vanish from his orbit entirely.

Before Wesley could utter another word, she slipped into Tyler’s waiting car like smoke escaping through fingers.

Gabriela assumed Wesley’s pride would prevent any pursuit.

However, she had gravely underestimated Loretta’s and Miriam’s determination.

Upon entering her home, she discovered both women occupying her living room sofa.

“Gabriela, you’ve finally returned.” Loretta launched herself upward the moment Gabriela appeared, tears pooling in her eyes as she captured Gabriela’s hands in a desperate grip. “Why did you hide your suffering from us?”

Miriam dabbed at her eyes and sighed. “Gabriela, how about you come back to Moss Manor with us? It’s alright if you choose not to marry Mr. Moss. Mrs. Larson and I care for you deeply, and we will make it our mission to ensure no one ever torments you again.”

Gabriela reassured them, “This was merely a small complication, and it’s been resolved completely.”

Loretta’s gaze swept the space behind Gabriela, noting Wesley’s absence, and her anger ignited. “Where is Wesley? I specifically ordered him to protect you. When such a catastrophic situation befalls his employee, he vanishes entirely. This is absolutely unacceptable!”

She reached for her phone to unleash her fury upon him.

Gabriela lunged forward to intercept her. “Mr. Moss escorted me to the hospital personally, but his heart condition is fragile, and I couldn’t bear to exhaust him further. Mrs. Larson, he requires rest above all else—please spare him your anger.”

Previously, Loretta had orchestrated elaborate schemes to bring her and Wesley together. If Loretta discovered Wesley’s love confession to her, Gabriela shuddered at the thought of what stunt the old woman might pull next.

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Loretta finally set her phone aside, persuaded not to call Wesley.

Just then, Ken carried in steaming dishes, and Gabriela urged both Loretta and Miriam to stay and share the meal. Ken's and Farley's cooking spoke for itself—every plate drew admiration, and Loretta and Miriam couldn't stop praising the flavors.

Gabriela, however, barely touched her food. She managed half a bowl of soup, then quietly set down her utensils.

Loretta's brows knit with worry. "Gabriela, you look so pale, and you seem thinner. Have you not been resting well lately?" She gently slid a piece of tender fish onto Gabriela's plate. "Didn't you used to love fish? Eat more. Gaining a little weight would make you look healthier."

The smell of the fish sent Gabriela's stomach roiling, and she bolted for the bathroom.

When she finally emerged, her face was ashen, her lips drained of color. Farley and Ken instantly understood the reason, but Loretta and Miriam still looked puzzled. Loretta studied Gabriela carefully, the faint suspicion of pregnancy flickering across her mind. She shared a quick look with Miriam, and the unspoken thought passed between them.

Fearing they might catch on, Gabriela forced a weak smile. "I must've eaten something bad. My stomach's been off these past couple of days."

“Did you see a doctor about this?” Loretta asked quickly.

“I did,” Gabriela said with a small nod. “The doctor said it isn’t anything serious—just some medicine, and I’ll recover soon.”

Unconvinced, Loretta’s mind was already spinning with an idea.

After dinner, Loretta pressed a hand to her temple and said with a faint smile, “I’m a bit lightheaded, Gabriela. I think I’ll stay here tonight.”

Gabriela nodded. She asked a maid to ready two guest rooms and added gently, “If you find yourself needing anything, don’t hesitate to call me.” Both Loretta and Miriam agreed with a nod.

“I’m going back to my room. You should turn in early too,” Gabriela said softly.

Pregnancy had been harsh on her, with its relentless nausea and bone-deep drowsiness. She took a quick shower, slipped beneath the covers, and fell asleep early.

Past midnight, Loretta and Miriam convened in the living room exactly as they’d arranged.

Keeping her voice to a whisper, Miriam asked, “Are we crossing a line? This is Gabriela’s home, after all.”

With a sure tilt of her chin, Loretta said, “I already asked around—she doesn’t have a boyfriend. She keeps close to Wesley; if she’s pregnant, the child is almost certainly his. We’ll comb the place carefully. If she is pregnant, something here will give it away.”

Miriam understood Loretta’s obsession with having a great-grandchild, so she reluctantly went along with the plan.

They crept barefoot through the living room, pulling open drawers and peeking into cabinets. The lamps stayed dark as they rifled through the space, and when nothing turned up, they slipped quietly into the kitchen.

Tucked in a corner, they spotted a few packets of salted plums.

Loretta leaned close and murmured, “When I was carrying Wesley’s mother, I couldn’t get enough of these.”

Miriam frowned. “That doesn’t prove anything. I’ve never been pregnant, and I love them too.”

“Just keep searching,” Loretta urged.

She thought it would be even better if they could slip into Gabriela’s bedroom. If Gabriela truly was pregnant, she had to be hiding prenatal vitamins or a medical report.

Meanwhile, Ken stirred awake, groggy and stiff. His aging body and weak kidneys had him rising like clockwork every night at half past two. As he shuffled toward the bathroom, faint rustling from the living room caught his ear.

He hesitated, then eased the door open. The dim glow of moonlight revealed two figures moving stealthily in the kitchen. His chest tightened, his heart pounding with sudden alarm.

This was terrible—there were intruders inside!

The house was full of people in their fifties and sixties, except for Gabriela. She was young and delicate, hardly the type to fend off intruders.

Ken, too cautious to confront the intruders, slipped his phone from his pocket and quietly called the police.

Meanwhile, Loretta and Miriam, oblivious to being discovered, kept digging through the oversized refrigerator.

Moments later, the wail of sirens split the night, and both women froze as officers stormed in, catching them red-handed. Ken and Farley stiffened when they realized the supposed intruders were their overnight guests.

Gabriela, startled awake by the commotion, rushed out and stopped short at the sight of Loretta and Miriam being mistaken for intruders. The scene shocked her, though she couldn't deny a nagging sense of inevitability. From the moment Loretta had insisted on staying, something had felt off.

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She stepped forward quickly and addressed the officers with an apologetic smile. "They're my guests. It's their first time here, and since they don't know Ken well, it caused a misunderstanding. I'm truly sorry for the false alarm."

Caught in the act like children sneaking sweets, Loretta and Miriam bobbed their heads in frantic agreement. "Yes, just a misunderstanding."

The officers, unimpressed, gave them a curt warning before filing back out into the night.

Ken's face burned with embarrassment as he stumbled through an apology to Loretta and Miriam.

Loretta quickly seized the upper hand. "I just didn't eat enough at dinner," she said smoothly. "I woke up hungry. I didn't want to disturb anyone, so I thought I'd make myself a little something. Why did you involve the police?"

All Ken could do was bow his head and keep apologizing.

Gabriela, watching the exchange, felt both exasperated and faintly amused. Loretta's talent for twisting situations in her favor seemed to grow sharper by the day.

She offered Ken a reassuring look and urged him back to bed. Then she flashed Loretta and Miriam a gentle smile. "What would you two like to eat? I'll whip something up."

Loretta hesitated, then said, "It's already so late. A sandwich will be fine."

Instead of summoning a maid, Gabriela slipped into the kitchen herself. Before long, she returned balancing two oversized plates, each holding a towering sandwich stuffed to the brim.

"Take your time and enjoy," she said warmly.

Loretta and Miriam stared at the massive portions, momentarily speechless. The sandwiches were so big they hardly knew where to begin, let alone how to finish.

Since they had made such a show of being hungry moments earlier, refusing them felt impossible. The two of them sat down to eat.

When Loretta and Miriam managed to get through only half of the towering sandwiches, Gabriela finally broke the silence. "What exactly were you searching for when you slipped out of your rooms in the middle of the night?"

Loretta kept throwing Miriam quick, pointed winks, urging her to invent something on the spot. Usually quick with a comeback, Miriam froze this time. She fumbled for words and finally muttered, "We were just hungry. The thing is, at our age, we can't put away food like we used to. A few bites and we're full."

Realizing they had no intention of confessing, Gabriela lifted a brow, studied them for a long moment, then chose not to press further. She stacked the plates neatly and said, "It's already late—you should get some rest. If you feel hungry again, just call me."

Mortified, Loretta and Miriam slipped away to their rooms.

By then, it was nearly four in the morning. Gabriela returned to bed, drifting back into sleep until daylight crept in. Luckily, it was the weekend. She stayed curled beneath the covers until after ten, then finally rose and made her way downstairs—only to find Wesley waiting in the living room.

He wore a casual pullover beneath a light gray coat, the simple outfit emphasizing his tall frame and striking good looks.

Gabriela's heart gave a little jolt. "Mr. Moss... what are you doing here?"

Wesley curved his lips in a mild smile, his tone calm yet steady. "I heard about the incident last night. I'm sorry for the disturbance. I came to bring Grandma and Miriam back to the estate."

Gabriela hurried to reassure him that it was nothing at all.

But Loretta's expression hardened. "I'm not going back. That estate is cold and lifeless. Wesley is already a grown man and still doesn't have a girlfriend. Spending time alone with him is painfully boring."

Once her tirade wound down, she heaved another long sigh, lamenting how his home had lost the warmth of laughter and bustle.

Wesley's expression hardened, the sharp lines of his handsome face shadowed with displeasure. That night, he settled in at Gabriela's house, unwilling to head back. His excuse was unwavering. "That estate of mine feels hollow, stripped of any warmth."

Gabriela stared at him in bafflement. What did that have to do with her? Despite her reluctance, all three of them dug in their heels, refusing to return to Wesley's vast estate and insisting on staying under her roof instead. Because of that, the house that once felt open and spacious suddenly seemed crowded and close.

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Gabriela's nausea intensified with each passing minute, leaving her barely able to manage a few bites that day. She crafted a careful lie to deflect Loretta's growing suspicion. "A while back, kidnappers locked me in a refrigerated truck compartment and poured water on me. The cold soaked through my clothes and damaged my stomach. A few days ago, I foolishly craved ice cream and ate some, which triggered the illness. The doctor examined me and told me to avoid cold foods temporarily. I should recover soon."

Wesley accepted her explanation without question, urging her to follow the physician's orders. Gabriela couldn't read Loretta's expression, but at least the older woman stopped dragging Miriam to the kitchen for midnight searches.

After successfully deceiving them, Gabriela exhaled quietly, though her anxiety only deepened. How long would this deception hold? When would they finally leave? She couldn't simply evict them without cause. While her slender frame might conceal a four-month pregnancy, by the fifth month hiding her condition would become impossible. What would happen then?

That night, these worries plagued Gabriela, and her exhaustion offered no relief from the mounting dread. She twisted restlessly between her sheets, seeking peace that wouldn't come.

A message notification pierced the silence. Wesley's name appeared on her screen. "Meet me outside. We need to talk."

The formal tone seemed to suggest trouble with the Alphacom Electronics project. Without hesitation, Gabriela pulled on her coat and slipped from her room. The moment she opened the door, strong fingers closed around her wrist.

She jerked back in surprise. "Mr. Moss, what are you doing?"

Wesley remained silent, drawing her swiftly into his room and securing the door behind them. Before Gabriela could protest, she found herself pressed against the cool wall, Wesley's arms forming a cage around her, his intoxicating scent filling her. Her coat pooled at her feet as her shoulder brushed against the solid muscle of his arm.

Her pulse hammered against her throat. "Mr. Moss, what do you want from me?"

Wesley's gaze fixed on her face. "Gabriela, you witnessed my grandmother's brutal reprimand today, didn't you?"

She nodded, confusion clouding her features. Wesley commanded respect as the brilliant, unflappable CEO in every boardroom, yet before Loretta, he became powerless. He endured her criticism without a single word of defense. Compassion stirred in Gabriela's chest despite herself.

Wesley's voice dropped to barely above a whisper. "You bear considerable responsibility for that humiliation."

Shock rendered Gabriela speechless. How could she possibly be involved?

"My grandmother and Miriam somehow believe that I harbor no interest in women. But you understand the depth of my feelings for you. You rejected me, but I kept it from my grandmother to protect you from her nagging. Now she's scolding me, and frankly, it's your fault too."

Gabriela's quick mind struggled to process his implications. Was he suggesting that her rejection caused his grandmother's harsh treatment? Could he truly mean such a thing?

"Gabriela, how will you make this right?"

Wesley stood too close, his magnetic presence overwhelming her as her breathing grew shallow. "What would you have me do?"

Wesley's expression grew troubled. "Sleep has abandoned me these past nights, and my heart carries a constant, crushing weight."

Alarm flashed through her eyes. “How did it become so severe? Have you consulted a physician?”

Her features transformed with genuine concern, worry etching itself across her delicate face. Wesley studied her intently, his voice roughening with emotion. “You care for me that deeply?”

Gabriela lifted her chin to meet his penetrating gaze before her courage faltered and she looked away. She swallowed hard against her nervousness. “Mr. Moss, you remain my employer. I just secured a billion-dollar contract, and I’m awaiting my commission.”

Her words drained every trace of warmth from the intimate space between them. Wesley’s jaw tightened with barely contained fury. A heart condition had shadowed him since childhood, teaching him to maintain rigid control over his emotions. Yet Gabriela possessed an uncanny ability to pierce that armor, sending sharp pain radiating through his chest whenever anger overtook him.

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“Gabriela, you obviously—”

“What exactly do you want me to do to fix this?” Gabriela asked, instantly regretting her words. Her attempt to redirect the conversation had only trapped her more thoroughly, and she wished desperately she could reclaim them.

Wesley’s quiet laughter acknowledged her obvious remorse. He murmured, “The massage you provided the other evening was exceptional. I’d like you to repeat it tonight.”

That was all? Relief flooded through Gabriela as she quickly agreed. “Certainly, no problem.”

Wesley settled against the headboard, his posture expectant. "Let's begin."

Gabriela remained frozen, her feet rooted to the floor. The headboard pressed against the wall, forcing her to climb onto the mattress to reach him properly. But this scenario—alone with him in the depths of night—felt dangerously inappropriate. Joining him on his bed crossed even more forbidden boundaries.

Wesley observed her internal struggle, and despite everything, tenderness softened his features.

Reluctant to burden her further, he released a quiet sigh. "Never mind, return to your room and rest."

His tender tone sent bittersweet emotions coursing through Gabriela's heart. The truth struck her with painful clarity—she genuinely cared for Wesley and treasured every moment in his presence. For one reckless instant, she nearly confessed everything: her pregnancy, her accidental night with Brenden, all of it.

She had maintained strict boundaries in all her relationships. Even during her time with Dustin, they had never shared intimacy. Her one-night stand with Brenden was a drunken mistake; she had stumbled into the wrong room. But the impulse dissolved as swiftly as it had formed, leaving her trembling with cold dread. Even if Wesley could accept her condition, Loretta never would. The older woman adored Brenden, and discovering that Gabriela was carrying his child while involved with Wesley would likely send her into apoplectic rage.

Wesley caught sight of Gabriela's creased brow and tormented expression, his voice carrying gentle mockery. "What's this? Reluctant to leave my side?"

Gabriela drew a steadying breath and lifted her chin to meet his penetrating stare. “Mr. Moss, I can provide the massage you requested. Two hundred per hour—do we have an agreement?”

Wesley’s smile vanished instantly, his previous warmth curdling into sharp irritation. “Agreed! I’ll purchase two full hours of your professional services.”

Relief flooded through Gabriela as anger hardened his features. She slipped off her shoes and climbed carefully onto the mattress. “Please lie down. If you find the treatment relaxing, you might even drift into sleep.”

Wesley, still seething with frustration, positioned himself on the bed and surrendered to her skilled ministrations. Perhaps her exceptional technique worked its magic, because within minutes, peaceful slumber claimed him.

Gabriela noticed moisture still clinging to his hair. Though men’s hair typically dried quickly, sleeping with dampness against his scalp could prove unhealthy.

She retrieved a fresh towel and began gently blotting the lingering wetness from his hair. Wesley’s exhaustion ran so deep that her careful movements failed to disturb his rest. His hair felt luxuriously thick beneath her fingers, and once dried, Gabriela couldn’t resist threading her hands through the silky strands. The lingering fragrance of his expensive shampoo filled her senses, lulling her toward drowsiness. She never remembered the moment sleep overtook her.

When consciousness returned, the unfamiliar surroundings sent panic racing through Gabriela’s system. She turned her head and discovered Wesley lying beside her, already alert and observing her with unreadable intensity. Shock nearly sent her tumbling from the mattress.

“Mr. Moss, I can explain—”

Wesley’s smile radiated warmth, though his words carried a sharper edge. “Gabriela, you’d better provide an excellent explanation for why you’re sharing my bed.”

Gabriela’s throat constricted as she prepared to respond, but urgent knocking sounded from beyond the door. “Wesley, have you awakened yet?” Loretta’s voice pierced through the wood like a blade.

Terror seized Gabriela’s entire frame as she turned pleading eyes toward Wesley, her whisper barely audible. “Please, you cannot let your grandmother discover me here.”

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Gabriela’s wide eyes betrayed her unease. Wesley found it faintly amusing. “Are you really that scared my grandmother will find out? Relax, she won’t be angry with you.” Gabriela was at a loss for words. He knew the answer to his question: she definitely didn’t want Loretta to know they were sharing another night together—something that would surely complicate things between them.

Loretta kept knocking. “Wesley, get up and have breakfast.”

Wesley glanced at Gabriela and lowered his voice. “So, what now? Should I open the door and invite her in?”

Realizing he wouldn't help, Gabriela took action. She shoved him out of the way, desperate to find a corner to disappear into. Wesley caught her hands. His voice dropped. "Don't move, or I'll call her in right now."

Gabriela stilled at once. Wesley felt torn between irritation and amusement. She was always saying she worked for him and would do as he said, yet he never truly held any sway over her. His grandmother's presence, though, was far more intimidating to her.

With that in mind, he decided to tease her, raising his voice a notch. "Grandma—"

That night, she had wandered into the wrong room, reached for him first, lit the spark in him, and then played innocent as if nothing had happened. He couldn't bear being the only one unsettled while she acted untouched. Childish or not, in that moment he only wanted to rattle her.

Gabriela went pale as he stretched out the word, her lips trembling. All she could picture was Loretta stepping through the door. Wesley gave a soft laugh and called again, louder, "Grandma, come in—"

Panicking, Gabriela lifted her chin and cut him off with a kiss. With her hands trapped, she had to use her lips to silence him. The air tightened as heat rose between them. Wesley's laugh died in his throat, his gaze darkening at once.

Before she could pull away, he cradled the back of her head and deepened the kiss. Gabriela couldn't break free and slowly yielded to him. His mouth was urgent. When he let her hands go, they wrapped around his neck on their own.

The knocking stopped as Loretta moved on. Wesley rolled, pinning Gabriela beneath him, his voice rough and threaded with delight. “Gabriela, how can you still say you feel nothing for me?”

Gabriela parted her lips to explain. Fresh from his kiss, they shone—soft, dewy, tempting. He dipped again, swallowing her protest with another kiss.

Morning desire came easily, and with Gabriela so willing in his arms, restraint slipped. He had only meant to tease, but now he couldn’t let go. One hand clamped at her waist; the other slid under her clothes. His warm, dry palm skimmed her skin, and her pupils widened. She pressed down on his advancing hand.

“You don’t want this?” His voice was low, rough. “Gabriela, do you truly feel nothing for me?”

Heat rushed to her face at the sound of his magnetic tone. “Mr. Moss, I don’t want this.” If she yielded now, everything between them would only grow more tangled. Fear stirred in her voice, bright with the edge of tears.

Wesley breathed out, tamping everything down, and helped smooth her clothes. Then he drew her back against him. “Don’t move. Let me hold you for a bit.”

He was so much larger that she nearly disappeared in his arms, and his weight felt oddly steady. A thin sadness brushed her, and she quieted.

No telling how long passed before Gabriela whispered, “Mr. Moss, could you shift a little?”

Gabriela was speechless.

Wesley felt like a different man—none of his usual cool restraint. Flushed to the ears, she stammered, “Your... hardness is pressed against me.” Her shyness, tinged with allure, held him captive. If the timing were different, he wouldn’t have stopped at all.

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He shifted his position. The pressure eased, and Gabriela let out a quiet breath of relief.

She ventured, “Mr. Moss, it’s already past nine. When do you plan to get up?”

“I hadn’t intended to sign Mason’s project,” Wesley said. “But you wanted it, so I didn’t stand in your way. I’ve been trailing you to meetings everywhere, and I’m exhausted.”

Gabriela was speechless again. His logic held, yet something in it sounded off. A billion-dollar deal was a win for Apex Group—how did he make it sound like a burden?

She drew a breath to argue, but he went on. “We just secured the deal, and then Marie caused trouble for you. I dug into leads for you and worried about you. Gabriela, I haven’t slept well in ages.”

His tone stayed even, emotionless, but guilt washed through her. “Then rest a little longer,” she whispered. “I won’t disturb you.”

A faint smile touched his lips. He found it effortless to guilt-trip her. Good thing she was with him—otherwise someone would take advantage without her even noticing. His arm tightened, and he hummed low, as if drifting off.

Gabriela felt the firm plane of his abdomen at her back and sighed. She liked him—she admitted that much—but she could not give up the child inside her. She could only turn him down.

Downstairs, others were gathered in the living room. “It’s ten already,” Miriam said, checking the clock. “Why hasn’t Mr. Moss come down for breakfast? Should we wake him?”

Loretta thought of the faint sounds she’d heard by his door. Quiet as they’d been, she was sure someone else was inside, but she kept it to herself and didn’t share it with Miriam. Miriam’s schemes had never succeeded anyway.

“No need,” Loretta said. “He doesn’t sleep well at his place. If he can rest here, let him be.”

Miriam nodded in approval. After a moment, she added, “Gabriela isn’t up either. I’ll go check on her.”

“No need,” Farley and Loretta said together.

Farley knew about Gabriela’s pregnancy fatigue. When she wasn’t working, she loved to sleep in. He chuckled. “She hasn’t felt well these days. Let her rest.” Loretta, suspecting Gabriela was in Wesley’s room, would not let Miriam interfere.

“Yes, she’s unwell. Don’t disturb her.”

Therefore, the two upstairs were left alone. Gabriela truly was tired and drifted off again. Wesley wasn’t sleepy at all, but with her curled in his arms like a small cat, he couldn’t bring himself to let go.

Near noon, Gabriela finally stirred. Wesley was already dressed. The light gray coat lent him a cool, distant air—a stark contrast to the intimate, teasing man from several hours before.

“I’ll keep watch,” he said, glancing over. “Go to your room and change.”

Color climbed her cheeks. This was her home, yet she felt as if she were sneaking about. She slipped back to her room and faced the mirror. Several hickeys marked her neck, with more below the neckline. Heat flooded her face again. How could he have been so intense?

But Wesley’s fiery intensity from earlier had been nothing short of mesmerizing, and she almost succumbed to the allure. She dressed and reached for concealer, dabbing at the hickeys.

A knock sounded. Loretta’s voice came through the door. “Gabriela, are you awake? I made chicken soup and brought it up.”

“Please wait a moment,” Gabriela called.

But at the sound of her voice, the handle turned and Loretta stepped inside. Gabriela hadn't yet covered all the hickeys.

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Gabriela quickened her movements, dabbing on powder to cover the hickeys. Yet Loretta, ever observant with her sharp gaze, instantly spotted the marks on Gabriela's neck.

Alarmed, she set the steaming bowl of chicken soup down with a clatter. Gripping Gabriela's shoulder, Loretta leaned in, examining closely. "Gabriela, what's on your neck? Did something bite you? No, wait—these marks are hickeys." She pressed, "What happened last night?"

Gabriela's cheeks flushed a deep crimson. She tugged her collar up, forcing a calm tone. "Mrs. Larson, it's just a rash. I'll apply some cream later, and it will clear up."

Loretta, believing those marks were hickeys rather than a rash, felt a thrill of excitement but kept it hidden. Having learned from past mistakes, she knew better than to make a scene, even if she had her suspicions. She also resolved to keep this from Miriam, fearing she would ruin things between Gabriela and Wesley again.

Chuckling softly, Loretta smiled. "I'll leave the soup here. You've been under the weather, so make sure you drink it all."

"Thank you, Mrs. Larson," Gabriela replied, relieved to see her go.

She hurriedly layered more powder on her neck, barely masking the vivid marks, muttering under her breath, “Leaving such obvious marks, as if he’s marking territory!”

As she finished, the savory scent of chicken soup filled the air, sparking her hunger. She took a tentative sip, surprised by its delicious warmth, which settled comfortably in her stomach. Unable to stop, she drank another, and soon the bowl was empty. It had been a while since she had eaten so well, and the cozy satisfaction left her content. Loretta’s cooking was exceptional.

Gabriela even toyed with the idea of asking her to stay at the villa longer.

By the next day, word that Wesley had spent the night at Gabriela’s home spread quietly but swiftly within select circles.

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"If you want a fancy car, just say so," Stewart said with a laugh, tossing him a set of keys. "Go, drive the car to Apex Group and circle around for half a day." The vehicle was a Bugatti, purchased by Stewart only a month ago, worth upwards of twenty million.

Erik gripped the keys, their weight heavy in his hand. “Mr. Williams, this doesn’t seem appropriate.”

“Just drive,” Stewart ordered, his eyes lingering on the deep-sea city model, his expression unreadable.

Knowing Stewart’s wealth and stubbornness, Erik complied, driving to Apex Group.

That afternoon, a juicy piece of gossip buzzed through Apex Group’s halls: some flashy tycoon in a super-luxury car had been circling their building all day, ignoring security’s orders to leave. Some employees speculated, “Maybe his girlfriend is dumping him for Mr. Moss, and he’s flexing his wealth for revenge?”

Downstairs, Erik had looped the plaza thirty times, head spinning, regretting his comment about Billy’s car. Without Stewart’s signal to halt, Erik wouldn’t have dared to pull over. The bright red Bugatti, a dazzling pinnacle of automotive luxury, inevitably drew eyes as it looped endlessly, becoming the hot topic at Apex Group and pulling in a curious crowd.

When Billy relayed the spectacle to Wesley, he was baffled. “Erik is behind the wheel, but this must be Mr. Williams’s order. I wonder what Mr. Williams is up to.”

Wesley, who was familiar with Stewart, saw through the stunt. Flipping through papers nonchalantly, he said, “Ignore it.”

While Wesley brushed off Stewart's taunt, Erik, stuck circling the Apex Group building over a hundred times, was miserable. Billy, taking pity, went downstairs to grab him an energy drink.

"Erik, I already know you have a car better than mine. Take a break," Billy said.

Erik's face reddened, his frustration bottled up with nowhere to go.

He had always known Stewart could be spiteful, but this level of pettiness—showing off his car to Wesley to prove that he was generous with his employees—was unexpected.

After two hundred dizzying laps, the workday ended, and Stewart finally instructed Erik to stop. Erik climbed out of the vehicle, legs trembling and stomach twisting. From that moment, he swore never to drive a luxury car again; he even developed a lasting phobia of driving.

As Gabriela and Aubrey stepped out of the company building, they caught sight of the red Bugatti pulling up to the curb.

"There's that car!" Aubrey exclaimed, pointing at the Bugatti. "I looked it up online—it's worth over twenty-five million!"

Gabriela, uninterested in flashy vehicles, just wanted to slip away. Her foot had healed enough for her to walk and catch the bus alone. "If you want to stare, go for it. I'm heading home," she said.

She worried that lingering might mean Wesley catching up, insisting on giving her a ride. Since he had held her all morning the other day, she felt uneasy around him, craving some distance.

Before she could escape, a figure approached her slowly—a tall man in a sleek, smoky gray coat, his posture confident. As he drew nearer, his face came into view, not as striking as Wesley's, but undeniably captivating. Gabriela felt a spark of recognition, as if she had seen him before.

Before she could place him, Aubrey gasped beside her. "Wow, a real heartthrob! Stunning face, killer build—impossible to tear my eyes away!"

Chapter 300

As Aubrey praised the man, Gabriela couldn't help but remark, "Mr. Moss is far more handsome than he is." To her, no one outshone Wesley.

Aubrey quickly fired back, "Oh please, Mr. Moss belongs to you. You can see him anytime. The rest of us? We're lucky if we catch a glimpse once in a blue moon. So now that there's an actual heartthrob standing in front of me, can I indulge a little?"

Heat crept up Gabriela's face. Wesley belonged to her? Since when?

"I don't have the energy to argue with you. Swoon all you want. I'm going home."

Gabriela pivoted to leave, only to find the man blocking her path. His eyes lingered on her with an odd intensity, as though he was truly startled by what he saw. At last, he broke the silence. "Gabriela?"

Gabriela blinked in confusion. "Do we know each other, sir?"

A low chuckle slipped from Stewart. "So it really is you!"

She gave a polite nod. "Gabriela Haynes. Sales department, Apex Group."

So this was Gabriela. Until now, Stewart had only heard her name tossed around in passing, but he had never actually seen her. He had never once imagined that the Gabriela from Apex Group was the very same fragile little girl etched faintly in his memory. He recalled their first encounter when she had been barely more than a child. And now, after six years, here she stood, not only grown but working under Wesley at the Apex Group.

The irony almost made him laugh. Several hours ago, he had been plotting how to put Gabriela in her place. The thought now felt absurd.

Forcing down the tide of recognition, Stewart smoothed his expression into a smile and offered his hand. "Stewart Williams."

Gabriela froze, caught off guard. So this was the CEO of the Williams Group. Stewart Williams in the flesh. Gabriela recalled Wesley's open distaste for the man, but at this moment, Stewart seemed quite easygoing.

If anything, he radiated an easy charm — at least far warmer than Adolf's frosty hauteur. She accepted his handshake. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Williams." Yet when she tried to pull her hand back, his

hold didn't loosen. His fingers stayed locked around hers as if he were expecting her to say something more.

Uneasy, Gabriela broke the silence. "Have we met somewhere before?"

At once, the genial mask slipped. Stewart frowned. "You don't remember me? Am I so unremarkable that you've completely forgotten me?"

He hadn't changed much since the past. But Gabriela — she was no longer the frail, wide-eyed girl she had been. Despite her changed appearance, he could spot her instantly, even across years.

Gabriela shook her head. "No! That's not it. You're... very handsome."

His grip tightened, drawing her a fraction closer. His tone dropped, calm but insistent, threading straight into her memory. "Then tell me, do you remember me now?"