

His kiss 301

Chapter 301

And suddenly, it all came rushing back. It was the day she got clipped by a car after leaving Farley's house. The very man she ran into afterward was none other than Stewart.

"I remember now!" Gabriela blurted. "I'm so sorry, Mr. Williams. It all happened so quickly, and honestly, I wasn't in the best mood at the time."

At last, Stewart released her hand, though his gaze lingered. "So your memory isn't failing after all. I felt sorry about what happened back then. Afterward, you disappeared, but I never imagined you'd end up working at Apex Group." He paused, studying her before asking almost casually, "Are you settling in well here?"

The question left Gabriela momentarily speechless. Why did he sound as though they were long-standing acquaintances?

She forced a polite smile. "Thank you for asking. I'm managing just fine."

Stewart gave a small nod, pulling out his phone. "I should have exchanged contact information with you earlier. It's rare fate brings us together twice. Please, add me on WhatsApp, and let's stay in touch."

Still bewildered, Gabriela did as asked. Something in her resisted the idea of keeping in touch with him, yet with the Williams Group partnering with Apex Group, how could someone in her position refuse?

Moments later, her phone buzzed. Stewart had sent her a simple smiling emoji. She quickly sent one back, more out of courtesy than warmth.

“I’ll be going now.” Stewart smiled. “Let me take you out for a meal sometime.”

His eagerness left Gabriela puzzled, unable to read his intentions. Caught off guard, she could only nod and murmur her agreement. Only then did Stewart walk away, satisfied.

Meanwhile, Erik had watched the entire exchange unfold, utterly bewildered. Wasn’t Stewart planning to make things difficult for Gabriela? How had that turned into swapping contact details?

Stewart slid into the passenger seat with his usual composure and said only one word, “Drive.”

Erik bit back his questions as he steered them forward, but after a few blocks, curiosity gnawed at him. He ventured, “Mr. Williams, were you trying to evaluate Gabriela just now?”

Stewart didn’t answer right away. His gaze lingered on Gabriela’s profile picture on his phone screen, which now captured all of his attention. “Why didn’t you tell me that Gabriela from Apex Group was the same girl I once knew?”

Erik blinked, thrown by the sudden turn in conversation. He scrambled for an answer. “When I bumped into Gabriela at the Deluxe Hotel, she claimed she didn’t know me,” he said quickly.

And to be fair, six years had changed her beyond recognition. The timid girl of the past had transformed into a breathtaking woman. At first glance, Erik himself thought he must have been mistaken, so he never pressed the matter.

After explaining, he suddenly paused, a thought striking him. "Wait! Are you saying this Gabriela really is the same girl from back then?"

Stewart chuckled, his expression softening into rare ease. "That's right. She's the one. She didn't recognize you, but she remembered me."

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Erik fell silent. By logic, he had spent far more time with Gabriela than Stewart ever had. So why had her memory held on to Stewart while erasing him? It made no sense.

Almost as if reading Erik's mind, Stewart smirked. "It's probably because I'm more handsome, so naturally I left the stronger impression."

Erik was at a loss for words. What pride could Stewart take in being remembered only for his looks?

Unable to hold back, Erik spoke up. "What happened back then... it was unfortunate, yes. But Gabriela cutting us off so suddenly? It still felt heartless. And now she reappears as part of Apex Group. Don't you find that odd?"

"What's odd about it?" Stewart replied casually.

Gabriela's profile picture had a little cartoon bunny on it. For some reason, the sight tugged the corner of his lips into a smile. Stewart added almost offhandedly, "What was that college boy's name again? Gabriela was head over heels for him back then. When he died, it broke her completely. Of course she wanted nothing more to do with us after that. But life goes on. Once she graduated, she needed work. There's nothing strange about ending up at Apex Group, right?"

Erik gave a slow nod. Stewart's reasoning sounded plausible enough. Still, a thought nagged at him. After a moment's hesitation, he asked carefully, "Then, does this mean we should ease up a little in how we deal with Apex Group?"

Only a few hours earlier, Stewart had ordered that anything connected to Apex be deliberately tangled with red tape. Not to cripple them, but to make sure they stumbled. Now that Gabriela had resurfaced as the girl from their past, surely that changed things. Surely it wasn't right to keep making her life difficult.

Without the slightest hesitation, Stewart said, "Gabriela is an old friend. How could I possibly make things difficult for her?" A short, derisive snort followed. "Wesley might have gotten lucky, snatching her up first. But don't mistake my courtesy for weakness. I'm yielding only because it's her."

Erik quickly inclined his head. "I understand."

Meanwhile, Gabriela quietly wondered how Stewart seemed to know her so well. Aubrey, however, could hardly contain her surprise. "Wait, that was the CEO of the Williams Group? Why did he act like he's on such familiar terms with you?"

Gabriela knit her brows, her tone cautious. "I met him once before." That day, after narrowly escaping the car, she was completely panic-stricken. Mistaking him for a threat, she ran away without a single word.

Aubrey leaned in, incredulous. "One meeting, and he's already treating you like a friend? And he actually added you on WhatsApp!" She gave Gabriela a mock glare.

Then sighed with exaggerated despair. "Honestly, it must be nice being this gorgeous. You're walking around with a built-in charm buff the rest of us just don't have."

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"Don't be ridiculous," Gabriela cut off Aubrey's words, her tone sharp. "We're working with the Williams Group, so what was strange about Mr. Williams adding me on WhatsApp?"

"Then why didn't he add me? I'm in the same division as you, and I'm working on this project too. Yet just now, he completely ignored me." She leaned in, teasing. "It seems he has a thing for you. Well, well — looks like Mr. Moss just found himself a rival."

Gabriela frowned, irritation tightening her mouth. "Keep spouting nonsense and you can forget about sharing the commission."

Aubrey clapped a hand over her mouth at once, a silent vow to stay quiet. Then she hooked her arm through Gabriela's, and the two of them went to wait for the bus together, spirits quickly rebounding.

When Gabriela got home, the aroma of freshly cooked dishes drifted from the kitchen. She had once been a foodie, through and through, loving the cooking as much as the eating. Now those tempting smells only churned her stomach and left her queasy.

“Welcome back, Gabriela!” Loretta called, delighted. “Go wash your hands — dinner is almost ready.”

“I don’t feel good. I’ll spend some time relaxing in my room.” Swallowing back the nausea, Gabriela murmured an excuse to Loretta, then hurried upstairs and shut the door behind her.

Not long after, Wesley returned. The moment Loretta saw him, her worry spilled out. “Wesley, you’re Gabriela’s boss. You must take good care of her at the office.”

Wesley stilled mid-coat, hearing the off note in her tone. “What is it? Did something happen?”

“Gabriela said she wasn’t feeling well the moment she got back and locked herself in her room,” Loretta explained. “You need to take her to the hospital for a proper checkup.”

Wesley, concerned by Gabriela’s recent state, nodded. “Alright.”

Upstairs, Gabriela was wrung out from vomiting. She had hardly eaten all day, and whatever little she forced down came straight back up.

She was starving, so weak her legs felt like jelly, yet the kitchen scents smothered her appetite completely. She hadn't expected the pregnancy nausea to hit this hard. At first, she could grit through it, but now it had blown past her control.

Tessa and Aubrey helped cover for her at work, shielding her pregnancy from others' suspicion. But at home — even with Farley's help — how long could she keep it from Loretta?

Troubled, Gabriela holed up in her room and didn't dare come out. When dinnertime finally passed, Loretta came looking for her. In a rush, Gabriela dabbed on lipstick, steadying herself before she opened the door.

"You didn't eat dinner, Gabriela. Are you okay? Should I have Wesley take you to the hospital for a check-up?" Loretta's voice carried genuine worry.

There was no way Gabriela would allow Wesley to take her anywhere near a hospital. Keeping her tone light, she answered, "No need. I've already seen a doctor, and I haven't even finished the medicine yet."

"But you can't keep missing meals," Loretta countered. She considered for a moment before adding, "You liked the chicken soup I made yesterday, didn't you? How about I prepare another pot?"

The thought warmed Gabriela, though guilt pricked at her. Loretta was no longer young, and it felt selfish to trouble her again.

"No need, really. The doctor said once I finish the medicine, I should recover," Gabriela responded, forcing a small smile.

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“How do you expect to regain your strength without eating? I’ll make you some soup.” Loretta didn’t wait for a reply and briskly disappeared into the kitchen.

Over an hour later, a gentle knock sounded at Gabriela’s door. Loretta entered the room and said, “Gabriela, the chicken soup is ready. Come downstairs and have some.”

A wave of gratitude swept through Gabriela. “Thank—”

“Don’t be so formal.” Loretta clasped her hand with quiet warmth. “Let’s go downstairs before the soup gets cold.”

She guided Gabriela down the stairs, glancing back with a meaningful look. Hidden nearby, Miriam peeked around the corner and discreetly gave a nod.

The moment Loretta led Gabriela away, Miriam slipped silently into the room. She rummaged through the bedside drawer until her fingers closed around a small bottle of folic acid. Though Miriam had never been pregnant, she knew it was a supplement meant for expectant mothers.

So Loretta’s suspicions had been correct — Gabriela might truly be carrying a child.

Her excitement flared. She quickly snapped a photo of the bottle before tiptoeing out.

To her shock, Wesley was waiting outside, leaning against the wall with deliberate ease. "What are you doing, Miriam?"

A jolt of unease rippled through her, but Miriam forced herself to remain composed. "Gabriela is downstairs having soup. She left her phone in the room, so I came to bring it to her." She extended her own phone toward him, as if in proof.

Wesley's lips curved faintly. He knew at a glance that it wasn't Gabriela's phone. Both Miriam and Loretta had been behaving oddly of late, and he needed to uncover the truth.

When Gabriela finished her soup, Loretta hurried off to meet Miriam. "Well? Did you discover anything?" she asked in a hushed voice.

"I found this in her room." Miriam pulled out her phone and revealed the photo.

Loretta's eyes shone with joy. "Folic acid! That's what pregnant women take. Gabriela really is pregnant!"

Miriam, however, hesitated. "But what if the baby isn't Wesley's?"

"Of course it's Wesley's!" Loretta declared with certainty. "Gabriela doesn't even have a boyfriend. She's with Wesley every day and has even spent her New Year holiday at our estate."

Miriam's doubt gave way to excitement. "Since it's clear Gabriela is carrying Wesley's child, shouldn't we push him to marry her?"

Loretta's nod was firm. She complained, "Wesley should have told me Gabriela was expecting. Since they aren't married yet, it's no surprise she refused to stay at Moss Manor."

"Then should we have Mr. Moss register their marriage right away?" Miriam suggested, her eyes gleaming with anticipation.

Loretta gave a decisive nod. "I'll discuss this with him. Just back me up when the time comes."

Unable to contain herself, she immediately summoned Wesley and Gabriela to the living room, arranging the atmosphere with the gravity of a formal meeting. Gabriela appeared pale and drained, wishing she could simply sink back into bed.

Seeing her struggle, Wesley felt a pang of sympathy and asked gently, "Grandma, what's so urgent that you had to call us out this late?"

Loretta sat tall in the center, her expression stern as she announced, "Wesley, since Gabriela is already pregnant—"

Wesley stiffened, eyes snapping toward Gabriela, who looked just as stunned — her face flushing with unease.

Loretta pressed on, “Why don’t the two of you go register your marriage tomorrow? After that, the two of you can pick a date and have a grand wedding!”

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Loretta’s voice carried unwavering authority, each word delivered with crystalline precision.

Gabriela jolted awake, her drowsiness evaporating as icy perspiration beaded across her brow. Why had Loretta suddenly mentioned her pregnancy? What secrets were uncovered? How would Wesley perceive her now?

Gabriela’s thoughts spiraled into chaos, and she couldn’t summon the courage to meet Wesley’s gaze.

When silence stretched between them, Loretta’s frown deepened as she turned toward Wesley. “Speak up, Wesley. What do you intend to do?”

Wesley’s mind churned with pleasant surprise. Was fatherhood approaching? He had never imagined one night with Gabriela would leave her carrying his child. If she would accept his proposal, he would marry her without hesitation and treasure her always.

He began, “Grandma, I—”

The instant Gabriela heard Wesley preparing to speak, she summoned her courage, buried her terror, arranged an expression of innocence, and cut him off. "What do you mean, Mrs. Larson? I don't have a boyfriend. How could I be pregnant?"

Loretta regarded her with tender affection. "Are you feeling bashful, sweetheart? Miriam and I understand how much you've endured recently. Don't fret. I'll scold him properly for your sake!"

She fixed Wesley with a withering glare.

Wesley concealed his satisfaction behind a composed mask, preparing for the inevitable lecture. Gabriela caught Wesley's peculiar expression, and her toes curled with nervous energy.

Loretta sounded absolutely convinced. Had she somehow discovered the pregnancy test results? If so, the fact that she'd had a one-night stand with Brenden would become impossible to conceal.

Gabriela had no choice but to deny everything. "I'm truly not pregnant. You're mistaken!"

Loretta exchanged glances with Miriam, who immediately retrieved her phone and displayed a photograph to Gabriela.

"We found this in your room, Gabriela," Miriam announced.

When Gabriela spotted the folic acid in the image, comprehension dawned. She released a silent breath of relief. Thank goodness they hadn't discovered what had transpired between her and Brenden. She had already prepared for this moment.

Gabriela asked with studied calm, "Do you understand what folic acid treats, Mrs. Larson?"

Watching Gabriela's composure gradually return, Loretta's certainty began to waver. "Isn't it exclusively for expectant mothers?"

"Folic acid also treats anemia," Gabriela explained. She then ascended the stairs and returned with another medication bottle. "I've suffered stomach problems recently. I've been vomiting frequently and developed mild anemia. Folic acid combined with vitamin B12 provides the proper treatment."

Loretta felt crushing disappointment and asked dubiously, "Folic acid for anemia? Shouldn't you consume iron-rich foods instead?"

Gabriela responded, "But I can't retain anything. I eat and immediately vomit everything up. That's why the doctor prescribed these medications. You can research it if you doubt me. Incidentally, I had my period roughly two weeks ago. I felt unwell, so I visited the hospital. Mr. Moss is aware of this. You can confirm with him."

Though discussing such personal matters felt mortifying, Gabriela had no choice but to use this information to deflect Loretta's interrogation.

Loretta immediately faced Wesley. When he nodded without expression, she couldn't suppress her deflation. So Gabriela was taking folic acid solely for anemia? What a crushing disappointment.

Loretta refused to surrender yet. Grasping Gabriela's hands, she spoke earnestly. "I know today was a misunderstanding, Gabriela. There's one thing I need to know. Do you have feelings for Wesley?"

Gabriela felt stunned, never anticipating Loretta would assault her with another tricky question.

The more time she spent with Wesley, the more certain she became about her emotions. She cared for him so deeply that she had even contemplated confessing the truth about her pregnancy. But she couldn't embrace such selfishness — carrying another man's child while hoping Wesley and she could build a future together.

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Seeing her prolonged hesitation, Wesley glanced briefly at her before turning away with glacial indifference.

"I don't care for him," Gabriela said quickly, though her heart fractured. "I've always considered him my employer, and I hold him in deep respect."

"Not even slightly?" Loretta persisted. "Wesley is attractive and wealthy. How could you feel nothing toward him?"

Miriam added, "Last time you injured your ankle, Mr. Moss carried you home. I could see immediately that you cared for him!"

Wesley felt genuinely surprised. That day, after Gabriela's rejection, he had been too devastated to observe her expression. What kind of look had she given him then?

"And..." Miriam remembered how, during New Year's celebrations, while the two decorated the house together, Gabriela had watched Wesley with unmistakable affection.

Gabriela felt overwhelmed by Loretta's and Miriam's persistence. She hastily fabricated a lie. "Actually, I already have someone I care for." She lowered her head, unable to face Wesley's reaction.

Wesley's features hardened into an expression of bitter cold. So that was it. Her heart belonged to someone else. No wonder she had stopped him from crossing the line the other day when they were intimate in his bed.

Loretta felt shaken to her core. "Who is he? Have I met him? Is he superior to Wesley?"

A single lie demands many more to shield it.

"No," Gabriela fibbed. "He's simply an ordinary man. How could he ever measure up to Mr. Moss? But affection isn't determined by someone's exceptional qualities."

Miriam pressed further. "What's his name?"

Gabriela reached her breaking point. This man didn't exist. How could she maintain such an elaborate fabrication?

"Gabriela doesn't wish to discuss it. Stop pressuring her," Wesley suddenly interjected, his tone arctic. "It's late. You should all retire for the evening."

He clung to his composure, refusing to let his pride crumble before them. Since Gabriela had made her feelings clear, pursuing her further would only diminish his dignity.

Loretta felt hollowness expanding in her chest. "But..."

Even Fiona hadn't captured Wesley's attention. The mere fact that he chose to remain at Gabriela's house demonstrated he harbored genuine feelings for her. Yet Gabriela didn't reciprocate Wesley's affection. What a disappointment.

Wesley sensed Loretta's thoughts and declared coldly, "I don't care for Gabriela either."

Gabriela felt startled hearing his declaration and experienced a sharp stab of sorrow. But upon reflection, a man of Wesley's caliber could claim any woman he desired. Why would he persist in caring for her after enduring repeated rejections? Perhaps it was a good thing for both of them. At least she wouldn't feel such crushing awkwardness when facing him in the future.

When Wesley observed that Gabriela appeared untroubled and even seemed relieved, his frustration intensified. Did she really find his affection so unbearable?

"I prefer intelligent, sophisticated women," he declared. Fury made him careless with his words. "Gabriela is too immature in her speech and behavior. I only consider her a friend."

Even after returning to her room, Gabriela couldn't banish those words from her thoughts. Though he lacked romantic feelings for her, she reassured herself that gaining a powerful ally like Wesley was a worthwhile outcome.

Caressing her still-flat abdomen, Gabriela whispered tenderly, "Sweetheart, no matter how difficult circumstances become, I will never abandon you."

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Sleep eluded Gabriela, keeping her restless until the first light of dawn finally pulled her under. When she woke, her body ached with exhaustion, and she discovered that Wesley had already left for work.

A flicker of disappointment stirred in her chest, but she smothered it with the thought that maybe this distance was for the best. She let out a slow sigh.

Loretta and Miriam approached Gabriela with downcast expressions. Loretta finally broke the silence. "Gabriela, Miriam and I talked last night. We've decided to return to the Moss Manor this afternoon. We've been imposing on you for far too long."

They still didn't know when or if Gabriela would bring home the man she held in her heart, and lingering here only risked deepening the quiet tension.

Gabriela shook her head quickly. "Mrs. Larson, you're not imposing at all. You're welcome to stay here as long as you need."

Loretta gave a faint smile. "We'll still visit often."

Gabriela managed a soft nod. "Come whenever you like."

Loretta nodded in return, her agreement tinged with quiet sadness. Once Gabriela had a boyfriend, she would likely wish they would keep their distance. The thought left a pang in Loretta's chest. What a shame it was that someone as kind and lovely as Gabriela would eventually marry another man instead of her grandson.

Then the three of them sat down to a quiet breakfast. Gabriela's appetite hadn't returned, and she barely managed a few spoonfuls of porridge before heading out for work.

The moment she arrived at the company, Gabriela froze. There, at the entrance, stood someone she hadn't seen in a while.

"Gabriela, long time no see. Did you miss me?" Brenden greeted with an easy grin.

Gone was the carefree, reckless charmer she remembered. Today, Brenden looked almost unrecognizable in his sharp black suit, hands resting calmly at his sides instead of shoved into his pockets. The sudden seriousness in his demeanor sent an uncomfortable jolt through her.

Her hand instinctively brushed her stomach as she stepped back, guarded. "Mr. Saunders?" Her voice wavered slightly. "What are you doing here?" Hadn't he been transferred to another branch?

Brenden explained, his grin widening, "I hounded Loretta until she finally spoke to Wesley. He gave in and agreed to have me return to headquarters." His eyes gleamed with excitement. "Isn't it great? Now we'll be seeing each other all the time!"

No, it was not great. Not even close.

A soft, awkward chuckle escaped her lips as she searched for a safe response.

"Come on, let's head in together," Brenden said brightly, oblivious to her discomfort. "I heard you're back in the sales department. Guess what? I'm your direct supervisor now. Looks like we'll be working side by side from here on out!"

As the general manager of all four sales divisions, Brenden was practically glowing at the thought of Gabriela falling under his management.

With no graceful way to refuse, Gabriela simply nodded and followed him inside.

Unbeknownst to them, Wesley stood a short distance away, his expression as dark as a gathering storm, the kind that promised thunder. Billy, lingering just a step behind, could feel the crackle of tension rolling off his boss like static. He hadn't sensed this level of quiet menace in years, and he dared not even exhale too loudly.

Wesley's gaze locked on Brenden and Gabriela walking side by side, and his fists clenched so tightly his knuckles ached. Then, unbidden, Gabriela's offhand confession from a while back about disliking men who were too tall came into his mind.

His jaw tightened. His teeth ground together. Wesley muttered sharply, eyes still fixed on Brenden's frame, "Do you think my legs are too long, Billy?"

Billy blinked, stunned.

Of course Wesley's legs were long, enviably so, the kind of legs that drew glances, but was this really the time to be noticing them? Wesley didn't wait for an answer. With a clipped huff, he turned on his heel.

"Let's go."

Billy scrambled to follow.

Lately, with everyone collaborating on the same project, Wesley and Gabriela had seemed to find a rare, tentative harmony. How had everything soured so quickly after landing the big deal? What had truly happened between them? Was it a total fallout or just an argument that escalated too far? Billy didn't dare ask. He kept his head down, careful not to make even the smallest mistake. The unease was palpable; the entire 12th floor of Apex Group felt like it had been sealed in a pressure cooker.

When Tessa approached Wesley for a routine signature, she barely had time to blink before he tore into her over a minor typo. Shaken and confused, Tessa sought out Billy, hoping for some clarity.

But Billy only gave her a look, his tone cryptic. "You're close with Ms. Haynes. Maybe you should ask her. Her version will be more reliable than anything I could tell you."

Tessa frowned, baffled. "What does Mr. Moss's mood have to do with Gabriela? She's not even working under him anymore. She transferred back to sales, remember?"

Billy hesitated, his eyes flickering with something unreadable before he finally said, "Perhaps that is where the source of all problems lies."

Tessa blinked, the weight of his words leaving her even more unsettled. By lunchtime, curiosity had gotten the better of her. Tessa found Gabriela in the cafeteria and slid into the seat across from her.

"Gabriela," Tessa whispered, leaning in, "Mr. Moss has been in a foul mood all morning. Did you upset him somehow?"

Seated next to Gabriela, Aubrey perked up like a cat hearing the sound of an open can. Her eyes gleamed, ready for drama.

Gabriela blinked, genuinely puzzled. "What's that got to do with me?"

“The whole company knows he gives you special treatment,” Tessa murmured, her voice dropping to a whisper. “Did he find out about your—”

Before the word “pregnancy” could even leave her mouth, a familiar voice cut through the air. Brenden slid into the seat beside Gabriela, a tray in hand and a grin on his face. “Special treatment? What are you two talking about?” Tessa clamped her mouth shut so fast she almost bit her tongue.

Across the table, Aubrey practically leapt out of her chair, offering a polite smile as she scooted away to make room.

“Mr. Saunders,” Aubrey said sweetly, “what brings you to the cafeteria? Don’t you usually have lunch brought to your office?”

“If lovely girls like you can eat here, why can’t I?” Brenden replied breezily, completely oblivious to the uncomfortable silence settling over the table. Then, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, he picked up a piece of rib from his tray and placed it gently on Gabriela’s plate. “Gabriela, you look like you’ve lost weight. Are all those projects wearing you out? Eat more, hmm?”

Gabriela stiffened, her gaze fixed on the rib sitting like a flashing beacon in the middle of her plate.

Was Brenden actually interested in her?

Forcing a polite smile, she quickly pushed the rib back onto his tray. “I don’t like ribs, but thank you, Mr. Saunders.”

“Don’t like ribs?” Brenden didn’t miss a beat, lifting a slice of steak onto her plate. “Then have this instead.”

Gabriela forced a tight smile, unable to find a polite excuse to refuse again. His relentless enthusiasm smothered her appetite, and by the end of lunch, she had barely eaten a thing.

She escaped the cafeteria as quickly as possible, retreating to the sales department.

Out of nowhere, her phone lit up. It was a message from “NotASaunders.”

“How was the steak?”

The message made her stomach dip. In the bright, crowded office, a chill crawled over her skin.

What on earth was Brenden playing at? Why was he acting all weird again?

She clenched her phone, but she couldn’t bring herself to send a reply.

Then another message blinked across her screen. “Gabriela, do you like me?”

Her heart lurched. She almost dropped her phone. Fingers trembling, she typed back quickly. “Mr. Saunders, please don’t joke like that. I’ve always respected you, but you are nothing more than my superior to me.”

Inside the CEO’s office, Wesley stared at his screen, his expression carved from stone. He was convinced by Gabriela’s response — she couldn’t possibly like someone like Brenden.

So who, exactly, had captured her heart?

Chapter 309

Noticing that “NotASaunders” had gone silent, Gabriela exhaled softly, a wave of relief washing over her. Yet her frustration lingered. Brenden’s sudden transfer to headquarters and his constant presence around her made dodging him increasingly challenging. What was she supposed to do?

Just as despair began to creep in, her phone rang — Josh was calling.

“Gabriela,” he began, then paused, his voice heavy with silence.

Gabriela reflected on the genuine care Josh had shown her over the years. Yet, due to Marie’s actions, she worried she could never share the same bond with Josh as they once had. A quiet sorrow tugged at her heart. In a soft voice, she asked, “Uncle Josh, is something wrong?”

"I've taken Marie to surrender to the authorities," Josh replied. "Since she is paralyzed, she is being kept in the medical ward for now."

Gabriela heard the weariness and grief in his tone and murmured, "I'm so sorry. I never wanted it to end like this."

She had considered letting Marie off, but without the video evidence, Marie would never have confessed to her wrongdoings.

Josh quickly gathered his spirits, forcing a lighter tone. "Marie has done too much harm over the years. This is the consequence she has to face. This isn't your fault." After a brief pause, he added, "Dustin has been charged with inciting suicide and attempted murder, but he has fled. The police haven't tracked him down yet. He's dangerous, Gabriela. Who knows what he's plotting? Stay vigilant."

A chill settled in Gabriela's chest. "I understand. Thank you, Uncle Josh."

After a few more cautious warnings, Josh ended the call.

Knowing Josh, a teacher with a modest income, was likely struggling, Gabriela discreetly transferred money to his account.

All day, she maneuvered to avoid Brenden, barely surviving until the workday's end, when she bolted the moment the clock struck. By chance, as she waited for the elevator, she spotted Wesley inside.

Puzzled, she wondered why he wasn't using his private elevator today. Wesley shot her a cool glance. "Aren't you coming in? How long do you plan to keep me waiting?"

Not daring to delay her boss, Gabriela stepped inside reluctantly.

Just then, Brenden hurried over, squeezing into the elevator with them. Despite there only being three of them, the space felt suffocating to Gabriela.

Wesley's expression remained icy, not sparing her a look. Brenden, however, wouldn't remain silent. "Gabriela, I haven't seen you in a while, and you've really lost weight. You look so pale, like you're drained. Is work too much? Why not take a few days off?"

"No need, Mr. Saunders. I'm fine, thank you," Gabriela replied quickly.

"Are you sure? I'm worried about you," Brenden pressed.

"I can manage. No need to worry."

The elevator ride, barely a minute, felt like an eternity to Gabriela. The moment the doors opened, she fled without a goodbye.

"Gabriela, why the rush? Wait for me. I'll drive you home!" Brenden called after her.

To Gabriela's relief, Wesley summoned Brenden back, stopping him from chasing her.

Once she got home, Gabriela collapsed onto her sofa, exhausted. The thought of facing Brenden at work every day filled her with frustration. Encountering both him and Wesley today felt like a waking nightmare.

For a moment, she even contemplated resigning.

That thought led her to check her savings. She had amassed a decent sum, and even after repaying the ten years' salary Wesley had paid her in advance, she would remain comfortable. Recently, she had sold the handbag and bracelet Brenden had mistakenly given her, netting over a million. Additionally, she had not yet received the commission for securing the billion-dollar contract. Even after dividing it with Aubrey and Nina, she would likely pocket at least three hundred thousand.

With careful budgeting, she could support herself and her baby comfortably for years, even without a job.

As she calculated future costs, Farley approached, buzzing with excitement. "Gabriela, an important guest is coming for dinner. You need to get ready!"

Chapter 310

Puzzled, she asked, "Who is coming?"

"It's Kaleb Haynes from the Haynes Group!" Farley replied.

Kaleb, the executive director at Haynes Group, was around Farley's age and a founding member alongside Gabriela's mother, Alanna. Though he was close to Alanna, he was the only one Marie hadn't forced out of the company.

Gabriela quickly asked Ken to prepare dinner and applied light makeup to look more polished.

Soon, Kaleb arrived, dressed in a sharp charcoal gray suit. Despite being around the same age as Farley, he appeared much younger. He radiated a commanding presence, forged by years of wielding significant power.

"Uncle Kaleb," Gabriela greeted respectfully.

Kaleb studied her, then said, "I've followed your situation with Marie closely. You've handled it admirably."

As a distant relative of Nanna's, Kaleb had been lifted from hardship by her and given a key role in the company—a kindness he never forgot. He spoke firmly. "Gabriela, with Marie's downfall, Haynes Group needs a new leader. If you want to take it over, I'll back you fully."

Gabriela was taken aback by his offer. She had been plotting to reclaim the company, not expecting the chance to come so swiftly.

“Aren’t you concerned I might not be up to it and let you down?” she asked.

“You are Alanna’s daughter, and you just clinched a billion-dollar deal with Alphacom Electronics. I trust your ability,” Kaleb replied with conviction. “Don’t worry. I’m here to support you every step of the way.”

Moved, Gabriela nodded. “Thank you. I’ll think it over carefully.”

Before, she had been preoccupied with ways to steer clear of Wesley and Brenden. Now, returning to the Haynes Group seemed the best path.

Decisive by nature, Gabriela acted quickly once her mind was set. The next day at work, she finalized the commission split for the billion-dollar deal with Nina and then announced her decision to resign.

Nina was shocked. “What made you decide to resign all of a sudden? Does Mr. Moss know?”

“Not yet. I’ll tell him soon,” Gabriela replied.

Nina frowned. “Our department is already stretched thin, and we just took on a big project. Your leaving now will throw things into chaos.”

Gabriela offered, “Miss Gibson, if you’re open to it, I would like to recommend someone.”

“Who?”

“Cali.”

That morning, Jaylene had dispatched Cali to fetch coffee, claiming the company’s coffee was stale and demanding a change. She specifically rejected the coffee from the downstairs café, insisting on a blend from the Golden Honey Café, which was miles away.

Cali protested, “Jaylene, it’s work hours. I’ve got my own tasks piling up. If you want it, go get it yourself.”

“You dare refuse me?” Jaylene’s expression soured, her voice sharp. “You landed a contract yesterday, right? One call from me, and I can ensure it falls apart.”

Cali’s face tightened with anger. “Don’t cross the line, Jaylene. If you sabotage my deal, I’ll report you to the executive office!”

Jaylene smirked, unimpressed. “Come on, you’re not Gabriela, and no one would care about your complaints. Go ahead — make a scene. See who cares.”

Cali’s cheeks flushed with fury. “You!”

Jaylene toyed with her polished nails, laughing coldly. “Look around the department. Anyone here backing you up?”

Nearby colleagues, overhearing the spat, quickly ducked their heads, feigning focus on their work as if deaf to the exchange.

Jaylene scoffed. Bryn, though he had grumbled about Jaylene pushing Gabriela out, knew she was a top saleswoman — a golden goose he would have to tolerate until she was let go.

With Brenden’s return as general manager, Bryn’s hopes for promotion were dashed, leaving him bitter and short-tempered.

“Cali, just go,” he snapped. “Grabbing a coffee for a teammate isn’t a big deal, and it’s not like you’re drowning in work.”