

His kiss 311

Chapter 311

Cali knew that challenging Jaylene was pointless, so she swallowed her rage and turned to leave to buy her coffee.

“Gabriela doesn’t care about you.” Jaylene’s voice sliced through the air behind her. “You still can’t see your place here and dare challenge me, huh? How pathetically naive.”

That cutting tone had poisoned the air for over a week. Something inside Cali finally snapped. Her hands balled into fists as she whirled around, fury blazing in her eyes.

“I defended Gabriela not because I expected anything back, but because I can’t stomach watching you!” She thrust her finger first at Jaylene, then at Bryn, her voice climbing with each word. “And you — your arrogant, condescending attitude makes me sick! Working alongside people like you two is a complete nightmare!”

Cali’s voice rang through the office like a battle cry, silencing every conversation, freezing every keystroke. Jaylene’s face turned crimson with outrage.

Bryn’s voice cracked like a whip. “Are you begging to get thrown out of Apex?”

Cali tore her employee badge from her chest and launched it straight at his face. “I’m done!”

She pivoted on her heel and marched toward the exit.

Aubrey appeared in her path, practically vibrating with excitement. She caught Cali's arm, confusion clouding her features. "Cali, what's gotten into you today?"

Cali's breathing steadied as she gathered herself. "I just quit."

"Quit? But why?" Aubrey's eyes widened in shock. "Miss Gibson just announced you're transferring to our division."

Cali was stunned. "Really? Why would she suddenly want me transferred?"

"Who knows? But HR already processed everything," Aubrey said, tugging at her sleeve. "Come on, let's get your transfer paperwork sorted."

Cali felt reality tilt around her. "But—"

She had once torn apart her colleagues behind their backs. Why would Nina possibly want her now?

"No arguments," Aubrey cut her off. "Miss Gibson wanted me to tell you — once you transfer, you'll join us on that billion-dollar project. You'll even get a cut of the commission!"

Understanding crashed over Cali like a wave. Gabriela had intervened on her behalf. Beneath that steel exterior, Gabriela possessed a surprisingly tender heart. Warmth flooded through Cali's chest, and she made herself a promise — never again would she speak poison about her colleagues. From this moment forward, whatever Gabriela asked of her, she would deliver without question.

Cali followed Aubrey away from her former division, leaving the shell-shocked Bryn and Jaylene in her wake. Whispers erupted among the remaining colleagues.

"Cali just struck gold. Transferring to Miss Gibson's team and landing a piece of that billion-dollar deal. That's résumé gold right there!"

"If I'd known this would happen, I would've sung Gabriela's praises too!"

The comments hit Jaylene like acid, her face burning as she fled to her office. Gabriela was such a bother. Even after moving to another division, she still managed to get under her skin. Jaylene began scrolling through her contacts with predatory focus. Whatever it took, she would make Gabriela pay.

Bryn's face twisted into an ugly mask of rage and humiliation as he barked, "Enough chatter! Back to work, all of you."

Silence returned, but the damage had already carved itself deep. The division's unity lay in pieces, never to be rebuilt.

Meanwhile, Gabriela sat across from Wesley in his office, unaware of the drama unfolding elsewhere. Wesley stared down at the resignation letter in his hands, his grip on his pen tightening until his knuckles turned white. He fought to keep his voice controlled. "What's driving this sudden resignation?"

Gabriela couldn't bring herself to meet his penetrating gaze. She had initially submitted her resignation through HR, expecting a simple approval process.

Instead, HR had passed the burden upward. "Your situation requires special handling. We can't authorize this decision. You'll need Mr. Moss's direct approval."

So here she sat, facing Wesley's intensity head-on.

Her voice came out steady and honest. "Marie is behind bars, and Haynes Group has no one at the helm. I have to return and assume control of the company."

Chapter 312

Wesley wanted to chain her to this office, but his pride built walls around those desperate thoughts. His voice dripped with skepticism. "You think you can handle running a company? Do you honestly believe you possess those skills?"

Gabriela's confidence wavered for a heartbeat. She found her voice again, though it emerged softer than before. "I'll dedicate myself to learning management principles, and my uncle Kaleb will guide me through the transition."

Wesley dismissed her words with an impatient wave. "Save your study plans for yourself. I'm not interested."

Gabriela fell silent, and the silence stretched between them like a chasm. She reached into her bag and withdrew a bank card, placing it carefully on his desk. "This card contains every penny of the ten years' salary you advanced me. I'm returning it now. Thank you for everything you've done for me during my time here, Mr. Moss."

Wesley ignored the card completely, his cold stare boring into her. "If leaving is what you want, then go. Spare me these empty pleasantries."

What an ungrateful creature she had turned out to be. She had leaned on him through every crisis, every obstacle, and now she planned to simply walk away. If he ever allowed himself to fall for her again, he deserved whatever pain followed.

Gabriela slid the resignation letter closer to him. "Your signature, please."

Wesley's pen moved across the paper with sharp, angry strokes. His voice carried a bitter edge as he spoke. "Perhaps this timing works perfectly. Rebecca returns soon, and she'll slide right into your position."

Rebecca Howard was Wesley's schoolmate. Gabriela remembered Brenden mentioning her once — a beautiful, sophisticated woman who carried herself with the kind of mature elegance that made Fiona seem like a child in comparison. Exactly the type who would capture Wesley's attention.

Emotion tightened Gabriela's throat, but she managed to speak with genuine warmth. "You are a kind soul, Mr. Moss. You deserve every happiness."

Wesley had thrown another woman's name between them to test her, yet Gabriela remained unshaken. Her composure ignited something savage in his chest.

He reached across the desk and snatched up the bank card, then released a laugh that cut through the air like broken glass. "You think my money works like some convenient loan? Interest accumulates, Gabriela."

Gabriela's heart plummeted, a wave of sudden unease tightening her chest. "What kind of interest are we talking about?"

Wesley's eyes narrowed as he studied her face. "Now that you want to repay it, we calculate at premium rates."

Gabriela's voice barely held steady. "Please tell me exactly how much I owe."

"Five hundred thousand."

The number struck her like a physical blow. That advance had sat untouched in her account for barely thirty days. Now he demanded half a million in interest.

“Unwilling to pay?” Wesley’s voice turned arctic. “Then remain with the company another three months.”

His true strategy crystallized — as long as she stayed within his reach, he would forget every cent of interest owed.

Gabriela’s jaw clenched until her teeth ached, but she forced the words out. “Fine. I’ll pay every penny.”

Wesley’s confidence crumbled. Knowing Gabriela’s nature, he had expected lengthy negotiations and desperate bargaining. He had crafted this trap to buy himself three months — time for something between them to shift. Yet she chose to pay that interest rather than stay near him.

“I’ll transfer the five hundred thousand to this card today,” Gabriela declared, her voice cutting through his shock. “You can verify the payment by the end of the day.” She lifted the signed resignation letter and offered him a respectful bow.

Wesley twisted away, refusing to witness her departure. Rage burned through his veins like poison.

“I’m leaving now, Mr. Moss.” Gabriela’s voice softened to almost a whisper. “Please take care of yourself.”

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Wesley offered no response to Gabriela’s parting words.

Gabriela understood — walking away now meant severing her connection to Wesley forever. Pain stabbed through her chest, but thoughts of the baby growing inside her steadied her resolve. For her child's sake, she had no alternative.

Though Wesley maintained his professional mask, the soft click of Gabriela's departing footsteps sent a sharp ache through his ribcage. He swiveled his chair toward the door. Gabriela was gone.

Billy knocked hesitantly before entering. "Mr. Moss, did you sign off on Miss Haynes' resignation?"

He had encountered her moments earlier, resignation letter clutched in her grip. He had assumed their conflict was temporary, never imagining it would escalate to her departure.

Wesley buried his fury beneath a composed exterior. "Gabriela is returning to claim her mother's legacy."

Relief washed over Billy's features. Simultaneously, envy pricked at him. Gabriela possessed the luxury of inheriting a ready-made empire whenever she wanted. He chuckled softly. "That's great for her."

Despite his anger toward Gabriela's cold departure, Wesley recognized her youth and the enormous challenge of suddenly commanding such a vast enterprise. He instructed Billy, "Monitor Haynes Group closely. Should they require assistance, provide it."

Billy nodded briskly. "Understood."

Wesley's concern for Gabriela ran deep — so why had their bond shattered so completely?

Meanwhile, Gabriela devoted half the day to transferring her responsibilities before collecting her belongings. Aubrey's heart shattered. Gabriela's departure felt unbearable.

She seized Gabriela's hand, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Gabriela, even when you become Haynes Group's CEO, promise you won't forget me."

Witnessing Aubrey's dramatic farewell performance, Gabriela suppressed her amusement. "Aubrey, Haynes Group sits thirty minutes away at most." There was no reason to behave as though they faced permanent separation.

Aubrey embraced Gabriela, her sobs intensifying. "But everything will change. We can't share meals anymore, and I'll lose my claim to the ribs, steaks, and wings from your plate."

Gabriela found herself speechless.

After Aubrey's emotional display subsided, Nina finally spoke. "Gabriela, should you need anything, contact me immediately."

Tessa chimed in, "My network runs deep, so if you need help, don't hesitate — ask me."

Warmth bloomed in Gabriela's chest as she absorbed their genuine expressions. She smiled warmly. "Thank you. Meeting all of you has been my greatest fortune."

Cali approached tentatively, her voice barely audible. "Gabriela, I apologize for my previous treatment of you."

She wanted to offer her assistance as well, but courage abandoned her. After all, Gabriela would soon command Haynes Group as CEO, while she remained just a salesperson — hardly in a position to offer meaningful support.

Gabriela nodded, squeezing Cali's shoulder gently. "The past belongs behind us. I'm leaving now."

As Gabriela entered the elevator, she spotted Brenden racing to intercept her. "Gabriela, wait! I must speak with you!"

She feigned deafness, jabbing the close button repeatedly, sealing him out by mere inches.

Brenden watched the doors seal shut, muttering despondently, "Gabriela still harbors resentment toward me. She wouldn't even acknowledge me during her resignation."

The following morning, Gabriela arrived at Haynes Group wearing a crisp white women's suit and modest heels. The company lacked its own headquarters, instead occupying the entire fifth floor of Lakeshore Building. Beyond the entrance, the company logo commanded attention through understated elegance.

Two young receptionists studied Gabriela carefully. “Good morning, whom are you here to see? Do you have a scheduled appointment?”

Gabriela’s smile carried subtle authority. “I’m here for Kaleb. No appointment necessary.”

Her time with Wesley had taught her the power of composed confidence. She lifted her chin slightly, radiating unmistakable command. The receptionists immediately recognized they faced someone extraordinary. One receptionist’s eyes widened with recognition. “You’re Miss Haynes, correct? Please allow me to escort you.”

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She personally guided Gabriela through the company corridors to locate Kaleb. Upon spotting Gabriela, Kaleb dispensed with pleasantries, offering only a curt nod. “Perfect timing. We’re beginning a meeting — join us.”

Though surprised, Gabriela remained silent and followed Kaleb into the conference room.

With Marie’s position vacant, Kaleb should have assumed control of the meeting. Instead, he remained standing and announced Gabriela’s identity to the assembled group. Then he gestured respectfully toward the head chair, inviting Gabriela to claim it.

The conference room erupted in whispered conversations and exchanged glances. Someone voiced their objection boldly. “Mr. Haynes, this seems inappropriate.”

“Exactly. Even as the former CEO’s daughter, she cannot simply march in and claim the CEO’s position.”

Kaleb had braced himself for this confrontation, ready with explanations. Suddenly, Gabriela’s voice cut through the tension, authority threading through every syllable. “Why shouldn’t I occupy this seat?”

Her recent experiences at Wesley’s side had forged her confidence — meetings with Vasquez Group and Alphacom Electronics had become her training ground. At Alphacom Electronics, she had addressed thirty thousand employees without faltering, articulating the advantages of machinery upgrades with unshakeable conviction.

A handful of executives posed no threat now.

Her gaze swept the conference table, each word deliberate and cutting. “Haynes Group represents my mother’s life’s work. Marie managed it during my youth, but—”

“Now I’ve come of age. Shouldn’t rightful ownership return to me?”

Kaleb’s eyebrows lifted in admiration. He hadn’t anticipated such boldness — not only did she refuse intimidation, but she claimed her ground with fierce determination. His head bobbed approvingly.

“The business may belong to the Haynes family, but you lack experience and maturity. Even with inheritance rights, you should climb from the bottom!”

“The CEO position at Haynes Group demands serious responsibility. You wouldn’t want to destroy everything your mother built, would you?”

“You’re merely a sheltered girl with no worldly experience. Return home and collect your dividends. Playing CEO will only bring ruin to yourself and everyone else.”

Gabriela’s attention fixed on the loudest voices. Kaleb provided swift introductions. Her opposition consisted of the Finance Department head, the Human Resources head, and the Marketing Department head. They were Marie’s most devoted allies.

Understanding crystallized in Gabriela’s mind, her composure deepening. “I secured a billion-dollar contract for Apex Group, earning praise from Mr. Moss himself. How exactly do you conclude I lack capability?”

The Finance Department head’s retort dripped with condescension. “Miss Haynes, during Marie’s tenure as acting CEO, she landed a contract worth over a million within two months. If you desire the CEO position, shouldn’t you demonstrate genuine accomplishments? Your billion-dollar contract involved Apex Group — it holds no relevance to our company’s success.”

Gabriela’s response came swift and sharp. “What exactly must I accomplish to prove my worth?”

The Marketing Department head’s casual tone masked underlying skepticism. “An overseas magnate seeks partnership with a domestic company for a major project. Secure this collaboration within three months, and we’ll recognize your capabilities.”

Gabriela weighed the challenge carefully. “If I fail to land the partnership but secure an equivalent project of similar value, would that satisfy your requirements?”

The three executives exchanged knowing glances before nodding. “Yes.”

They harbored no genuine belief in Gabriela’s ability to close a significant deal.

They merely awaited her inevitable failure.

Gabriela’s smile carried unwavering confidence. “Consider it done.”

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Kaleb guided Gabriela to her office once the meeting wrapped up.

The space was sleek and understated, its white walls carrying only the bare essentials of decoration. One beautiful painting hung neatly behind the broad executive desk.

Catching the direction of her gaze, Kaleb remarked, “Your mother painted that artwork herself. Even though Marie was overbearing and relentless in her ways, she never dared touch what Alanna left behind.”

A faint sting warmed Gabriela's eyes as her mother's tender face surfaced in memory. If her mother were alive, she would have lived as the happiest girl in the world.

"Gabriela, this isn't the moment for tears." Kaleb exhaled slowly, his expression hardening. "You handled the meeting well, but taking that wager was reckless."

Though he never doubted her abilities, he knew she was still a newcomer in the business world. She had secured a billion-dollar contract with Alphacom Electronics — likely thanks to Wesley's backing. Kaleb worried she might lose the wager — a loss they couldn't afford.

"What happens if you can't secure another major project? Are you truly prepared to walk away from your position?"

Age was catching up to Kaleb, and more than anything, he wanted to see her firmly established as CEO before he could finally step back in peace.

Gabriela lifted her gaze, eyes steady with determination. "Uncle Kaleb, I'll make it happen. You can count on me."

Even if she failed to clinch the deal with that tycoon, she still had backup plans. While chasing the Alphacom Electronics project, she had rubbed shoulders with countless top-tier executives. At worst, she could lean on those connections, trading favors and subtly invoking her history as Wesley's trusted secretary — a title that made plenty of people eager to lend her support.

Realizing there was no better option, Kaleb finally relented. “In that case, I’ll back you with everything I’ve got.”

“Thank you.” Gabriela’s voice softened with genuine gratitude.

Word of her return to Haynes Group rippled quickly through the business circle. Though Haynes Group itself couldn’t compare with industry giants, Gabriela’s reputation carried weight — after all, she had once been Wesley’s most valued secretary. Every step she took now drew watchful eyes.

Mason wasted no time inviting her out for a meal once he heard the news. “Gabriela, now that you’ve stepped away, who’s going to oversee my major project?”

She met his gaze with steady sincerity. “There’s no need to worry, Mr. Garner. Apex Group’s employees all hail from top universities, and their skills are solid. On top of that, Mr. Moss himself will be closely monitoring the project.”

Her calm assurance eased the tension in his shoulders, and after a moment, Mason finally looked a little more at ease.

Changing the subject, he asked, “So, how are you doing now that you’ve returned to your family’s company?”

Gabriela put on a show of frustration. “I’m managing... though there have been a few challenges, of course.”

She explained that she needed to secure a partnership with an overseas tycoon. “Since Okburg’s had its share of international swindlers, I can’t shake the feeling he might be a fraud.”

Mason, always looking for a way to return Gabriela’s kindness, felt this was the moment he’d been waiting for. “Are you talking about Bradly McCoy?” he asked at once.

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Gabriela gave a small nod.

“I actually have a friend who knows him well,” Mason said quickly. “Let me check into his background for you.”

Gabriela’s relief showed in her voice as she thanked him warmly.

Later that day, Mason rang her with an update. “Bradly isn’t some fraud. His company’s ranked among the world’s top five hundred, and he just stepped in to lead the family empire. He’s come back determined to make a splash.”

Mason had also learned that Bradly was currently staying at the Horizon Club. Gabriela wasted no time — she gathered the proposal she had polished overnight and set out to meet Bradly.

At the doors of the VIP suite, the sound of laughter and spirited voices spilled into the hall.

When she finally stepped inside, the sight made her pause. Several high-powered men lounged on the sofas, each flanked by an elegant woman draped over his arm.

In the center, occupying the prime seat with effortless authority, sat a striking young man. His features were refined, his demeanor cold yet magnetic. That was Bradley.

Gabriela moved to greet Bradley, only to freeze when she spotted Fiona seated beside him. The easy way Fiona leaned in toward him made their closeness unmistakable, and Gabriela's chest tightened — Fiona bore a grudge against her.

Fiona's gaze swept over and, catching sight of Gabriela, she immediately pieced together her intention. A sly, mocking smile curled her lips. "Well, if it isn't the newly appointed CEO of Haynes Group. What business drags you here, Miss Haynes?"

Her words made Bradley glance over. His dark eyes flicked to Gabriela briefly before he turned back to Fiona with mild curiosity. "Fiona, why the sudden bite in your tone? Did she do something to offend you?"

Fiona could never confess that the man she longed for had already been swept up by Gabriela's quiet charm. Instead, she curled her lips into a sharp smile and remarked with feigned admiration, "Miss Haynes toppled her own aunt, sent both her aunt and her cousin-in-law to prison, and seized control of the company. Quite the ruthless talent, wouldn't you say?"

Fiona's barbed words cast Gabriela in a negative light, causing Bradley to dislike her even before she spoke. The other men frowned, their eyes flicking toward Gabriela with thinly veiled suspicion.

Gabriela, inwardly cursing Fiona, maintained her composure in the face of it. She lifted her chin, wore a practiced, professional smile, and introduced herself to Bradley with calm clarity — then laid out her proposal for collaboration without hesitation.

Bradley admired Gabriela's fearless attitude and liked the fact that she cut straight to the point. Still, mindful of Fiona's presence, he deliberately ignored the proposal and instead lifted a crystal glass, filling it with liquor.

"Why don't we set business aside for now? Let's have a drink first," he suggested smoothly.

Fiona's lips curved into a sharp smile as she slid the glass toward Gabriela. "Miss Haynes, enjoy your drink."

Gabriela's brows pinched together ever so slightly. Her pregnancy meant she couldn't down strong alcohol. Yet turning the glass away outright could make Bradley dismiss her — and possibly ruin any chance at closing the deal. Having a small amount of alcohol wouldn't do much harm.

Forcing herself past the taste, Gabriela tipped the entire glass back in one swift motion.

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The bold gesture made Bradley pause, a flicker of approval softening his expression. He had come home with the intent of finding a business partner who could be trusted.

Sensing his interest shift, Fiona's smile stiffened. She couldn't allow Gabriela to gain the upper hand so easily. Leaning toward him with a playful lilt in her voice, she cut in quickly, "Bradly, weren't we supposed to spend today catching up? Why ruin the mood with business matters?"

Bradly conceded with a nod and told Gabriela, "Head back for now. We'll sit down again tomorrow."

The unexpected promise of a follow-up meeting left Gabriela quietly thrilled. She passed him her business card, speaking with genuine warmth as she confirmed the time and place for the next day.

Once outside the club, she hailed a cab and headed straight home. While a single drink wasn't particularly dangerous during pregnancy, her body reacted poorly to certain types of liquor — sometimes enough to make her black out — and she worried something might go wrong if she stayed out any longer.

When she returned to the villa, Ken noticed the faint flush on her cheeks and quickly handed her a glass of honey water to soothe the effects of the alcohol. Farley stood nearby, his voice carrying a note of concern. "While you're pregnant, you shouldn't be pushing yourself so hard."

Gabriela curled into the sofa cushions, hugging a soft pillow against her chest. With quiet earnestness, she asked, "Farley, would you consider coming back to the company to help me?"

In Alanna's time, Farley had been a sharp, dependable assistant — his reputation spoke for itself. But now, bound by his disability, even walking had become a challenge. He couldn't bring himself to drag Gabriela down. The only reason he had agreed to stay in the villa was because she had insisted she felt unbearably alone without family around her. But to return to the company, to step into that old role again — that was something he had no intention of doing.

After finishing the honey water, Gabriela drifted off on the sofa.

Through the blur of sleep, she felt someone's arms slide beneath her and lift her gently. Her fingers curled into the crisp fabric of a collar, and a clean, familiar scent brushed against her senses — it was Wesley. The haze of alcohol made her giggle softly. She looped her arms around his neck, pressing her cheek to the cool smoothness of his suit jacket. "Mr. Moss, did you come for me?" she murmured.

Wesley said nothing. Holding her securely, he carried her upstairs, each step deliberate and unwavering.

Farley's worry grew the moment Wesley carried Gabriela toward her room. "Mr. Moss," he said nervously. "Perhaps I should be the one to look after her."

Gabriela was both tipsy and pregnant. If Wesley attempted to be intimate with her, things could get out of hand.

With quiet composure, Wesley said, "It was my grandmother's wish that I take care of her."

Loretta valued Gabriela deeply and had personally entrusted Wesley with that responsibility, and he was simply honoring her wishes.

Farley thought it over and found no reason to object. "Then I'll leave her in your hands, Mr. Moss."

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Wesley carried Gabriela all the way into the bedroom. Even after he laid her gently on the bed, her arms refused to release him, chaining him there with desperate strength.

He had no choice but to lean closer, his voice coaxing, low and steady. "Alright, let go now."

But the liquor had her in its grip. Gabriela only shook her head, tightening. "No. Just stay with me a little longer." Her eyes, hazy yet luminous, shimmered like stars.

For a moment, Wesley forgot to breathe. His voice roughened with restraint. "Do you even know who I am?"

"Yes, of course I do," she whispered with a squint, her pout soft. "Mr. Moss, I'm sorry. Don't be angry with me. I want to be with you, I really do. But I can't."

Her words trembled with sorrow, each syllable fragile, soaked in longing. "These past days without you have been dreadful. I've missed you so much. Can I get a kiss?"

The plea shattered something inside him. For a split second, Wesley's mind went utterly blank. Then his arms tightened fiercely around her waist. "What are you trying to say? Why can't you be with me if you want to? Who's stopping you?"

There was no response from her. She had fallen asleep, her arms still locked stubbornly around Wesley. He prided himself on ironclad self-control, but tonight, her unconscious hold sparked an unquenchable itch beneath his skin, clawing at his composure. How could she so easily set his entire body aflame only to drift into sleep without the faintest awareness? Unbelievable.

Wesley leaned over her, gaze lingering, tracing the delicate rise and fall of her breath. The room settled into stillness. At last, he exhaled a quiet sigh, fingers brushing her messy fringe back with uncharacteristic tenderness.

His voice dropped to a murmur. "Why not just come to me if you want to secure a major project? If you asked, I'd always help you, no questions asked."

Gabriela, lost in dreams, slept soundly until dawn.

When morning came, her hand instinctively reached out to the space beside her. It was empty. Her eyes flickered open in shock. She had dreamed of Wesley last night. In her dreams, she had clung to him, whispering for hugs and kisses.

Flustered, Gabriela pressed her palms against her cheeks. How could she dream something so reckless? Yet, her lips tingled faintly, as if brushed by warmth. She told herself it was just the hangover.

Gabriela shook the thought away before it could root itself deeper. Rising in haste, she washed, dressed, and straightened her composure. There was no time to dwell on dreams, as she had an appointment with Bradley today, and punctuality was everything.

When Gabriela arrived at the Horizon Club, she waited nearly an hour before her phone finally rang.

“Miss Haynes, I’m really sorry.” Bradley’s voice came through, smooth yet careless. “I’m in Eleyton dealing with something important. I can’t make it back.”

“It’s alright,” Gabriela replied with practiced grace. “We can meet tomorrow instead.”

“I won’t be in town tomorrow,” Bradley replied quickly. “I may need to fly to Zaburgh.”

“Mr. McCoy, where are you exactly? I’ll come to you now.”

After a pause, Bradley gave her an address. Without a second thought, Gabriela chartered a helicopter and sped across the river to Eleyton. The turbulence left her stomach churning, but she pushed it aside, rushing straight to the Veale Grand Hotel, the place Bradley had mentioned.

Only then did she discover that the “something important” was actually a round of golf. And Fiona was right there with Bradley.

In that instant, Gabriela realized that Bradley had played her.

Yet Gabriela didn’t flare up. Instead, she pulled out the contract and calmly presented her proposal.

Bradly listened with surprising seriousness, then gave a small nod. "Not bad. I'm satisfied with this. Let's collaborate."

To her astonishment, he immediately produced a pen and signed the contract.

Fiona, standing off to the side, arched her brow with a smirk.

Gabriela was stunned. Could it really be this simple?

But just as she began to breathe in relief, Bradley waved her away, casual and dismissive. "Miss Haynes, I've only finished the first half of my game. I'd like to continue without being disturbed."

Chapter 319

Still dazed, Gabriela left the hotel and dialed Kaleb the moment she stepped outside. "Uncle Kaleb," she blurted, voice trembling with disbelief, "Bradly signed the contract."

But Kaleb's reply was firm, not celebratory. "Check the contract. Make sure nothing's wrong. And confirm the signature."

A prickle of unease ran down her spine. Gabriela pulled the document from her bag and froze.

Letter by letter, Bradly's bold signature vanished into nothing. It was erasable.

Bradly had never intended to honor the deal at all; he had been toying with her from the very start.

On the hotel's golf course, Bradly adjusted his stance, swung his club, and watched the ball arc into the distance. A lazy smile tugged at his lips. "Fiona, are you satisfied now?"

Fiona twirled her hair with feigned nonchalance. "Yeah. If you sign with Gabriela, consider our friendship over."

Bradly chuckled. "Relax. I've got plenty of companies lined up at my door. I don't need Gabriela."

Fiona nodded, smugness flickering across her face as she lifted her chin. In her mind, the game was already won. Gabriela could never claw her way back from this.

Meanwhile, back at Haynes Group, Gabriela slumped against the cool leather of the black swivel chair, exhaustion seeping into her bones. This time, she knew she had slammed headfirst into a wall, because the deal with Bradly was as good as gone.

The finance director, Trenton Diaz, dropped by under the guise of offering comfort, though his words were dipped in mockery. "Since Bradly's return, half the major corporations have been chasing after him. Why would he bother with a small firm like ours? Miss Haynes, ambition is fine, but one must know their limits. If you lack the ability, perhaps it's wiser to step down."

Kaleb's expression darkened. He cut in sharply, voice like steel. "Trenton, watch your tongue."

Trenton scoffed, his tone dripping with disdain. "Since when am I not allowed to have an opinion?"

Kaleb's jaw tightened. Anger flared in his eyes, yet helplessness weighed his shoulders. "Gabriela, if this project really can't be secured, we'll just move on to another. I've built plenty of connections over the years. We'll find another way."

"Uncle Kaleb, let me think this through first," Gabriela sighed.

She wasn't willing to concede defeat. She was certain that Bradley had been satisfied with her proposal. It was Fiona's interference that had poisoned his decision.

Still, no one was untouchable. Everyone had a weakness. Gabriela believed Bradley was no exception. For all his swagger, he was still a man, and men always had desires or needs that could be leveraged.

With that thought crystallizing, Gabriela arranged another dinner with Mason. After placing her order, Gabriela couldn't help venting her frustration. "Mr. McCoy is certainly skilled at playing tricks."

Mason offered a few words of comfort before a thought struck him. His eyes lit up. "Gabriela, I just remembered, he is an avid fan of handcrafted models. His collection is extensive. And if I recall correctly, you're no stranger to making models yourself. Why not craft one for him? It might be the key to winning him over."

Gabriela paused, caught off guard, then leaned forward with interest. Her model-making ability was her pride, and his suggestion sparked something inside her. “Are you sure?”

Though she had never directly compared her work with others, every model she made left people astonished.

“Absolutely!” Mason assured. “I dabble in model-making too, and there’s a whole circle of enthusiasts. We even formed a club. Funny enough, the very first thing Bradley did upon returning to the country wasn’t chasing business deals, it was applying to join our club. On his first day, he even showed off several exquisite pieces.”

Mason pulled out his phone, scrolling to a small gallery. “Here, take a look. Do you think you can make ones better than these?”

The screen lit up with photos of meticulously detailed models. Among them was a towering deep-sea replica, over a meter tall.

Gabriela froze. That design and those intricate details looked hauntingly familiar, almost identical to the piece she had once lost.

Her fingers tightened slightly around the phone before she handed it back. “Yes, I’ll give it a try,” she said firmly.

Gabriela thrived on decisive action — once her mind locked onto a goal, she charged forward without hesitation.

After outlining her strategy to Kaleb, she set to work on creating a model for Bradley. Though years had passed since she'd worked with model materials, the moment her fingers touched the familiar supplies, design concepts flooded her imagination. She pictured a magnificent seven-story structure infused with steampunk elements. Her mission crystallized — she would render the model enthusiasts speechless.

Three intensive days vanished as Gabriela sketched her vision, followed by another day spent hunting down the perfect materials. From that moment forward, she barricaded herself inside her home study, refusing all outside contact. Ken and Farley became her lifeline, delivering meals directly to her study. On nights when exhaustion finally conquered her drive, she would collapse onto the nearby sofa, still clutching her tools.

Farley observed her relentless pace with growing concern. "You shouldn't sacrifice your sleep to secure this project — your health matters more. Remember, you're carrying a child."

Gabriela had already conquered the first floor of her architectural marvel and was methodically securing materials while adding support pillars for the second level. "Farley, I understand my body's signals. Stop fretting — I treasure this baby more fiercely than anyone could imagine."

Recognizing the futility of changing her mind, Farley surrendered to her determination. He remembered her weakness for homemade chicken soup, so he convinced Loretta to share her recipe and mastered the dish himself.

Two weeks melted away as Gabriela constructed every floor with meticulous care. Only the miniature figures and exterior embellishments awaited completion. Seven more days would seal her triumph.

She stepped back to survey her nearly finished masterpiece, satisfaction warming her chest.

This creation would eclipse anything Mason had ever shown her — she felt certain of it.

Farley's knock shattered her concentration. "Gabriela, Mr. Moss has arrived to see you."

Gabriela's hands stilled on her work. Her relentless focus had pushed all romantic complications from her thoughts. Wesley's unexpected presence sent her mind spinning into confusion.

"Farley, please explain that I've been incredibly occupied lately..."

A rich, compelling voice cut through her excuse. "Miss Haynes, surely you can manage a few minutes?"

Shock jolted through Gabriela as she discovered Wesley standing before her — someone she hadn't seen in nearly a month. He wore a crisp white shirt with his jacket slung over one arm, appearing as though he'd rushed from some important engagement.

Wesley moved closer. "Avoiding me?"

Heat crept up Gabriela's neck. "Mr. Moss, I genuinely am swamped with work."

Wesley studied the towering model and his lips curved upward. “I can see your dedication.”

The structure rose over a meter high with a half-meter diameter. Both material selection and craftsmanship radiated professional excellence.

He remarked, “Your model is absolutely stunning.”

Gabriela acknowledged his praise with a confident nod, her eyes sparkling with pride. “Wait until it’s finished — the final result will steal your breath away, I guarantee it.”

She was certain Bradley would be completely enchanted by her creation.

Wesley found himself momentarily captivated by her luminous smile and returned one of his own. “I have complete faith in you.”

His genuine compliment caught Gabriela off guard, sending warmth spreading through her cheeks.

She offered an apologetic smile. “Time is crushing me today — I can’t properly host you.”

“Don’t concern yourself,” Wesley responded smoothly. “Continue your work. I won’t interrupt.”

He selected a book from her shelf and settled onto the sofa with casual ease, clearly intending an extended stay. The situation struck Gabriela as oddly intimate, though she couldn't identify exactly why. Since he was her former employer, ejecting him would be impossibly rude, so she returned to her delicate work.

When Gabriela entered her creative zone, the outside world ceased to exist. Hours dissolved as she sculpted half of the scene's miniature inhabitants. By the time she looked up again, Wesley had disappeared.