

## His kiss 551

### Chapter 551

Brenden, still reeling from the draining torment of wealthy women who had toyed with him, stood hollow-eyed and silent. His body sagged under the weight of exhaustion, his spirit too battered to answer.

“I know what’s really driving you—you’re just out for Gabriela’s sake! Brenden, if Wesley hadn’t shown up tonight, you’d be the one walking out with her. And here you are, pretending to be some selfless romantic, throwing your chance away. Do you think Gabriela even knows what you’ve done?”

Fiona’s voice cut like a blade, her embarrassment twisting into fury as she glared at him with undisguised contempt.

Brenden’s chest tightened, his face clouding with resentment. “Fiona, I already threw away my dignity just to get in here and pull you out. What else do you expect from me?”

The entire evening felt like a nightmare.

Every time he remembered the greedy, appraising stares of the wealthy women, his stomach knotted.

The experience left him shaken, and he dreaded how long it would take before the memory stopped haunting him.

Fiona realized that Brenden had been nothing but loyal to her, and that she had lashed out at him out of frustration.

The tightness in his jaw and the shadow crossing his face made guilt twist in her stomach.

She opened her mouth to apologize when Roderick suddenly appeared, jogging out with two gleaming bottles of wine cradled in his arms.

“Fiona,” he called with a practiced smile. “You didn’t finish these. Do you want to take them along, or shall I keep them here?”

It was common for guests to leave their unfinished bottles sitting at the club.

The last thing Fiona wanted was another encounter with Roderick.

In Brenden’s absence, Roderick didn’t seem so bad—he was, after all, the club’s top escort.

Next to Brenden, Roderick paled in comparison.

Fiona snapped, her tone sharp, “I don’t want them. Take them yourself!”

Roderick's face lit up, and he accepted with unfeigned delight.

"Thanks."

The two bottles together were worth millions.

Clearly, Fiona wasn't just wealthy—she was extravagantly so.

Roderick instantly regretted his earlier roughness.

Leaning in with a softer tone, he said, "Fiona, you're welcome here anytime. I'll even waive the service fee."

Her eyelid gave an involuntary twitch.

She swore she was done with this place for good.

Her mouth opened, ready to snap at Roderick to shut up, when Brenden suddenly turned on his heel. Irritation burned in his chest, and he strode out of Blue Star without another word.

Fiona rushed after him, trailing him through the neon-lit corridor until they reached the dimly lit parking lot. Only then did Brenden finally stop.

She lowered her voice, guilt softening her expression. "Brenden, I didn't mean what I said earlier."

"It's fine," he answered, his tone cold and distant. "I just can't understand why you'd throw money around so carelessly."

Fiona blinked, caught off guard. "What?"

Was Brenden really upset over something so ridiculous?

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She had the money, and she had every right to spend it however she pleased. In this lifetime, she intended to enjoy her freedom without restraint.

Brenden let out a sharp snort. "If you want to admire a handsome guy, why not look at me?"

Her breath caught in her throat.

Watching the tight set of Brenden's jaw and the awkward heat simmering in his expression, she suddenly pieced it together.

Could it be that... Brenden was jealous?

The thought made Fiona's lips curve, a flicker of satisfaction stirring quietly in her chest.

Could her allure truly be so powerful that Brenden's affections wavered from Gabriela to her?

The thought pricked at her conscience, and guilt softened her voice as she murmured, "I'm sorry. Next time I feel like admiring someone handsome, I'll just look at you, alright?"

Brenden gave a cold snort, still smoldering. "Get in the car."

He swung the door open and shielded her head with his hand as she climbed in.

Only then did Fiona notice the quiet gentleness in him—that even when annoyed, he still thought to protect her.

Being with him felt far more reassuring than clinging to that so-called top escort.

Neither of them realized Rebecca was lingering at Blue Star's entrance, watching them with frosty eyes.

Wesley remained completely unaware that Rebecca had followed him to Blue Star.

He only cared about getting Gabriela to the hospital as quickly as possible.

Gabriela's skin burned against him, her body pressing closer, every movement turning more daring.

Slender fingers slipped beneath his shirt, grazing over his chest. "Wesley, we don't need the hospital. Let's just go home, alright?"

Her voice carried a playful lilt, her wide-eyed expression deceptively pure.

Keeping one hand steady on the wheel, Wesley caught her wandering hand with the other, his brow tightening. "Stop that."

But Gabriela, lost in her own reckless longing, didn't notice his anger at all. She was simply acting on impulse.

A dull ache throbbed behind Wesley's temples.

He couldn't bear to picture what might have unfolded tonight if he hadn't shown up.

Neither Brenden nor that so-called top escort would have been able to resist Gabriela in her current state.

Wesley pressed harder on the accelerator, the car speeding toward the hospital.

Meanwhile, Billy wasted no time. He tracked down the drug used at Blue Star and rushed it to the doctor.

After analyzing the ingredients, the doctor finally looked up and prescribed medicine for Gabriela.

“This is a strong compound,” the doctor explained gravely. “The treatment I’ve given her can only suppress the worst of its effects. When you get home, make sure she rests. If her fever doesn’t go down, have her drink plenty of water to help flush the drug from her system.”

Once the sedative took effect, Gabriela’s restless body eased, her breathing slowing into something steadier.

Wesley carried her back to the apartment and gently lowered her onto the bed.

He returned with a clean towel, dabbing her damp forehead with careful strokes.

All at once, Gabriela's eyes fluttered open, and she threw her arms around his neck, clinging to him with sudden urgency.

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The sedative should have kept Gabriela under for two hours.

So how on earth was she awake this soon?

Wesley froze, caught off guard as her arms coiled around him, holding tight, leaving him no room to slip away.

They were so close their breaths tangled, hot and shallow, as though the air itself had thinned.

Her skin was silk beneath his touch. Her eyes were sharp and captivating, pulling him in like a tide.

And those lips, curved in quiet perfection, could undo any man with a single glance.

Wesley could feel his control fraying, a whisper away from closing the distance and claiming her mouth with his.

Gabriela's voice trembled, though her gaze didn't waver. "Wesley, you said you don't like me anymore."

His palms pressed against the bed on either side of her, trapping her in place. His chest tightened, a storm raging behind his ribs, but his voice came out clipped, cold. "I no longer have feelings for you."

Gabriela's eyes locked on his, unwavering. "Then prove it. Kiss me. If you can kiss me and feel nothing, I'll believe you."

His throat tightened, his stare dark as midnight. "I don't force myself to kiss a woman I don't—"

Her lips crashed against his before he could finish, soft and urgent, carrying the faint sweetness of the wine she'd sipped earlier.

The last of Wesley's restraint broke in that instant.

The woman he loved was pressed so close to him that she ignited a fire in his senses he couldn't put out.

How could he not want her?

With a rough, desperate sound, he crushed her against him, kissing her like a drowning man clinging to air.

His fingers deftly unbuttoned her blouse.

Beneath his touch, her stomach was smooth except for the long, deep scar slashed across her skin.

His brows drew together, the heat in his gaze faltering, replaced by stunned silence.

His voice came out rough, edged with something he couldn't name. "Gabriela... did you get hurt?"

Her mind was fogged, thoughts swimming in a haze of desire and confusion. She clung to him, kissing him like she'd drown without him. "Hurt? What do you mean?"

Wesley steadied her by the shoulders, his gaze softening even as worry sharpened his tone. "Did you have surgery? When did this happen?"

"I don't know," she murmured.

She wasn't entirely aware of herself, but somewhere deep inside, instinct screamed at her to never let him find out about the child. So she didn't tell him that it was a C-section scar.

If Wesley discovered the truth, the Moss family would come for the baby.

She couldn't allow that.

Wesley looked at her wide, guileless eyes, and a heavy sigh left him. He remembered her broken childhood, the quiet tragedies that had shaped her, and his chest tightened painfully.

He couldn't marry her.

And now, drugged and unguarded, she was clinging to him, baring her heart without even knowing it.

If he crossed that line now, there would be no undoing it.

Carefully, he lowered her blouse, then scooped her into his arms and carried her toward the bathroom.

"Wesley," she said, her tone so innocently earnest it nearly undid him, "do you... want to do it in the bathroom?"

He almost stumbled, the words hitting him like a jolt.

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Heat shot through him, but he swallowed it down, steadying his voice.

“No... you just came out of a club. Let me run you a bath, alright?”

Gabriela stiffened, panic flickering across her dazed expression. She wriggled in his arms, desperate to put some space between them.

Wesley couldn't help it. He laughed, low and quiet, his chest rumbling against her cheek.

This little troublemaker was so endearing.

He ran the bath, letting her sink into the warmth for a good half hour, then coaxed her to drink a tall glass of warm water. Once she'd swallowed the medicine prescribed by the doctor, Gabriela finally quieted, her restless energy dimming until sleep claimed her.

It was deep into the night when Wesley carried her back to Rosemont Gardens.

Farley's eyes widened the moment he saw them. “What happened? What's wrong with Gabriela?”

Wesley kept his expression unreadable, his voice calm. There was no reason to burden the old man with what had happened at Blue Star.

“She’s been overworked these past few days,” he said evenly. “She’s just sleeping deeply. A night’s rest, and she’ll be fine.”

Farley, thinking of the mounting pressure from the company’s loan troubles, felt a sharp pang of sympathy. Gabriela had been carrying far too much.

Together, they carried Gabriela to her room and gently laid her on the bed.

When they stepped back into the quiet hall, Farley turned to him, gratitude etched into every line of his face. “Mr. Moss, thank you so much for tonight.”

“You’re welcome,” Wesley said, his tone soft but distant. “Don’t tell her it was me who brought her back.”

Farley blinked in surprise. “But she’ll ask when she wakes up.”

“Just tell her it was Brenden,” Wesley murmured. “I’ll tell him to keep the truth from her.”

Knowing his days were numbered, he refused to offer her false hope—it was the kindest thing he could do.

Farley hesitated, then nodded. “Alright.”

Meanwhile, Rebecca returned home from Blue Star, her face alight with barely contained excitement.

Gabriela? At Blue Star? The audacity of that woman walking straight into a place like that, as if begging for trouble. And with Fiona there too?

A slow, satisfied smile curled Rebecca's lips. A little twist to the truth, and their reputations would be in ruins.

Without wasting another moment, she called Luther. "Leak what happened at Blue Star tonight," she said, her voice sharp with anticipation.

On the other end, Luther hesitated.

Jasper had made it clear to keep an eye on Gabriela, nothing more. He'd already bent the rules by reporting that she'd gone to Blue Star, and now Rebecca wanted him to go further, to fan the flames.

Not only would Jasper disapprove, but clearly, this wasn't just about Gabriela anymore. Wesley's name was tangled in this, and that made it dangerous.

Luther, unwilling to make a reckless move, gave nothing more than a hollow promise to try his best.

But as he hung up, his mind raced. Acting rashly could cost him dearly. Better to stall for a few days until he knew exactly where Jasper stood.

After leaving Rosemont Gardens, Wesley dialed Brenden, his tone clipped. “No matter what Gabriela asks, you are not to tell her I was the one who brought her back.”

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Brenden lit up at his words. “Wesley, thanks!”

In his mind, it all made perfect sense. Wesley, about to be married and with no future alongside Gabriela, was pitying his single, love-struck cousin.

That was why Wesley was trying to set him up with Gabriela—and it was exactly the chance he needed to make a good impression on her.

“Wesley, I ruined your engagement party last time, and yet here you are, still treating me so well. I’ll remember this forever. I—”

Wesley ended the call before Brenden could finish his endless chatter.

Still, Brenden was in good spirits. He leaned back in his chair with a grin, already picturing Gabriela’s grateful gaze tomorrow as he hummed a cheerful tune.

The moment the call ended, Wesley's composure cracked. Holding his anger in check, he immediately called Billy. His voice was like steel. "Send more men to Blue Star. I want every trace of those drugs found."

Billy straightened, his expression turning grim. "Understood."

Blue Star had always claimed that every service they provided to their female clientele was legal, that there were no shadows in their dealings.

Gabriela had believed that. It was why she'd dared to go there alone.

And yet, someone had spiked her drink.

Wesley's hands clenched into fists. That wasn't just misconduct. That was a crime.

Previous clients had never raised complaints, which was why Blue Star had been able to operate so smoothly all this time.

But this time, they had crossed a line. They had dared to drug Gabriela—and that single mistake marked the end of Blue Star.

Within the hour, Billy dispatched dozens of bodyguards to the club, tearing through every corner in search of the drugs. Panic swept through the establishment. The owner of Blue Star, seething with fury, rounded on Marcus.

Marcus, cornered and resentful, gritted his teeth. "I had no idea she was a complete exception. Every single client before her has wanted intimacy."

It was true. Most of the wealthy women who came through their doors kept up a façade at first, but sooner or later, they gave in, and when they did, the money flowed even more freely. Marcus, drawn by Gabriela's beauty, had ignored the slow, careful approach Blue Star usually followed.

The owner's voice cut through the tension like a whip. "Enough. Stay home. Don't come in for the next few days."

Frustration burned in Marcus's chest, but he knew better than to argue.

From his seat nearby, Roderick watched the exchange with a flicker of amusement in his eyes.

Marcus might have been as handsome as he was, but that temper was always clashing.

Now, with Marcus out of the picture, his clients would slowly drift away, and Roderick would reclaim the spotlight uncontested.

Feeling smug, he took out his phone, snapped a picture of the two bottles of wine Fiona had gifted him, and posted it on Twitter. “A gift from a distinguished guest. I’m so happy about it.”

Roderick was no stranger to attention.

His striking looks rivaled those of idols, and his refusal to hide his profession only fueled the fascination.

That candor had earned him a massive following of over three million fans.

The post had barely gone live before comments flooded in, netizens scrambling to uncover the exact price of the rare wine.

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The netizens wasted no time digging up the prices of the two bottles.

They cost millions. Absolutely staggering.

Still, curiosity buzzed: which vintage was Roderick flashing around this time?

Moments later, Roderick’s response lit up the feed.

“One bottle is priced at eight million, and the other at three million.”

It was a direct, almost smug answer to the flood of questions.

The netizens were floored, shaking their heads at the sheer absurdity of it all. The world of the wealthy was truly unfathomable.

“Even if I emptied my savings, I wouldn’t afford a glass of that wine,” someone commented.

Another chimed in with playful desperation. “Roderick, are you hiring? I can work as a waiter at Blue Star!”

With practiced charm, Roderick replied, “Welcome to join us!”

To him, it was harmless fun—just simple banter with fans, a small ego boost.

But then, the unexpected happened: his two posts rocketed to the top of the trending charts.

At first, Roderick didn’t grasp the gravity of the situation. The sudden wave of nearly a hundred thousand new followers only fed his excitement.

Meanwhile, casual scrollers, spotting the trending hashtags, assumed they were ads for a luxury liquor brand.

But when they clicked in, what they found was juicy gossip instead.

The entire internet was buzzing, stunned by the audacious spending of that mysterious wealthy woman.

Rebecca, however, eyed the trending topics with mild disdain. To her, the headlines lacked bite. There was nothing there that truly screamed scandal.

But it hardly mattered, as Blue Star was already a trending sensation. Rebecca knew that when she finally exposed the scandal involving Gabriela and Fiona, it would ignite a nationwide frenzy.

Just as she was preparing to pour more money into boosting exposure, a new headline detonated across the internet:

“Blue Star Shuts Down!”

Moments ago, netizens had been joking about applying for jobs there. Now, confusion rippled through them as they flooded Roderick’s Twitter, demanding answers.

Roderick knew the whole story.

Wesley had sent in a small army of bodyguards, who swiftly uncovered the stash of drugs and tipped off the police. Ordinarily, the club's owner had enough influence to smooth things over quietly. But against Wesley, there was no winning.

Blue Star was shut down. Permanently.

Roderick seethed at Marcus, blaming him for the disaster, but fear clawed at him too.

If Wesley decided to target him next, his life would be over.

In a panic, he wiped his posts, locked down his comments, and vanished from the public eye.

Yet silence didn't last long. While Roderick hid, a netizen leaked insider details.

He claimed to be a former male companion at Blue Star and laid out the bare bones of the club's shutdown.

"The whole mess started," he wrote, "when a certain heir's fiancée walked into Blue Star as a guest and requested our top escort. He stormed in later, flanked by over a hundred bodyguards, catching them red-handed. The scene was so terrifying that anyone would have been shaking. In the end, Blue Star was closed down."

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The post sent shockwaves online. Netizens scrambled to figure out who this heir was until someone spilled the tea.

“It is none other than the Moss family heir and the same man who founded Apex Group.”

Disbelief flooded the threads.

Even if his fiancée had visited such a place, why hadn’t she done so discreetly? And how had Wesley found out that very night?

Some netizens even combed through financial news sites, digging up photos of Wesley. They returned to Twitter swooning over his sharp looks, calling him “a man descended from the heavens.”

One incredulous commenter posted, “The top escort at Blue Star pales in comparison to him. Why would his fiancée even think of hiring a male escort?”

Sensing the frenzy, the self-proclaimed insider jumped back into the fray, spinning the story further.

“This situation,” he wrote, “is more complicated than you think. Ms. Dewitt, who’s been feuding with his fiancée, spotted her at Blue Star and decided to follow. She”

booked a private room, ordered the top escort in the establishment, and threw in two bottles of ridiculously expensive wine. But when it came time to pay, Ms. Dewitt realized she didn't have her purse with her, so she called the heir's cousin to cover the bill."

The twists and turns only deepened the chaos.

Netizens, now completely hooked, grew restless with the slow drip of information.

"Hate it when people leave stories half-told!"

"Spit it out already. Don't play with our hearts like that!"

"We need the whole story!"

And with that, the internet erupted.

When Gabriela finally stirred around noon, the chaos raging online still hadn't reached her.

Her head throbbed as she tried to piece together the hazy fragments of the previous night. She remembered seeing Wesley before everything went black. And then, hugging him, kissing him, and even trying to undress him.

The memory made her stomach twist in shame. What the hell was wrong with her?

And yet, more importantly: how did she get home?

Gabriela, notorious for her blackout spells after heavy drinking, couldn't recall a single detail beyond those fleeting flashes.

Dragging herself downstairs, she froze mid-step. Farley was on the sofa, chatting with a guest. It was none other than Brenden.

For a brief moment, Gabriela stood there, stunned.

Brenden, equally flustered, shifted in his seat the moment his eyes met hers.

The humiliation from the night before still clung to him. Being paraded around by wealthy women, only to have the girl he liked witness it, was beyond mortifying.

But then he remembered his cousin's words, and with a subtle inhale, Brenden straightened his spine, forcing calm into his posture.

“Gabriela, you’re finally awake!” Brenden’s voice carried a hint of excitement. “You don’t know how wild things got last night. Thank God you found me in The Okay Room later—”

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Gabriela cut him off, her tone sharp but soft. “You brought me home?”

Brenden hesitated, unease flickering across his face. He couldn’t quite meet her gaze. “Yeah, you don’t remember?”

A quiet disappointment sank into Gabriela’s chest.

So those tender, stolen moments with Wesley, the heat of his touch... all had been nothing more than fragments of a dream.

Worse, after all the chaos she’d stirred up, she still hadn’t managed to talk to Wesley about the Lakeshore Building transfer.

Still, she forced herself to smile and thanked Brenden repeatedly for helping her.

Later, she slipped away to find Truett.

She found him with Ken, the little boy's lower lip jutting out as soon as he saw her.

Having been apart from his mother for a day, he reached for her with both arms, his face etched with innocent heartbreak.

Gabriela's chest ached at the sight.

She scooped him up, hugging him tightly, murmuring comfort until his little sniffles quieted. Then, settling him down, she began preparing his formula.

As Truett grew, her breast milk supply had dwindled. Within a couple of months, she knew she'd have to wean him completely.

From nearby, Brenden watched silently. He'd seen Gabriela like this before, treating the child with such tender devotion, yet it still unsettled him.

He knew the boy wasn't hers. However, the way she looked at Truett, like he was her entire world, baffled Brenden.

Unable to bite back the words, he said quietly, "Gabriela, it's nice that you're really patient with him. He's such a cute baby. I like him too."

Gabriela turned her head, her smile soft and genuine, and simply nodded.

Maybe it was Brenden's gentle words that lightened her mood, and Gabriela offered a polite smile. "Brenden, would you like to stay for lunch?"

Brenden didn't hesitate. "Well, I'm not going to refuse that offer!"

Before long, the table was set, the comforting aroma of freshly cooked dishes filling the air.

But just as they were about to sit down, Brenden's phone rang. Fiona's frantic voice spilled through the speaker. "Check the trending topics now! Something big just dropped!"

The male escort, after leaving netizens hanging for hours, had finally unveiled what he claimed was the real reason for Blue Star's abrupt closure.

"The heir's cousin is close friends with Ms. Dewitt. When she called for help that night, he rushed over immediately. But the club has a strict policy. No male guests allowed. Therefore, the heir's cousin disguised himself as a waiter to slip inside."

"Unfortunately, he walked into the wrong room and ended up at the mercy of a group of wealthy women, which, of course, infuriated the heir. In a blind rage to protect his cousin's dignity, the heir shut Blue Star down."

The news exploded across social media like wildfire.

The abrupt closure of Blue Star was connected to Wesley's cousin.

The revelation took everyone by surprise.

The online reaction was a blend of curiosity and sympathy for Brenden's suffering.

"He is having it rough!"

"Does anyone have a video of what those wealthy women did to Brenden?"

"I'm curious as well!"

Fiona's mood soured as she scrolled through the trending posts. The situation was absurd.

Brenden couldn't even locate the right room she was in at Blue Star. What a fool.

If she kept associating with him, her reputation would be in tatters.

Lydia, a frequent Blue Star patron, was stunned by the online buzz.

“Fiona, why did you go to Blue Star alone? I invited you before, and you brushed me off. If we had gone together, this mess might have been avoided.”

Fiona shot her a sharp look. “Who said I was the one involved?”

Lydia blinked, confused. “Isn’t it obvious? Those posts referred to ‘Ms. Dewitt’ and the heir’s cousin. Everyone knows you and Brenden are tight.”

Fiona felt her world spin.

If even Lydia, who wasn’t the sharpest, could piece it together, the rest of their social circle surely would too.

This scandal could ruin her standing.

Panicked, she dialed Brenden.

Brenden glanced at the trending news on his phone and brushed it off.

“Relax, there is no proof—no photos. Netizens don’t know it’s you. Are you worried about our circle? I’ll just say you were curious about that club. They’ll get it.”

Fiona seethed, grinding her teeth.

Brenden’s nonchalance was infuriating.

Before she could snap, she spotted her father storming in with a whip in hand.

Fiona’s eyes widened in panic, her brows trembling as she frantically pleaded, “Brenden, my dad’s so mad he is about to whip me because of this! Please, come help me!”

Brenden hesitated. He was finally having lunch with Gabriela and didn’t want to deal with this drama.

Hanley doted on Fiona—surely he wouldn’t actually hurt her. A scolding and maybe a month of grounding seemed more likely.

Brenden really didn’t want to get involved.

But Fiona’s frantic tone nagged at him. After telling Gabriela, he rushed to the Dewitts’ house.

Hanley's whip cracked, and Fiona yelped in distress.

Her mother, Lavinia Dewitt, stood nearby, wiping tears. "Stop, Hanley! She's our daughter—you can't treat her like this!"

In truth, Hanley had barely touched her; he adored Fiona. But with the scandal implicating the Howard family, he needed to make a show of discipline to avoid a feud.

"Dad, I didn't do anything wrong! I just went to Blue Star and bought two bottles of wine. I promise I won't visit that place again!" Fiona pleaded.

Lydia, trembling in the corner, mustered a timid defense. "Mr. Dewitt, Blue Star is not what you think—it's a decent place. I go there often, and it's really no big deal."

"Shut up!" Hanley barked, his icy stare pinning Lydia. "Fiona is in this trouble because of your influence."

Terrified of Hanley's wrath, Lydia clamped her mouth shut, not daring to utter another word.

Fiona, desperate to escape her father's fury, saw that Lydia was no help and pinned her hopes on Brenden's arrival.

She darted around the room, dodging Hanley as he pursued her, toppling several costly vases in the chaos.

The scene was pure pandemonium.

Thankfully, Brenden arrived soon after.

He rushed in and, seeing the chaos, stepped protectively in front of Fiona. "Mr. Dewitt, this isn't worth all this anger. It's not a big deal."

"Step aside!" Hanley roared, his temper flaring at the sight of Brenden.

With divorced parents, Brenden was an outcast in both the Moss and Saunders families, only tolerated because of Wesley's backing. To Hanley, he was a bad influence, leading Fiona astray.

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Brenden tried to calm him. "Mr. Dewitt, plenty of girls visit Blue Star for fun. There's no need to make a scene."

Sneering, Hanley swung his whip with full force when Brenden didn't budge, slicing open Brenden's hand.

Fiona gasped, shoving Brenden aside. "Dad, are you insane? Why would you hit him?"

"He's a womanizer, rejected by every decent woman from a proper family. Only someone as foolish as you would waste time with such a loser. Keep this up, and no respectable man will ever marry you!"

Hanley's fury boiled over, his temper unleashed as he found Brenden to target, his words sharp and unrestrained.

Brenden stood frozen, as if caught in a biting blizzard, stripped bare and utterly disoriented.

Fiona's eyes welled with tears, burning with both anger and hurt. "Fine, I messed up this time, but why drag him into it? What has he done to deserve this?"

"He is the one pulling you down!" Hanley snapped back.

As the argument spiraled, Lavinia stepped in, alarmed. "Good heavens, Brenden's hand is bleeding badly! He needs a hospital now!"

A deep cut slashed across Brenden's hand, blood pouring out. Without a word, Fiona, tears streaming, rushed him to the hospital, with Lydia trailing behind in a stunned haze.

At the hospital, Brenden's wound was promptly bandaged. His streak of bad luck was relentless: no sooner had an old wound scarred over than another took its place.

What was worse, his recent concussion from being struck by that bar assailant still lingered, and the doctor recommended a few days of observation.

As soon as Loretta got word of the incident, she rushed to the hospital, pulling Wesley along with her.

Gabriela, stunned to learn that her spontaneous visit to a club had spiraled into such a mess, hurried to the hospital to check on Brenden.

She breathed a sigh of relief seeing his injury wasn't too serious, but Loretta's heart sank at the sight of him—pale, bandaged, and visibly drained.

"Brenden, you poor soul," she said, her voice thick with worry. "Why do you always end up in these situations?"

Brenden, pulling himself together, managed a faint smile to reassure her. "It's just a whip mark, nothing major. I've taken worse hits and come out fine."

But it wasn't the physical pain that stung most—it was Hanley's biting words that had wounded him deeply.

He realized the older generation viewed him as little more than a loser.

Fiona, overhearing this, felt a wave of guilt crash over her.

Tears welled in her eyes as she admitted, "This is all my fault. If I hadn't gone to Blue Star to hire that top escort, Brenden wouldn't be hurt."

Gabriela, catching her words, frowned in confusion. "You hired a top escort too? I thought his name was Marcus."

How was it even possible for the top escort to be double-booked?

The sight of Gabriela irritated Fiona.

If Gabriela hadn't gone to Blue Star, she wouldn't have followed, and Brenden wouldn't be hurt.

In Fiona's eyes, this was mostly Gabriela's fault.

She shot back sharply, "The top escort's name is Roderick, not Marcus!"

So the top escort was Roderick?

Gabriela, uninterested in a pointless argument with Fiona, stayed silent.

Fiona pressed on, "I chose Roderick because he looks like Brenden. So, Gabriela, why did you pick Marcus?"

Her words were a calculated mix of self-defense, a compliment to Brenden for his looks, and a sly attempt to smear Gabriela.

Before Gabriela could reply, Brenden interjected, "I'm way better looking than Roderick."

The room froze; everyone was stunned.

Clearly, Brenden's confidence was untouched, and he didn't need anyone's pity.

Seeing that Brenden was stable, Wesley slipped out of the hospital room.

Gabriela, her thoughts snapping to the Lakeshore Building, hurried after him. "Wesley, hold on, I need to talk to you about something."

Also, let me share this for the second half of the year dear readers, Joshua 1:9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”