

His kiss 561

Chapter 561

Wesley stopped in his tracks, his cold gaze cutting back to Gabriela.

“Why did you transfer the Lakeshore Building to my name?” Gabriela asked, her voice steady but sharp.

For a moment, there was only silence.

The lights of the hospital corridor washed over Wesley’s face, painting him in shades of icy detachment.

When he finally spoke, his tone was distant. “I’m sure you’ve heard that I’m getting married. Transferring assets before marriage is standard practice in our circle. I trust you, and Grandma likes you. That’s why I chose you.”

The words hung in the air like a blade, sharp and merciless.

Gabriela stared at him, disbelief widening her eyes.

She willed herself to stay composed, but the sting in her chest betrayed her.

"I don't believe you, Wesley!" Gabriela's voice rang out, sharp and trembling with emotion. "If this is just some convenient arrangement, then why the hell did Brett wire me that much money?"

Wesley's eyes darkened, his tone dropping to a chilling calm. "Believe whatever story helps you sleep at night. But understand this: with my property in your name, a few million is of little concern."

He stepped closer, his expression unreadable, his voice edged with quiet authority. "And brace yourself. This won't be the last time."

For people like them, bank statements and official accounts were just a fraction of the truth. The hidden properties, secret investments, and off-the-books holdings far exceeded what ordinary minds could even fathom.

Before tying the knot, meticulously cataloging every asset and ensuring no disputes could arise in the event of a divorce was common practice.

Gabriela fixed him with a burning stare. "So that's why you won't see me or take my calls!"

Wesley's eyes remained cold, his nod curt. "Yes. Don't come looking for me again."

Her chest heaved, fury flaring like wildfire. "I won't come looking for you again! And since the Lakeshore Building is in my name, I'm keeping it!"

Her voice rose, fierce and and unyielding. "I will marry the most eligible bachelor in Okburg using your property!"

A flash of tension crossed Wesley's face. His fists clenched, a sharp sneer twisting his lips. "If I could give it to you quietly, Gabriela, I can take it back just as easily."

Her eyes blazed. "Then we'll see about that!"

Wesley said nothing and turned to leave.

Billy hurried to follow him, glancing back at Gabriela despite himself.

She stood frozen, her face vacant, almost as if the world had stopped moving around her.

Billy's mind flickered to memories of how skilled she had once been at pleasing Mr. Moss. She would bend to the will of circumstance without crossing legal boundaries, always bright and ever optimistic.

Her vibrancy was now overshadowed by heartbreak.

The two reached the parking lot.

Wesley sank into the back seat of the car, leaning back with a weary exhale and closing his eyes.

Billy's voice was cautious. "Mr. Moss, shall we return to the company now?"

"Yeah," Wesley replied, his tone clipped.

As the car eased forward, Billy couldn't help stealing glances through the rearview mirror.

Wesley finally broke the silence. "What is it you want to say to me? Spill it."

Billy responded quickly, "The Blue Star buzz online is going viral. Should we try to suppress it?"

"Don't worry about it," Wesley said flatly. "Just make sure Gabriela doesn't get dragged into it."

"Understood," Billy replied.

The incident had blown up so much that even Rebecca's parents, who were rarely active online, had caught wind of it.

In the Howards' house, Matthew's voice carried a restrained edge of anger as he addressed his daughter in the living room. "Rebecca, what were you doing in a place like that?"

The Howards were a family with a long-standing reputation, built over generations through careful cultivation of influence and respect.

Their children were raised with the strictest standards, taught etiquette and character befitting their status.

Daughters from prominent families rarely ventured into such places.

Rebecca frowned, exasperation flashing across her face. "Dad, you've got it all wrong! That anonymous male escort is spreading lies. I wasn't even at Blue Star."

Matthew's lips pressed into a thin line, the anger still simmering. "You are lying," he said, clearly displeased.

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Lauren, sensing the tension between father and daughter, spoke softly, trying to mediate. "If it wasn't you, then why was Wesley there? And what about Fiona and Brenden?"

The flood of online gossip made it impossible to sort fact from rumor.

Rebecca's anger flared, her voice sharp with bitterness. "It was Gabriela! She went there, and Wesley went after her. As for Fiona and Brenden... I have no idea why they were even involved."

Lauren's tone softened. "Gabriela must have had something to do with that male escort, and he made up all sorts of stories about you. Don't worry, Becca. I'll make sure he's found so we can clear your name."

Lauren's words implied that her daughter was being unfairly targeted.

Matthew, hearing his daughter's explanation, relaxed slightly and gave her shoulder a reassuring pat. "I'm glad to hear it wasn't you. I'll have the lawyer issue a warning to the slanderer."

"Thank you, Dad," Rebecca said, a wave of relief washing over her.

She retreated to her bedroom, shut the door behind her, and immediately dialed Luther.

Holding back her simmering anger, she asked, "What happened? I told you to leak the Blue Star incident, but why did it end up dragging me into this?"

Luther's voice was respectful. "Sorry, Miss Howard. I didn't plan carefully enough. I can't explain why Blue Star suddenly became such a hot topic, but I'm doing everything I can to manage the fallout."

Rebecca's eyes widened in disbelief. "So this whole mess was not your doing?"

“No. We believe it began with that male escort’s posts of the expensive wine from his client,” Luther answered. “Originally, this could have been handled quietly. Blue Star would have closed without attracting much attention.”

But when Blue Star suddenly became a trending topic only to be abruptly shut down, the scandal was bound to go viral nationwide.

Rebecca sank onto her bed, her hands clenching.

Damn it! Was it really her own actions that had trapped her in this mess?

Rebecca’s mask of composure cracked. “It was Gabriela who went to that club, not me! Who twisted the facts?”

Luther’s voice remained maddeningly steady. “I’m still looking into it.”

Her tone turned glacial, slicing the air. “I don’t care how you do it, but by tonight, I want my name scrubbed from this whole mess. Understand?”

Her anger flared hotter, spilling into cruelty. “I want Gabriela’s name dragged through the mud.”

Silence followed. Luther's lack of response only fed the fire.

Rebecca's eyes narrowed, her voice a whip. "Why aren't you saying anything? Do I need to bring my cousin to make you listen?"

Finally, Luther spoke, cautious and deliberate. "Miss Howard... perhaps you should look at the trending topics first."

Something in his tone unsettled her. A cold ripple of dread slid down her spine as she grabbed her phone.

The latest feed refreshed.

The moment she clicked the article, Rebecca's stomach sank. Several photos appeared, clearly showing her standing at the entrance of Blue Star.

Three different angles captured her unmistakably.

A shiver ran down Rebecca's spine.

Without photos, she could have denied ever being there. But now? The images provided undeniable proof.

Any excuse vanished.

Worse, the photos captured only her. No Gabriela, no Fiona. She was alone in the frame.

Panic surged.

There was only one person she could turn to: Jasper.

Throwing on her coat, she rushed to his house.

Inside his study, Jasper was casually handling a gift from a business partner.

It was a bespoke dagger, its blade razor-sharp and glinting ominously.

Luther stood nearby, having already briefed him on the trending topic, awaiting instructions.

Before Jasper could speak, Rebecca burst in. "Jasper, please, you have to help me!"

Jasper twirled the dagger in his hand. He set it down, reached out, and gently brushed a strand of hair from her face. His calm voice was a balm. "Don't worry. I'll take care of this."

Relief flooded her, and she clung to his arm, urgency and desperation in her tone.

"Jasper, I'm sure Gabriela and Fiona are behind this. Please, you have to teach them a tough lesson!"

Chapter 563

Jasper, who had always cared for Rebecca, tried to calm her down with patient explanations.

"This isn't just about Gabriela and Fiona," he said, his tone calm but firm. "Wesley's involved too. We can't afford to be reckless. Keep your head down until this blows over. I'll take care of everything."

Rebecca gave a small nod.

Around Jasper, she was always obedient, never daring to cross the lines he drew.

Of course, Jasper found this immensely satisfying.

The moment Rebecca stepped out of his residence, that carefully worn mask shattered. Sliding into the back seat of her car, her voice turned to ice.

“Find me a few reliable men,” she said coolly, “and make sure Gabriela learns her place.”

The driver hesitated, fingers tightening on the steering wheel. Since taking this job, he’d realized that driving for Rebecca often meant brushing dangerously close to crime. “Miss Howard, what you’re proposing is unlawful.”

The driver hesitated, though his real concern wasn’t the law, but that her pay never quite matched the danger.

Rebecca flicked a sleek black card onto the seat between them, her patience thinning. “Two million. Find men who know how to keep their mouths shut. I want Gabriela’s name plastered across headlines by tomorrow.”

Money had a way of buying silence and loyalty.

The driver’s hesitation vanished, replaced by a glint of excitement as he pocketed the card. “Consider it done, Miss Howard.”

Rebecca leaned back and closed her eyes, a soft, cold hum escaping her lips.

She had gone through several drivers before finding a man with connections in both the polished, legal world and the shadows beneath it.

The thugs he knew were more than capable of taking down someone like Gabriela.

After leaving the hospital, Gabriela didn't bother heading back to the company.

The finances were steady, morale was high, and with Kaleb bringing in a new director, everything was on track. Her absence for a day or two would not make a difference.

Her feet carried her without much thought until she found herself near the Apex Group building.

Almost on instinct, she slipped into a nearby café.

Memories stirred as she settled into a corner seat; the first time she had ever brought lunch for Wesley had been right here. She had assumed Brenden was playing a prank on her, so she had thrown in random ingredients without a second thought.

Only now, looking back, did she realize that it had actually been Wesley's birthday that day.

A few years ago, still recovering from his heart transplant, he had spent that day in a hospital room, assuming she had remembered and brought him lunch on purpose.

That day, Wesley had even smiled faintly and asked, “Do you remember what day it is today?”

She hadn’t. She had completely forgotten. He must have been so disappointed.

Back then, she had been too caught up in chasing promotions and pay raises, blind to everything else.

The memory twisted like a knife now, and Gabriela did not dare dwell on it.

She had been careless, and perhaps that was why Wesley had kept the truth of their one-night stand from her.

And later, when her memories returned, she had had the audacity to doubt him, to accuse him of hurting Allan, to spit out those cruel, venomous words.

Gabriela lowered her head, her eyes stinging with regret.

Chapter 564

No wonder Wesley was so distant with her now.

“Miss, would you like something to drink?”

The server’s polite voice drew her from her thoughts, and Gabriela looked up, quietly ordering a latte with no ice.

Wesley had always preferred his coffee that way.

Given his frail health, he should not be drinking so much of it. She wondered if Rebecca was even taking proper care of him.

She shook her head, frustrated. Why did every little thing lead her back to thoughts of him?

“Gabriela? Is that really you?”

A startled voice cut through her thoughts, sharp and unexpected. Gabriela looked up and froze when she saw Stewart standing in front of her.

“Mr. Williams? What brings you here?” she asked, startled.

“Our company is working on a project with Apex Group,” he replied with an easy smile. “I had a meeting earlier and thought I’d stop by for some coffee.”

Gabriela gave a polite nod. "What would you like to drink? My treat."

Stewart didn't answer right away. Instead, his gaze lingered on her.

The weight of it made her shift uncomfortably. "Is something wrong?" she asked, trying to mask her unease.

"Your eyes," he said bluntly. "They're red. Have you been crying?"

Caught off guard, Gabriela quickly shook her head. "No... I've just been staying up late recently."

"You should take better care of yourself," Stewart said, his tone softening. "And maybe cut back on the coffee."

Before she could respond, his hand closed firmly around hers. "Come on. I want to show you something."

Gabriela blinked in surprise as he pulled her up from her seat.

"Wait, my latte hasn't even—"

"We'll take it to go," he interrupted smoothly, collecting the drink from the counter before guiding her out of the café.

Minutes later, she found herself settling into the passenger seat of his car.

When Stewart leaned over to buckle her seatbelt, she instinctively turned her face toward the window, murmuring, "Thank you."

"Sit tight," he said with quiet authority, pressing the accelerator. The car leapt forward, disappearing into the flow of traffic.

Left standing on the curb, Erik watched the taillights vanish into the distance before crouching down in frustration.

A moment later, Billy's car came to a stop next to him. "Erik? Why are you sitting out here alone? Aren't you supposed to be driving Mr. Williams?"

Erik sighed, a note of resignation in his voice. "He ran into Gabriela, decided to take her somewhere, and told me to get out of the car."

Billy felt a strange chill creep through the air, the temperature in his own car seeming to dip without warning.

From the back seat, Wesley had heard every word.

Billy gripped the steering wheel a little tighter, choosing his words carefully. "Erik, do you know where Mr. Williams is taking Gabriela?"

"I'm not sure," Erik answered. "But it's spring, so probably to see the flowers or something. Women are usually into that sort of thing, right?"

Billy didn't need to glance at the rearview mirror to feel the sharp, dangerous edge of Wesley's expression.

He opened his mouth to ask more, but a taxi pulled up.

With a quick goodbye, Erik slipped inside and was gone, leaving Billy alone with the heavy silence filling the car.

Regret settled in fast.

He should have just kept his mouth shut instead of asking Erik so many questions.

Chapter 565

Now, with Wesley sitting there like a storm about to break, Billy could practically feel the temperature drop.

Seconds ticked by. Wesley didn't say a word.

Finally, when Billy dared to speak, his voice was cautious. "Mr. Moss, are we still heading to The Gilded Fork?"

Wesley had an important lunch meeting with a client, but the silence dragged until at last a single word cut through it.

"Yes."

Billy straightened, instantly starting the engine.

Stewart drove for over an hour before finally easing the car to a stop.

"Alright, we're here," he said, stepping out and circling around to open the door for her.

Gabriela climbed out, and the moment her feet touched the ground, her breath caught.

Before her stretched a vast expanse of flowers, rippling under the soft breeze like a sunlit sea.

White butterflies fluttered lazily above the blooms, and for a moment, it felt as though the world had been painted in gold.

Unable to help herself, she walked forward a few steps, eyes wide with wonder.

Stewart chuckled at her expression. "Well? Beautiful, isn't it?"

Gabriela nodded, still drinking in the sight. "In all my years of living in Okburg, I never knew this place existed. How did you even find it?"

With a boyish grin, Stewart replied, "I have a knack for seeking out natural beauty."

Gabriela turned to him, her voice sincere. "That's amazing, Mr. Williams."

His smile faltered, a hint of playful irritation flashing across his face. "Gabriela, we've been friends for years. When are you going to stop with the formalities?"

Gabriela laughed softly. "Fine. From now on, I'll call you Stewart."

That earned her a genuine laugh. "That's better."

Then, without waiting, he tugged her hand and led her deeper into the field. "Come on, give me your best pose. I'm taking your picture."

Gabriela shook her head quickly. "No need."

Stewart burst out laughing. "Please. These days, every young woman loves to post a dozen photos after going out for fun."

With a resigned sigh, Gabriela allowed him to take a few shots, awkwardly posing while Stewart directed her.

Then, at his insistence, she snapped a few photos of him, and finally, he pulled her close for a couple of playful selfies together.

Hours slipped by in a blur of laughter and golden light, and before long, the horizon had begun to blush with the warm hues of dusk.

Gabriela felt it was time to head home.

But Stewart wasn't having it. He shook his head with a boyish grin. "You want to go back with that gloomy expression? Not a chance. Come on, I'm taking you somewhere else."

Stewart led Gabriela to the seaside, guiding her down to sit on the soft sand. The sun was just kissing the horizon, spilling golden light across the coastline.

It was that fleeting, magical hour when the sky hovered between day and night, and the vast sea shimmered with an air of mystery.

Gabriela realized she couldn't remember the last time she had witnessed a sunset like this.

Twilight had never seemed so unexpectedly breathtaking.

Stewart settled beside her, his gaze fixed on her with careful intensity.

In his eyes, the sunset paled next to Gabriela's beauty, and every look of hers—every smile or frown—sent ripples through his heart.

Chapter 566

As the sun sank below the horizon, darkness swiftly enveloped the surroundings.

Gabriela rose to her feet, dusting the sand from her clothes. "Stewart, let's head home," she said softly.

With night falling, she knew Truett might grow anxious if he could not see her.

This time, Stewart did not argue. He clasped Gabriela's hand and suggested, "How about a quick photo to capture the moment?"

He lifted his phone, leaning in close to her.

The picture was taken in an instant. He then showed her the day's images on his phone.

"Take a look. Which ones do you like? I'll send them to you."

Gabriela had little interest in the photos.

Her childhood had taught her that pictures were often evidence of her suffering. This had left her with an aversion to being photographed.

Still, seeing Stewart's excitement, she pointed to a couple at random. "These two look nice."

"No problem. I'll send them to you!" Stewart grinned, forwarding them to her.

He then uploaded the photos to his social media with a caption: “The scenery is beautiful, but the company is even better.”

Gabriela watched him post it and felt it was inappropriate. She considered asking him to take it down, but he had already pocketed his phone.

“Let’s head back,” he said cheerfully.

Gabriela let the request die on her lips.

At The Gilded Fork, Wesley sat distracted, his eyes glued to his phone.

He had tasked Billy with monitoring Gabriela’s return to the villa. By 10:30 p.m., she still hadn’t arrived, and his mood darkened upon hearing the report.

Then he saw Stewart’s post—a photo of Gabriela, radiant and smiling, standing close to Stewart.

Jealousy twisted in Wesley’s gut, a suffocating knot that made it hard to breathe.

His heart stung with familiar pain.

Across the table, his client, Jaycob Stanley, noticed his preoccupation. "Mr. Moss, if something urgent has come up, we can reschedule," he offered courteously.

Wesley's mind was indeed elsewhere. "My apologies, Mr. Stanley."

Jaycob nodded understandingly, and they exchanged a handshake before parting.

As Wesley stepped out of The Gilded Fork, Billy approached.

"She is still not back?" Wesley asked sharply.

"No," Billy replied.

Wesley's frustration flared. "Call Farley..." He paused, then shook his head. "Forget it, I'll do it."

He quickly dialed Farley's number.

Farley, surprised by the late call, answered, "Mr. Moss? What's wrong?"

"Where is Gabriela?" Wesley demanded.

“She hasn’t returned yet,” Farley said calmly.

Wesley’s irritation spiked at Farley’s nonchalance. “She is like family to you, Farley. Doesn’t it worry you that she’s out this late?”

Farley paused, glancing at the clock. “It’s no big deal.”

Gabriela often worked late into the night during busy periods, sometimes not returning until dawn.

Additionally, as a devoted mother, Gabriela consistently demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility, which had earned Farley’s unwavering trust.

Farley’s casual tone only fueled Wesley’s frustration.

How could Farley be so relaxed when Gabriela was out so late at night?

Now she was even bold enough to hire a male escort to spend time with her and have fun, and Stewart was taking her around as well. Once he was out of the picture, who knew how reckless she might become?

Gritting his teeth, Wesley said, "Farley, she's a young woman. If she's not home by ten, you should check on her."

Farley, puzzled by Wesley's intensity, responded, "Gabriela is an adult. She knows what she should and shouldn't do. Meddling too much might push her away."

Wesley was at a loss for words.

He had told Gabriela he didn't like her, so she had moved on to someone else without hesitation.

And yet, he was the one who couldn't let go.

Chapter 567

"Thank you for your concern, Mr. Moss. I'll let Gabriela know when she's back," Farley said politely before hanging up.

Unable to resist, Wesley called Gabriela.

She had just settled into the car, buckling her seatbelt, when her phone lit up with Wesley's name. Her heart raced, nerves tingling. Stewart, assuming it was Farley, smiled and nudged her to answer.

Taking a steadying breath, Gabriela picked up. "Wesley."

Upon hearing the name, Stewart's smile faded, his lips tightening.

"Where are you?" Wesley's voice was sharp, almost accusatory.

His tone doused the flicker of hope Gabriela had felt.

"I'm at the beach," she replied evenly.

"Come home. Now," he ordered.

His commanding attitude grated on her. "Why should I do what you say? I'm enjoying myself out here, I'm not ready to go back."

Wesley's chest tightened with anger, his jaw clenched. "Do you even know what time it is? A young woman out late with some guy—aren't you worried about what could happen?"

Gabriela's fingers trembled, her temper flaring but held in check. "Wesley, you know who I'm with, don't you? Stewart is a gentleman; he's just showing me a good time."

Hearing her defend Stewart, her voice warm with familiarity, drove Wesley to the edge. His words spilled out recklessly. "Gabriela, the money I give you is yours to spend, and you can marry any man you choose. But you will not marry Stewart!"

Gabriela's frustration surged when she thought of his upcoming wedding to Rebecca, and she couldn't understand why he was interfering in her personal life. "Mr. Moss, take your money back. Otherwise, I'll spend it how I please!"

"Gabriela!" Wesley's voice rose, sharp with exasperation. "Are you really defying me?"

Gabriela had tried countless times to bridge the gap between them, but his constant rejections had worn her down.

Her eyes stung as she gave up. "I'm done listening. If you've got a problem with it, come and get me yourself."

She hung up abruptly.

Stewart, sitting beside her, shifted uncomfortably.

Realizing he had overheard, Gabriela muttered, "Sorry you had to hear that."

He shook his head, acting as if he hadn't heard anything.

“Up. I’ll get you home.”

Farley heard footsteps outside his room.

He slipped on a jacket and came out. When he switched on the lights, they revealed Gabriela seated on the couch in a daze.

“Gabriela? Why are you sitting in the dark?” he asked gently.

She exhaled deeply, mustering a faint smile. “Just exhausted, Farley. I needed a minute. By the way, how was Truett today?”

“He was an angel, no trouble at all,” Farley replied, pausing before adding cautiously, “Mr. Moss called earlier. He seemed really worried about you.”

“Oh, I know,” Gabriela said softly. “He called me too.”

Farley found himself at a loss for words.

He could sense Wesley's affection for Gabriela, but with his impending marriage to the Howard family's daughter, any chance of a future between them seemed impossible.

Hoping to lighten Gabriela's mood, he offered brightly, "How about a late-night snack? I can whip something up for you."

Gabriela shook her head. "Thanks, but I'm okay. I ate with a friend earlier."

She retreated to her room, letting the warmth of a hot shower wash over her.

As she towel-dried her hair, her phone buzzed—Stewart's name lit up the screen.

"Gabriela, I forgot to mention something earlier."

She sank onto the edge of her bed, rummaging for her hairdryer. "What's that?"

"Don't ever settle for less than you're worth, no matter what happens." His gentle words carried through the line. "Allan told me someone as exceptional as you should be loved by the best man in the world."

Chapter 568

At the mention of Allan's name, Gabriela's hand stilled, her voice low. "Thank you."

“You should be thanking Allan,” Stewart replied with a faint smile. “Now, get some rest. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight,” Gabriela whispered, her tone softer than the night air.

When the call ended, Stewart remained by his car, his eyes drifting toward the quiet villa. The stillness there only deepened the ache in his chest.

Every time Gabriela’s heart was bruised because of Wesley, it wounded him as well.

Gabriela’s love for Wesley ran deep. How could he ever hope to claim a place in her heart?

That night, sleep eluded more than one soul.

After Gabriela ended the call, Wesley did not dial her number again. He sat in silence, rubbing at his temples as a dull ache throbbed behind them, a powerless fury gnawing at him. He couldn’t marry her, yet the thought of her with another man was unbearable.

The contradiction drained him; lately, the constant turmoil had left him utterly spent.

A knock at the door interrupted his brooding.

“Gabriela has returned home safely,” Billy said.

Wesley only murmured a faint acknowledgment and waved him off to rest.

Alone once more, he reached for the bracelet he had once placed on Gabriela’s wrist. All night, he turned it over in his hand, sleepless.

Meanwhile, Stewart hadn’t returned home either.

After ending the call, he lingered outside Gabriela’s house, the night air growing colder by the hour. By morning, the damp chill had seeped into him, leaving his body heavy with a cold.

He went to the hospital for an IV drip and casually made a new post on social media: “Caught a serious chill from the wind last night. Down with a bad cold.”

Friends and family responded with concern, but Gabriela—the one person he hoped to hear from—never commented on his post.

Frustration welled in Stewart’s chest.

Whenever Wesley so much as frowned, Gabriela would grow restless, rushing to cook for him and personally feed him his medicine.

But when Stewart fell ill, she hadn't even sent a single message.

Stewart spent the entire day in the hospital, listless beneath the IV drip.

"Mr. Williams," a nurse finally said with gentle firmness, "the doctor made it clear that your condition isn't serious enough to require a hospital stay."

Her meaning was obvious. Beds were limited, and for a simple cold, there was no need to occupy one.

As Stewart stepped out of the hospital, his dark expression was enough to make Erik falter.

"Mr. Williams, are you still feeling unwell? Would you like to go back for another IV?" Erik asked with concern.

"Shut up."

One look into Stewart's glacial eyes was enough to silence him. Even so, Erik couldn't suppress the thought gnawing at him: if his boss truly wanted Gabriela's attention, why not send her a direct message?

Chapter 569

Why not be more straightforward about it?

No wonder Gabriela kept her distance.

Stewart shot Erik a glare. "What's with that look? Do you think I can't compare to Wesley? That I deserve to rot in a hospital bed with no one by my side?"

Erik stiffened, speechless.

The irony was cruel, because Stewart's family and friends had all rushed to his bedside as soon as they heard he was sick. And yet Stewart had driven them away, irritated by their fussing, preferring the silence of solitude.

This loneliness... it was his own doing.

But Erik couldn't forget the sting of the punishment he'd once endured for a careless remark about Billy's flashy car. The memory pressed down on him, silencing any hint of honesty.

Swallowing his unease, he plastered on a quick, submissive smile and said as carefully as he could, "Mr. Williams, perhaps it's for the best that Gabriela doesn't know you're unwell right now."

Stewart raised an eyebrow, intrigued. "Why?"

Erik quickly launched into his analysis. "You got sick after taking her to the beach, and you didn't tell her. When she finds out later, she'll definitely feel guilty. Trust me, plenty of romances start with a little guilt."

Stewart shot him a skeptical look and tapped his forehead. "What would you know about romance? You've never even had a girlfriend."

Erik opened his mouth, ready to argue.

But seeing the storm brewing in Stewart's eyes, he wisely swallowed the words.

Stewart pressed on. "And if Gabriela never finds out?"

"You could adjust the privacy settings on your post so it stays up for a while," Erik replied. "Then, in a few days, create a chance for her to see it."

Stewart nodded thoughtfully, fiddling with the settings, though a puzzled expression lingered. "Not bad. But tell me this, if you're so smart, why don't you have a girlfriend?"

Erik just turned to start the car, thinking wryly to himself that they were in the same boat, so it was best not to sling mud at each other.

Two days later, Brenden was finally discharged from the hospital.

Fiona immediately suggested they visit a psychic named Samuel Guzman, thinking he might have a way to help Brenden get rid of his bad luck.

Brenden's brow furrowed into a stormy scowl. "Fiona, I doubt he can help me. I'm not stepping foot in that place."

Fiona didn't flinch. Her voice was calm, coaxing. "Come on, Brenden. You've had nothing but bad luck lately. Just give it a try. If Mr. Guzman can help turn things around, that's wonderful. And if it doesn't, you haven't lost a thing. Just get in the car first, please?"

Perhaps because Brenden had suffered a whipping on her behalf, Fiona treated him with unusual tenderness now. She persuaded, and finally managed to get him into the car.

Chapter 570

As their hands brushed, Brenden felt an unexpected jolt of warmth in his chest, and for once, he fell quiet.

Soon, they reached Samuel's home, a charming villa nestled on the outskirts of town.

Crossing the main entrance, the yard unfolded before them. On the left, three cypress trees stood in a perfect row, each about five feet tall, their slender forms swaying gently in the breeze.

Brenden's eyes lingered, captivated.

Noticing, Fiona murmured softly, "Those are cypress trees."

Of course, Brenden knew exactly what kind of trees they were.

Yet as he gazed at them, he couldn't explain the strange clarity and quiet energy they seemed to radiate, compelling him to steal a few more glances.

Soon, they entered the living room. Samuel stood there in a simple gray T-shirt, slim, with a modest mustache.

Beside him stood a slight, alert teenager.

Samuel didn't strike Brenden as particularly wise or reliable, yet he still offered a polite greeting. "Hello, Mr. Guzman."

Samuel returned the nod with a gentle expression. "Fiona has told me about your situation. Please, follow me."

They stepped into a side room, clearly arranged to receive visitors.

A table sat at its center, while at the far end an altar displayed a statue that exuded a faintly mystical aura.

Samuel pulled out several cards and spread them across the table. He had Brenden choose a set of cards, then studied them intently.

Five long minutes passed before he finally spoke. "It doesn't look good, if I can be honest. Your bad luck runs deep."

Brenden snorted in response.

Of course. The oldest trick in the book: paint everything in the bleakest tones first.

Fiona, however, looked tense. "Mr. Guzman, please help us. What should we do?"

"I'm not sure if I can, but I will try my best."

He disappeared briefly to wash his hands, then went to the courtyard to begin the ritual.

He placed a ring of candles on the ground, their flames casting a flickering light.

Brenden stepped forward as instructed.

“Today, if you cross each candle without incident, you’ll have peace for the rest of your life,” Samuel said.

Brenden stared at the flames, a cold knot forming in his stomach. He hesitated, unwilling to step forward.

Fiona leaned close, her voice low but urgent. “Go ahead. Just do as Mr. Guzman says.”

Not wanting to argue with Fiona, Brenden began stepping over the candles, and at first, everything was fine—he was managing it successfully.

Then, perhaps because his mind was elsewhere, his left pant leg caught a spark.

Within seconds, flames climbed up his thigh.

Brenden screamed and dropped to the ground, rolling frantically to smother the fire.

Fiona's eyes widened in shock. She quickly grabbed a basin of water and hurled it over Brenden.