

His kiss 591

Chapter 591

Matthew's throat constricted with emotion.

Gabriela was his daughter. She was meant to lean on him, trust him, and bask in the security of a father's care.

Yet now, her eyes burned with bitterness when she looked at him.

He spoke deliberately, his voice soft but firm. "Gabriela, you've got me all wrong. Rebecca has made mistakes, so she should pay for her actions. I'll see to it she learns her lesson. I won't let her hurt you again. Please trust me—I will keep you safe and never let anyone hurt you."

His words were heartfelt, meant to offer solace and certainty. But when Gabriela heard her name spoken so warmly, a chill ran through her.

Still, with Matthew being so earnest, she couldn't simply brush him off.

"Mr. Howard, please, come inside," she said, guiding him into the villa's cozy living room.

Ken, upon learning who Matthew was, served him tea with a polite smile but a sharp edge to his words. "We only have simple tea here, Mr. Howard. I hope it is not too plain for your refined tastes."

Matthew's expression flickered with understanding as he caught the undercurrent in Ken's tone.

Rather than irritation, he felt a quiet gratitude.

At least Gabriela had friends watching over her.

Just then, Farley emerged, carrying a freshly bathed Truett. "Gabriela, Truett has been restless all day. I'm wondering if he is under the weather."

He stepped into the room, only then noticing the visitor.

After learning about Matthew's identity, Farley's expression mirrored Ken's—cool and distant. He did not even bother with a word of acknowledgment.

Truett stretched out his tiny arms toward Gabriela the moment he saw her.

She scooped him up, soothing him with gentle pats until he calmed.

Matthew's gaze settled on Truett.

The boy's delicate features made him utterly endearing. He would occasionally glance at Matthew, babbling nonsense in a way that only added to his charm.

The more Matthew watched, the more his heart warmed.

"Gabriela, could I hold him?" he asked softly.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Howard," she replied without hesitation. "A friend held him once, and he got peed on. With your esteemed status, it's probably best not to risk it."

Matthew sensed the excuse but did not press further.

He rose, slowly taking in the living room's decor.

Was this where Alanna had later lived?

Did she feel isolated and afraid, raising a child alone?

This very villa was where Gabriela had endured her aunt's cruelty and her cousin's torment.

The thought overwhelmed Matthew, urging him to confess the truth and make amends—to finally give Gabriela the life of a cherished daughter.

“Gabriela, I would like to speak with you privately,” he said.

Before she could respond, Farley interjected, “Whatever you need to say, Mr. Howard, you can say it here. Ken and I are her family; we should hear it too.”

Matthew felt a pang of envy at their protectiveness.

This was his daughter, and he should have been the one protecting her.

With measured patience, he replied, “I assure you, I mean Gabriela no harm.”

Farley opened his mouth to argue, but Gabriela cut in, wary of escalating the tension.

The Howard family, despite their polished exterior, was not to be trifled with.

“It’s fine, Farley. I would like to know what he has to say,” she said, moving to pass Truett to him.

But Truett, unusually clingy, wrapped his arms around her and held on tightly, letting out soft whimpers of protest.

Chapter 592

His tiny sounds of discontent were impossible to ignore.

Who could resist such a heartfelt display of need?

Even Gabriela couldn't. Her cheeks flushed with mild embarrassment as she asked, "Mr. Howard, is it alright if I keep holding him while we talk?"

She reasoned it was fine, since the baby would not understand any of the adult conversation.

Matthew observed the boy's strong bond with Gabriela, and a troubling thought stirred within him.

"Gabriela, whose child is this?" he asked, the question slipping out despite how inappropriate it was.

As her father, he feared she might be retracing her mother's difficult path.

Before Gabriela could respond, Farley cut in sharply, "Mr. Howard, didn't you come here to apologize? Why are you probing into her private life? The child's parentage does not seem like it is your business."

"It's everything to me," Matthew thought, stung by envy and frustration.

Records showed Farley was merely Alanna's former assistant. How had he become such a paternal figure to Gabriela?

She was his daughter.

But Matthew swallowed those thoughts and turned to Gabriela, hoping for a softer response.

Instead, she nodded coolly. "Mr. Howard, if you have something important to say, go ahead, but my personal matters are not your concern."

Her distant tone left Matthew with a quiet ache.

Gabriela pressed a gentle kiss to Truett's cheek, whispering, "Be good, Truett. Farley will look after you for a bit."

Farley, with a warm smile, took the reluctant boy, soothing him as he carried him to another room.

The tender scene pierced Matthew's heart, his eyes welling with unspoken grief.

His fists clenched as he held back a wave of sorrow.

In the study, Gabriela faced him. "Mr. Howard, what do you need to discuss?"

Matthew hesitated for a long moment, then finally, unable to contain himself, he blurted, "Please, stop calling me Mr. Howard."

The formality felt like a wall between them.

He could not stand it.

Gabriela tilted her head, puzzled. "Then what should I call you?"

A sharp pang twisted in Matthew's chest.

He realized that her strained history with Rebecca had only deepened her wariness toward the Howard family.

Revealing that he was her father now might only push her further away.

Cautiously, he asked, "Gabriela, I heard you've never met your father?"

She frowned, finding his question increasingly strange.

"My mother said he went far away," she replied, her voice flat.

Relief washed over Matthew, grateful that Alanna had not spoken ill of him to their daughter.

Gabriela went on, "As I got older, I assumed he must be dead. Why else would he never show up?"

Her words hit Matthew like a blow, deepening his sorrow.

"Maybe he had reasons beyond his control," he said, his voice thick with emotion.

"That means nothing to me," she replied, devoid of feeling.

Memories of her childhood surfaced—her mother caring for her alone until she was eight, followed by the nightmare that began after her death.

She had once dreamed of a heroic father swooping in to save her from her aunt's starvation punishments or when Phyllis beat her nearly to death.

But growing up had shattered those childish fantasies.

Matthew's heart broke at her emotionless reference to her father.

To her, he was a stranger—not even worth resenting.

Noticing the pain in his gaze, Gabriela grew uneasy.

Was Matthew... pitying her?

How peculiar.

Worried about her son, she said, "Mr. Howard, if there's nothing urgent..."

“There is!” he interrupted, his voice tight with urgency and unspoken truth.

Chapter 593

Matthew’s interruption came fast and sharp.

Gabriela assumed he had something weighty to announce. “Mr. Howard, please, go ahead.”

He wrestled silently with the words.

But as he met Gabriela’s clear yet distant gaze, the truth he wanted to say—that he was her father—stalled on his tongue. In the end, the words that emerged were different.

“I will grant you three requests. No conditions.”

The moment the promise left his lips, the air seemed to freeze. For a second, Gabriela wondered if she had misheard. But after thinking it through, it made perfect sense.

She held evidence of Rebecca’s crimes, and her father—ever the doting protector—must be afraid she would expose them if she were pushed too far.

So he had come to win her over.

A devoted father indeed.

Gabriela found it bitterly ironic. She had never trusted cunning, wealthy businessmen for even a heartbeat.

With a trace of sarcasm, she asked, "Can you really stand by your word?"

Matthew nodded with grave certainty. "I mean it."

Gabriela immediately pulled out a sheet of paper and a pen, sliding them across the table. "Talk is cheap."

Matthew was stung by his daughter's mistrust, a wave of bitterness rising in his chest.

Still, he took the pen, wrote out his pledge, and signed his name.

Gabriela had not expected him to put it down in black and white.

For a fleeting moment, she even felt a stab of envy for Rebecca. No matter what chaos Rebecca caused, her parents always came running to shield her.

Gabriela tucked the paper safely away, her voice no longer quite so sharp.

“Mr. Howard, I see you are a reasonable man. Keep your daughter from troubling me, and I promise the evidence will stay locked away forever.”

Misunderstood so deeply, Matthew’s heart clenched, the words choking unspoken in his throat.

Yet with no way to explain, he simply gave a nod. “Don’t worry. I’ll see to it.”

Gabriela noticed how readily he conceded, and her thoughts shifted toward her company’s recent headaches. A sudden idea sparked in her mind.

“May I cash in one request now?”

“Go ahead.” Matthew brightened, eager for the chance to do something—anything—for his daughter.

“Do you know Orion Bolton?” Gabriela asked.

Matthew, long removed from company affairs, shook his head. “What about him?”

Gabriela outlined the hotel dispute in a few words. “The renovations are halfway done, yet someone keeps throwing obstacles in the way. I know the hand behind it comes from your family—Jasper. Could you speak with him? Tell him to honor his word and quit meddling. Anyway, I won’t hand the hotel back to him.”

She brought up the hotel, though truthfully, she hadn’t expected Matthew’s help.

By contract, the hotel legally belonged to Haynes Group.

But Jasper, regretting the deal, claimed the group had taken unfair advantage. He wanted to repay the renovation costs and snatch the hotel back. Gabriela would have none of it.

At worst, she’d drag the fight into court. Even if Jasper outweighed her, she’d make sure he paid dearly.

Hearing this, Matthew’s brow furrowed deeply. “I’ll have someone look into it.”

Noticing he wasn’t brushing her off, Gabriela thanked him sincerely.

After their talk, they stepped out of the study—only to find another visitor waiting in the living room.

It was Wesley.

Seated comfortably on the sofa, he was being served tea by Ken, who asked politely, “What brings you here, Mr. Moss?”

“Grandma asked me to visit Gabriela.”

In truth, Wesley had heard Matthew was visiting her and feared that man might give her a hard time, so he had hurried over. His frantic worry and rush aggravated his poor health, leaving his face pale and draining the color from his lips.

Ken noticed immediately, worry creasing his brow. “Mr. Moss, are you feeling all right? You young folks shouldn’t run yourselves ragged. Remember to rest.”

Wesley gave a polite nod of thanks. “I will. Thank you, Ken.”

When Farley heard Wesley had arrived, he brought Truett along to greet him.

Chapter 594

Tonight, the little one was especially restless—squirming, wriggling, never still for even a moment. Even in Farley’s arms, he kicked his short legs nonstop, as though itching to break free.

Every time Wesley laid eyes on Truett, his mood lifted without reason. He smiled lightly. “Farley, take care of the child. Don’t trouble yourself with me.”

“No trouble at all. I hope you don’t mind the noise he made,” Farley said.

Farley sat beside Wesley, and Truett suddenly turned his gaze on Wesley, then stretched his tiny hands toward him. Caught off guard, Wesley hesitated before tentatively reaching out. The little one eagerly leaned into his arms. Wesley gathered him up quickly, his heart softening at once.

As Farley watched the scene, he recalled the hidden truth that Wesley was Truett’s father. He chuckled. “I didn’t expect Truett to like you so much. When Mr. Williams visited last time, Truett refused to let him hold him and even peed on him.”

Wesley couldn’t help the surge of delight at that. Clearly, Truett had a sense for people. He knew Wesley was better than Stewart.

A little smug, Wesley replied, “Children see clearer than anyone. They can tell good from bad at a glance.”

Just then, Gabriela and Matthew stepped out. The sight of Wesley holding the baby made Gabriela uneasy, and she strode over quickly. “Mr. Moss, why are you here? Hand me the child.”

He was about to marry another woman, so couldn’t he just keep his distance? Why was he here holding their son?

At that moment, Truett was clutching Wesley's thumb, examining it curiously and even trying to put it in his mouth. Wesley was unwilling to let go.

"It's fine. The little one is enjoying himself," he said.

Strangely enough, in Wesley's arms, Truett was not the least bit restless. Even when he spotted his mother, he made no fuss about being taken back.

Matthew watched, a sharp pang of jealousy gnawing at him.

Seeing how close Truett was to Wesley, Gabriela did not press to take him back. After all, this was one of the rare chances for the boy to be near his father.

Then, all of a sudden, Truett opened his mouth toward Wesley.

"Daddy!"

The sound was sweet, innocent, and surprisingly clear. Wesley's heart lurched, his eyes snapping to the child in disbelief.

Had he just misheard?

Did the little one really call him Daddy?

As if to erase any doubt, Truett repeated softly, "Daddy," gazing up with wide, sparkling eyes.

That tender little voice carried straight into Wesley's chest. Though Wesley believed this was Tessa's child, a strange ache welled inside him, his eyes prickling with heat.

He turned to Gabriela with a faint smile. "He can say Daddy now."

Gabriela, hiding her sorrow, forced a smile in return. "Yes, Truett is clever. He has been trying to talk for a while."

Matthew lingered like a shadow at the side, silent as he watched.

He thought of Wesley's coldness toward Rebecca and the child's clinginess with Gabriela. A possibility began to take shape.

Could it be that Truett's mother was Gabriela and his father... was Wesley?

The idea sent fire blazing in Matthew's eyes.

A violent urge tore through him. How he longed to wring the neck of the man who had gotten his daughter pregnant and left her unmarried.

Seething, Matthew abruptly sat down beside Wesley and reached out. "Wesley, let me hold the child for a while."

Wesley lifted his eyes, clutching Truett protectively. His voice was edged. "Mr. Howard, you and Gabriela are not exactly close. Why have you come to see her?"

Matthew's expression darkened. "And you, Wesley? What about you and Gabriela? Why are you here?"

"Gabriela used to work for me," Wesley replied evenly. "I'm here because I care. I heard Rebecca had someone attack her. Since the Howard family has chosen to settle, I hope you won't press her further."

His words left no doubt—he was here to stand by Gabriela.

Matthew let out a bitter breath, caught between annoyance and grim amusement.

Chapter 595

Matthew's visit was purely to see his daughter, Gabriela. Why would anyone suspect ulterior motives?

As he sized up Wesley with a discerning gaze, Matthew found him thoroughly aggravating.

Still, he kept a warm smile plastered on his face.

“Wesley, don’t get the wrong idea. I’m only here to visit Gabriela.”

Wesley knew Matthew’s nature well.

Easygoing and unambitious, he had handed the family business to Jasper long ago. A man so mild-mannered seemed unlikely to stir trouble without cause.

Wesley nodded, his tone respectful but firm.

“Rebecca is too reckless, Mr. Howard. You should rein her in more firmly.”

The audacity of a young man lecturing him grated on Matthew, but he swallowed his irritation and replied evenly,

“Of course, I will.”

Gabriela, hearing their exchange, knew Wesley's words were meant to protect her, but she was uncertain how to feel about it.

Every time she dared to hope, he would shatter it without mercy.

This time, she chose to act as if she hadn't heard a word.

The conversation between Matthew and Wesley stretched on, laced with veiled hostility and sharp jabs, the air crackling with barely contained tension.

Then Truett's soft, sweet voice broke through, calling "Daddy" once more.

Wesley's expression softened instantly, his hand gently ruffling the child's hair.

Emboldened, Truett chirped "Daddy" again, his enthusiasm bubbling over like a cheerful little chatterbox.

Gabriela averted her gaze, sadness twisting in her chest as she watched the scene unfold.

Matthew caught her evasive look and sighed inwardly. He reached out to stroke Truett's hair, smiling warmly.

“What a delightful little boy.”

No sooner had he spoken than Truett burst into tears.

Gabriela swiftly scooped her son into her arms.

A single strand of hair had been tugged loose by Matthew’s...

His touch had loosened a single strand of hair, and Truett buried his face in her embrace, pouting, unable to voice his distress.

Wesley shot Matthew a sharp, disapproving glance.

He had held the child for quite some time without issue, yet the moment Matthew touched him, Truett wailed.

The boy had been restless all day, finally settling in Wesley’s arms, only to be upset again, inconsolable despite all their efforts.

Gabriela, apologetic, escorted the two men out.

Outside the villa, Matthew and Wesley lingered briefly in the neighborhood.

Billy, who had been waiting nearby, and Matthew's driver promptly pulled their cars around.

Before stepping into his vehicle, Matthew finally unleashed what he had been holding back.

"Wesley, you're engaged to Rebecca now. You should keep your distance from other women."

Wesley's response was cool and unflinching.

"My arrangement with Rebecca is a marriage alliance, as you well know. Why lecture me now? Besides, the engagement ceremony never happened. She is not my fiancée yet."

In public, Wesley never refuted his tie to Rebecca, purely to appease Roger.

He could not always watch over Gabriela, but he could at least ensure she had stability.

When it came to the Howards, however, he saw no need for excessive courtesy.

Matthew trembled with fury at Wesley's brazen attitude.

"And one more thing," Wesley added. "Mr. Howard, you're aware of what Rebecca did to Gabriela this time. If you bothered to dig deeper, you'd see just how much harm she's caused Gabriela behind your back. I suggest you keep a tighter leash on Rebecca. If she wants to marry into the Moss family, she should carry herself with dignity."

Without waiting for Matthew's reply, Wesley slid into his car, his demeanor icy.

As the window rolled up, a metallic taste flooded his throat, and he coughed.

Billy, alarmed, soothed him with gentle strokes on the back.

"Mr. Moss, is your heart acting up again?"

Wesley shut his eyes, leaning back to rest briefly before speaking.

"For tomorrow's Spectrum Arts acquisition, put Brenden in charge."

With his health deteriorating, he needed to fast-track Brenden's rise within the company.

Billy nodded promptly. "Understood."

Wesley continued, "Go with him. If he hits any snags, guide him carefully."

Chapter 596

Billy felt a pang of sorrow. "Rest assured," he said softly.

"Billy, I'm entrusting the company to you moving forward."

Billy's throat tightened. "Mr. Moss, with today's medical advancements and proper care, you can still pull through. Five years ago, doctors gave you a terminal prognosis, yet you defied the odds. Perhaps more miracles are on the horizon."

Wesley only murmured calmly, "Let's head back."

The car sped off, leaving Matthew's vehicle alone in its wake. Watching Wesley's car disappear, Matthew's anger surged, lodged in his chest, simmering with nowhere to go.

After a long pause, he opened his palm.

A single strand of Truett's hair lay there.

He handed it to his driver. "Get this tested. I want results as soon as possible."

The driver produced a ziplock bag, carefully securing the hair.

"Yes, sir."

A paternity test could deliver results in as little as seven hours.

By early morning, Matthew held the report.

He had never tested Gabriela's paternity; her mother's name alone had convinced him she was his daughter.

This test, however, was for Truett.

The results revealed a 43% DNA match.

The boy was undeniably his grandson.

If Gabriela was Truett's mother, why had she hidden it?

Was she unwilling to share the truth?

Over two decades ago, Alanna had coldly ended things with Matthew, claiming she had terminated the pregnancy and demanding he leave her alone.

Soon after, word of her death reached him.

The memories stabbed at Matthew's heart, sharp and unrelenting.

What had happened to Alanna all those years ago?

Was Gabriela now trapped in a similar fate, an unmarried mother struggling to provide for her child?

The more Matthew dwelled on it, the more his frustration flared. He set out immediately to confront Jasper.

It was ten in the morning.

Rebecca was at Jasper's residence, her eyes swollen from tears. "Jasper, Gabriela's gone too far!" she cried. "She took Dad's money, bought up everything in Fashion Lane, and handed clothes out to her friends. Now our whole social circle is talking about it! And the Blue Star mess—I'm still taking the fall for her."

Their circle buzzed with rumors that Rebecca had secretly hired male escorts behind Wesley's back.

"Jasper, I'm a laughingstock!" she wailed.

Jasper, reining in his own frustration, soothed her gently. "It's alright, don't cry. Gabriela's nothing—she's not worth your tears."

Rebecca, eyes still red, fumed, "Every time I think about how we handed her that hotel for free, it chokes me."

Jasper had fought hard to secure the land for that hotel, navigating complex procedures and sinking over half a billion into it.

Yet Gabriela had taken it over with a mere two hundred million for renovations.

"She's harvesting the rewards of your hard work!" Rebecca's voice rose. "Jasper, think of all the money she's siphoned from our family. That scheming, penniless woman is ruthless and greedy. We can't let her win!"

Jasper wanted to remind Rebecca that they had set Gabriela up first.

Now that their plans had backfired, they had only themselves to blame.

As head of the Howard family, he had never suffered such a humiliating defeat, especially not at the hands of a woman he'd dismissed as insignificant. Rage simmered within him.

No matter how much Gabriela appealed to him, he would show no mercy this time.

Rebecca, still teary, pleaded, "Jasper, can't you find a way to take the hotel back?"

Before Jasper could answer, the butler rushed in. "Sir, your uncle is here!"

Moments later, Matthew strode into the living room.

Jasper's eyes flickered with curiosity, sensing something amiss.

For Matthew to arrive so urgently, had something major shaken the Howard family?

Rebecca, startled, quickly pulled her hand from Jasper's arm. "Dad, why the sudden visit?"

Matthew's brow creased at their closeness. "I need to discuss something critical with Jasper."

Rebecca nodded in understanding. "I'll leave, then."

"No," Matthew said, glancing at her. "Stay. This concerns you too."

Chapter 597

Hearing that the issue concerned her, Rebecca's chest tightened with unease.

Had Gabriela stirred up trouble once more?

Rebecca frowned. She hadn't dispatched any thugs after Gabriela recently. Perhaps Gabriela had whispered complaints directly into her father's ear?

Matthew caught Rebecca's uneasy expression and shifted his attention to Jasper. "Last year, you purchased that plot on Spring River Avenue for the hotel project. Where do things stand?"

A chill swept through Jasper's veins.

Matthew had withdrawn from company operations for over a decade. What possessed him to inquire about the hotel now?

When Jasper remained silent, Matthew's fury erupted without warning.

"Lost your voice? Allow me to fill the silence. You orchestrated Orion's scheme to trap the Haynes Group into that cooperation contract, then withdrew the funding. You wanted to destroy the Haynes Group's reputation, leaving them desperate enough to surrender the hotel project to you. But now that the Haynes Group has secured financing for the final construction phase, you've lost your chance to seize the hotel and descended to underhanded tactics?"

Matthew spoke with measured calm, yet each calculated word struck Jasper like a physical blow.

Recent years had softened Matthew's edges. Jasper had nearly forgotten that Matthew remained the Howard Group's true puppet master.

He was merely the caretaker managing affairs on Matthew's authority.

Despite being the CEO of the Howard Group and basking in the flattery of the business world, Jasper was reduced to nothing in Matthew's presence.

Jasper swallowed his brewing resentment. "Forgive me, Uncle Matthew. I was wrong. It won't happen again."

Matthew's rage cooled slightly at Jasper's contrite demeanor. "I know this wasn't your idea. You've always exercised sound judgment, which is why I entrusted the company to your care." His brow furrowed as his piercing gaze settled on Rebecca. "Did Rebecca pressure you into this foolishness?"

Under her father's withering stare, Rebecca felt simultaneously terrified and indignant.

Damn it. Because of Gabriela, her father was looking at her with that familiar contempt again.

She had sent thugs after Gabriela, yet Gabriela emerged unscathed and had even profited from the ordeal.

What more could that woman possibly want? How dare she run crying to her father?

Jasper avoided a direct response. "Uncle Matthew, I accept complete responsibility for the hotel situation. Please spare Rebecca your anger."

Relief washed through Rebecca.

She knew that regardless of the circumstances, her cousin would always take the blame for her.

Matthew studied Jasper in prolonged silence.

Eventually, he released a weary sigh and placed his hand on Jasper's shoulder. "Jasper, I understand your devotion to Rebecca and your protective instincts. But she has grown spoiled and reckless. You cannot continue shielding her from the consequences."

Chapter 598

Jasper nodded. Hidden from view, the corner of his mouth twisted into the faintest downward curve, harboring a trace of venom.

While Matthew confronted Jasper, Gabriela arrived at the hotel site.

The structure's emerging magnificence filled her with joy.

Soon, she would claim ownership of a splendid five-star hotel.

The renovation foreman approached with respectful courtesy the moment he spotted her.

The construction crew, surprised to see such a young and stunning boss, greeted her enthusiastically.

"Good afternoon, Miss Haynes!"

"You look absolutely beautiful, Miss Haynes!"

“Thank you.” Gabriela beamed and nodded graciously. “I appreciate everyone’s dedication. Dinner tonight is my treat.”

Excited cheers erupted from the workers.

Walking at her side, Kaleb watched Gabriela radiate confidence and vitality, stirring memories within him. When Alanna had established the company, she had been about Gabriela’s current age—equally gorgeous and driven.

Gabriela placed a steadying hand on his arm, encouraging him to remain calm.

Kaleb’s worry deepened. “What course of action do we take? We cannot permit these people to establish permanent residence here.”

Gabriela’s striking eyes gleamed with inspiration. She smiled knowingly. “Don’t fret. I’ve got a way to deal with this.”

Had the Howard family employed legitimate business tactics against her, Gabriela might have found herself overwhelmed. After all, the Haynes Group was still dwarfed by the Howard Group’s massive influence.

But Cindy’s dirty tricks?

Overcoming those was laughably simple.

Gabriela dialed Tyler's number. "Tyler, are you free? There's something I need your help with..."

Watching Gabriela call for assistance, Cindy's lips curled into a mocking sneer. "Rebecca mentioned you have hundreds of thugs at your beck and call. Allow me to enlighten you—these homeless individuals are delicate and easily frightened. If you summon those intimidating brutes and someone dies, the resulting lawsuit will ensure your hotel never welcomes its first guest."

After ending the call, Gabriela regarded Cindy with a subtle smile. "I'm offering you one final opportunity. Remove these people immediately, or face the consequences."

"Consequences?" Cindy dismissed Gabriela's words as an empty threat, her eyes blazing with disdain. "This is merely the opening act. Unless you surrender the hotel to Jasper within three days, you'll discover exactly how unpleasant things can become."

Gabriela shook her head with quiet certainty. "I hope that after today's events, you won't find yourself on your knees, begging for my mercy."

Had Cindy possessed any understanding of Gabriela's capabilities, she would have cleared the homeless individuals out without a second thought.

After finishing her call with Tyler, Gabriela dialed Vivian's number. "Hey, Vivian, could I borrow your friend Gem's social media account?"

Vivian, in the middle of a shopping spree, felt a twitch in her eyelid at the sound of Gabriela's voice. Gabriela was making waves lately, even bold enough to challenge the Howard family. Vivian had been discreetly keeping an eye on her.

She hadn't anticipated Gabriela reaching out for help so abruptly. A hidden swell of pride prompted Vivian to tilt her chin slightly. "Gabriela, don't assume a few favors make us friends. I'm telling you, stop pestering me! I'm not helping this time!"

With Gabriela entangled in a feud with the Howards, Vivian wanted no part in the chaos.

Gem, shopping alongside Vivian and catching Gabriela's words, perked up with excitement. "Vivian, agree to it now!"

Since aiding Tessa with a live stream, Gem's follower count had surged from thirty million to eighty million, a testament to her viral triumph. The growth was so explosive that Gem believed Gabriela's name carried more weight than any ad campaign. Another collaboration with Gabriela might push her followers past one hundred million.

Vivian rolled her eyes. Why was Gem so thrilled? Couldn't she show a bit of restraint?

Irritated, Vivian snapped, "Talk to her yourself!"

Gem snatched the phone, got Gabriela's address, and rallied her team, hauling top-tier video equipment to her location.

Meanwhile, back at the hotel, as Cindy observed Gabriela's confident poise, a flicker of unease stirred in her chest. Still, she reassured herself that this was a society governed by law; Gabriela would not dare summon hundreds to attack her.

It didn't take long for Cindy to grasp Gabriela's true intentions.

In comparison, physical confrontation seemed almost merciful. Cindy realized an apology was far too late.

At Jasper's residence, Matthew had a serious conversation with Jasper for nearly two hours. Seeing Jasper's genuine willingness to reform, Matthew prepared to leave when the butler burst in.

Sweat poured down the butler's face, his voice quaking with panic. "Something's wrong! A huge crowd has gathered outside!"

Matthew and Jasper hurried out of the villa, Rebecca trailing close behind.

Beyond the estate's gates loomed a dense throng of hundreds. Farther off, over a hundred taxis lined the road. Thankfully, Jasper's sprawling suburban mansion, surrounded by open fields, had ample space for vehicles and crowds.

At the forefront stood Gabriela, radiant in a white vintage dress, her posture exuding assurance. Her luminous eyes and dazzling smile lent her an otherworldly grace, and the hundreds behind her only amplified her commanding presence.

Matthew's heart swelled with pride.

His daughter was truly remarkable.

Rebecca, however, seethed with fury and marched toward Gabriela. "What do you want? Bringing a mob to my cousin's home—are you here to rob us?"

Chapter 600

Gabriela's smile remained serene as she signaled for Cindy to be brought forward from the crowd. "Miss Howard, shouldn't you first ask what your cousin had planned for me?"

Cindy stood mute, head bowed like a chastised child, not daring to utter a word. She had never imagined Gabriela would have the audacity to march hundreds of people to Jasper's doorstep.

Worse still, Gabriela had brought a swarm of reporters and a top influencer named Gem.

The reporters were in a frenzy, cameras trained on Jasper and Matthew. After all, capturing these high-society figures wasn't an everyday opportunity.

Cindy dreaded to think how Jasper and Matthew would handle her once the reporters dispersed.

Rebecca's face paled at the sight of Cindy.

Frowning, she demanded, "Why are you with Gabriela?"

This fool—had she actually tried to mess with Gabriela?

Cindy shrank back, whispering, "Rebecca, please don't be mad. The reporters are filming."

She couldn't fathom Gabriela's brazen move to confront the Howards head-on. But she knew she was in deep trouble. Facing Rebecca's questioning, she dodged a direct answer.

When Cindy refused to talk, Gabriela took over and loudly explained everything.

"That's ridiculous!" Matthew's brow furrowed deeply, his eyes blazing as he glared at Cindy. "You have brought shame upon our family."

Humiliated, Cindy mumbled, "I was just trying to seek revenge for Rebecca."

Rebecca's eyes flashed with rage. "When did I ever ask you to do such a thing?"

Cindy felt deeply aggrieved. "Rebecca, I have no personal vendetta against Gabriela. If it wasn't for you, why would I go to the trouble of rounding up over a hundred homeless people?"

Okburg, a bustling metropolis, made gathering such a large group no small feat.

"Your actions have nothing to do with me!" Rebecca's face burned with rage, and she barely restrained herself from lashing out at Cindy.

"Enough, stop this bickering," Matthew interjected, stepping forward with a look of shame. "Gabriela, I owe you an apology. I gave you my word yesterday, and today I've already failed to keep it."

"Save your apologies," Gabriela replied, not sparing Matthew a glance. She pulled out the hotel contract and the pledge he had written.

Her gaze shifted to Jasper. "Jasper, the hotel now belongs to Haynes Group. Am I operating within legal bounds?"

This marked Gabriela's first direct challenge to Jasper. Jasper's emotions churned as he met the fierce stare of the striking young woman.

Part of him admired Gabriela's beauty, yet another part bristled at her sharp intellect.

A woman too clever, he thought, lacked charm.

In his view, the ideal woman was like Rebecca—clingy, making a man feel needed.

He clenched his jaw and nodded. "Yes."

"Then why did you send people to sabotage my business and bring the homeless to overrun my hotel?" Gabriela pressed.

Whether Jasper had orchestrated it personally or not, she pinned the blame squarely on him. If he was angry, he could take it out on Cindy later.