

## **His kiss 601**

### Chapter 601

Jasper drew a deep breath, his tone earnest. "I apologize. I failed to discipline my family."

Gabriela let out a mocking sneer. "So, tell me, how do we settle this?"

Long accustomed to his lofty position, Jasper had never been so sharply challenged by a woman in public.

Suppressing his fury, he maintained a veneer of calm. "What do you propose?"

Gabriela replied, "This isn't hard to resolve. After all, no one was seriously harmed."

Jasper, sensing a trap beneath her breezy tone, felt a growing unease.

Gabriela continued, "Just cover the losses I incurred today. I arranged for these people to take taxis here, and that wasn't cheap."

Rebecca, whose nerves had been stretched taut, relaxed slightly at that.

So petty—demanding reimbursement for taxi fares.

What a small-minded approach.

But Jasper suspected there was more to it and asked cautiously, “How much are we talking?”

Gabriela rattled off a detailed list.

“Cindy brought 120 vagrants to my hotel. I called 360 friends to help clear them out. Then I hired 180 taxis to bring them here. A taxi from Spring River Avenue to this location costs \$100 per ride. The drivers were reluctant to transport such unkempt passengers, given their odor and mess, so I paid an extra \$200 per car for cleaning.

“My friends took time off work, exhausted themselves, and deserve a good meal. Each of them should receive \$20,000 for their efforts and inconvenience. On top of that, the vagrants disrupted my hotel’s renovation and traumatized my staff. Every employee deserves \$20,000 for their emotional distress.”

At first, Rebecca scoffed, viewing Gabriela’s demands as trivial. Compensation for delaying their work, ruining the hotel’s reputation, and affecting its future profits—all bundled into her claims.

How desperate for money could she be?

But as the list went on, Rebecca sensed something was off.

By the end, Gabriela had tallied a staggering thirty million dollars in compensation.

Rebecca's eye twitched with barely contained fury. "Gabriela, are you here to extort us?"

Gabriela did not bother acknowledging her, keeping her focus on Jasper. "Jasper, does my list seem fair?"

Each of Gabriela's demands, while unusual, skirted the edge of reason.

Compensating employees for emotional distress sounded outlandish, but on closer inspection, it held some merit.

Jasper ground his teeth, yet managed to maintain a facade of civility. "Fair."

Gabriela glanced at Gem.

Gem caught the cue instantly, swinging her camera toward Jasper.

With millions of viewers watching through the lens, Gabriela flashed a radiant smile. "Thank you. You're a reasonable man."

Jasper nearly choked on his rage.

With a dozen cameras trained on him, how could he afford to be anything but reasonable?

## Chapter 602

Rage coursed through Jasper's veins like molten fire, yet he forced himself into rigid composure and gave the order for the money to be transferred to Gabriela. Then he turned to her. "Miss Haynes, please wait a moment."

Gabriela offered a graceful nod.

Matthew positioned himself nearby, his gaze fixed on her with unmistakable fondness. His daughter possessed such brilliant cunning.

She understood her position perfectly—that any private negotiation would inevitably tilt against her, like a rigged scale.

So she had orchestrated this theatrical arrival, bringing a small army of reporters to stage a public spectacle, forcing the Howard family under the unforgiving spotlight of scrutiny.

The Howards—a name that had commanded reverence for over a century—treasured their pristine reputation above all else. Who would dare resort to underhanded tricks with cameras trained on their every move?

These realizations crystallized into a single, startlingly clear thought as Matthew contemplated Jasper's standing in the company.

The transfer was completed with mechanical efficiency. Jasper's voice carried forced politeness. "Miss Haynes, does this arrangement satisfy you?"

Gabriela's face lit with radiant satisfaction. "Absolutely delighted."

Jasper buried his mounting irritation beneath a mask of calm. "Then, when might these people depart?"

"My three hundred sixty loyal friends will vanish the moment I do," Gabriela declared with theatrical flair. "However, these one hundred twenty homeless souls present a different challenge—one beyond my humble capabilities."

A crushing weight of foreboding descended upon Jasper like a heavy curtain.

He recalled their previous encounter—Gabriela's wrist had sustained the most trivial of injuries, yet she had demanded a breathtaking hundred million from the Howard family.

Given the magnificent chaos she had orchestrated this time, her ambitions clearly soared far beyond a mere thirty million.

Wrestling his temper into submission, Jasper began, “These individuals arrived with you...”

Gabriela cut through his words like a blade through silk. “Come on, these homeless wanderers were assembled by your own cousin, plucked from every forgotten corner of Okburg. Their welfare rests squarely on your shoulders.”

She pivoted to survey the group before continuing her assault. “They have all been cast adrift without a permanent residence, day after day. Such heartbreaking misery. Does the Howard family not pride itself on being the city’s premier philanthropic beacon? You possess the resources to construct a proper shelter and take care of them.”

The Howard legacy included countless substantial charitable contributions at glittering public events—donations that often reached into the millions.

Jasper had not anticipated Gabriela would make such a proposition.

He leaned closer to her, his voice dropping to a dangerous whisper. “Miss Haynes, every game has boundaries. You would not want to turn the Howard family into your eternal enemy, would you?”

“Project your voice, Jasper.” Gabriela deliberately amplified her response. “I understand perfectly that the Howard family wields tremendous power and influence—no one dares risk your displeasure. My modest Haynes Group has no business conflict with your empire. Yet you, the mighty CEO of Howard Group, persist in harassing my small company over petty personal grudges, wielding bankruptcy threats

like a sword. If every major corporation behaved with such vindictive pettiness, what entrepreneur would dare pursue their dreams?"

Jasper found himself stunned into silence by Gabriela's verbal onslaught, unable to formulate any response before her final words struck home.

"Jasper, justice lives in the court of public opinion. Should my company face destruction someday, thousands of digital voices will rise in my defense."

## Chapter 603

Gabriela's proclamation rang out with crystalline clarity, leaving Jasper mentally reeling.

Without conscious thought, he heard himself declaring, "Miss Haynes, I, Jasper Howard, pledge here before these witnesses that the Haynes Group will never face destruction under my watch."

Only after the promise escaped his lips did the devastating truth crash over him—Gabriela's true objective transcended simple compensation or shifting responsibility for the homeless back onto the Howard family.

She had come to secure an ironclad guarantee for the Haynes Group's continued existence.

And this spectacle was unfolding before countless streaming viewers across the digital landscape.

Should the Haynes Group ever crumble in the future, regardless of the Howard family's actual involvement, the online masses would surely assign blame to them without hesitation.

When that moment came, Gabriela would only need to shed tears before her camera, and the Howard family would face a digital uprising unlike anything in their storied history.

For a prestigious dynasty like the Howards, money was merely numbers on a ledger—but their carefully cultivated reputation could make or break future business ventures worth billions.

Therefore, the Howard family could never again target the Haynes Group with hostility. More than that, they would be compelled to extend assistance whenever Gabriela's company encountered difficulties.

As this realization settled into his bones, Jasper's hands curled into white-knuckled fists, silent fury consuming him from within. A woman had outmaneuvered him completely.

Gabriela responded with cheerful brightness, "With your solemn guarantee, my worries have completely evaporated. I've spent sleepless nights consumed by anxiety over your cousin's threats. Tonight, I'll finally sleep in peace."

She turned toward her assembled army. "Let's make our exit."

"Yes, Miss Haynes!" her followers responded in one thunderous voice, their collective power radiating through the air.

Witnessing Gabriela's commanding presence, Rebecca suddenly realized that her own privileged life was no match for Gabriela's raw influence.

Frustration erupted in her chest.

Gabriela departed with her legion, leaving behind one hundred twenty unwashed homeless people whose odor permeated the air.

With reporters still documenting every moment, Jasper could not simply ignore the unfolding crisis. He issued instructions to the butler for immediate accommodation arrangements.

"We'll establish a proper shelter by tomorrow's dawn," Jasper commanded.

The butler bowed with practiced deference. "Yes, sir."

After the Howard family had managed to settle their unexpected guests, the reporters began their gradual exodus from the property.

The entire Howard clan reconvened in their opulent living room like generals after a devastating defeat.

Rebecca could no longer contain her explosive fury and delivered a vicious slap across Cindy's cheek. "What delusion possessed you to believe you could outsmart Gabriela?"

Her recently manicured nails, sharp as tiny daggers, carved scratches across Cindy's skin, yet Cindy did not dare release even the smallest whimper, offering instead an endless stream of desperate apologies.

Matthew stepped forward with measured authority. "Enough, Rebecca. The damage has been done—maintain some dignity."

Rebecca fell into seething silence, though her mind had already conceived a hundred exquisite methods to torment Cindy in the coming days.

Matthew then shifted his attention to Jasper with calculated precision. "Expand the shelter's budget. We can begin accepting additional homeless individuals gradually."

Confusion clouded Jasper's features as he voiced his bewilderment.

Matthew's explanation flowed with calculated wisdom. "We're currently pursuing that coveted land acquisition, aren't we? The evaluation process extends far beyond our company's financial strength and corporate history—they are scrutinizing our public image with microscopic intensity. This situation presents a golden opportunity to cement the Howard family's philanthropic legacy."

Chapter 604

Jasper's head bobbed with newfound understanding, and he immediately summoned his assistant to orchestrate the necessary arrangements.

Matthew's voice carried deeper currents of meaning. "I have one more thing to say. Should I discover anyone orchestrating covert attacks against the Haynes Group, they will face my personal wrath."

His gentle yet commanding presence swept across the assembled room like a lighthouse beam, capturing every soul's undivided attention. "Contemplate the ramifications carefully."

Rebecca's foot struck the floor with explosive frustration. "Dad, Gabriela is a greedy, shameless woman—a pathetic orphan cast adrift by fate. What possible reason could you have for championing her cause?"

"Watch your words!" Matthew's roar shattered the room's tension, his palm hovering dangerously close to her cheek.

Rebecca's eyes transformed into pools of unshed crimson tears, brimming with wounded fury.

Matthew's eyelids fell like heavy curtains as he drew a steady breath. "I have my reasons."

His expression hardened into granite resolve as he delivered several final directives to Jasper before departing the villa with swift, purposeful strides.

Rebecca's rage erupted in a vicious kick against an innocent table.

Cindy retreated to a safer distance, wisdom dictating she avoid further provocation of the volatile woman.

Meanwhile, Gabriela had returned to her hotel, distributing the windfall among her loyal companions with infectious jubilation.

The buzz of electric energy continued to surge through Gem's livestream channel. The comment section exploded into a digital fireworks display of excitement.

"That spectacle rivaled any blockbuster production!"

"Gabriela consistently delivers pure theatrical gold. Every public appearance turns into an explosive event!"

"Imagine if she entered the entertainment industry—wouldn't she become a legendary star instantly?"

"And her beauty is beyond compare!"

"But don't you think Gabriela's demand is completely outrageous? It seems reasonable to charge compensation for taxi fares and emotional distress, but demanding payment for potential damage to the reputation of an unfinished hotel feels a bit excessive."

“Come on, if Gabriela’s hotel ends up losing guests because of this incident, most travelers will see the place as suspiciously empty and untrustworthy. Over time, that perception would snowball into a destructive downward spiral... Viewed from that angle, demanding two hundred million wouldn’t even count as excessive greed!”

“Your analytical brilliance astounds me!”

The digital conversation pulsed with vibrant energy and passionate debate.

Wesley absorbed these comments, amusement tugging at the corners of his mouth.

The icy detachment that typically shrouded his presence melted away beneath that subtle smile, revealing a trace of warmth and genuine humanity beneath his polished exterior.

Billy had never seen Mr. Moss so captivated by such seemingly trivial online chatter, much less watching it all unfold with such focused intensity.

After the livestream ended, Wesley set his device down on the polished table and let out a quiet chuckle.

“Gabriela certainly understands the art of securing the greatest advantage for herself.”

His worries about her future struggles in his absence had completely faded.

However, the thought of such an extraordinary, captivating woman someday pledging herself to another man filled him with a deep, gnawing dissatisfaction.

He found the very idea intolerable.

She belonged in his world, as his cherished companion.

Why should he surrender her to anyone else?

Chapter 605

A heavy gloom settled over Wesley, pressing down on his chest. No matter how he tried to remind himself that all of this had been his choice, the darkness clung to him, unyielding.

His chest tightened, and a violent cough suddenly tore through him.

Billy, alarmed, hurriedly poured him a glass of water.

“Mr. Moss, we need to get you to the hospital!”

A deep, harsh rasp echoed from Wesley's lungs, and a moment later he coughed up a mouthful of blood.

Billy reacted instantly, rushing to his side and catching him before he could slip from the chair and collapse. Wesley's vision dimmed, the room spinning before everything went black.

In a frantic blur, Billy got him to the hospital.

After the examination, Melvin pulled Billy aside outside the ward, his voice grave.

"His condition has become critical. It's time for his family to prepare for the worst."

Billy's blood ran cold, disbelief surging through him.

"Doctor, isn't there anything more you can do?"

Melvin shook his head, expression somber.

"His heart is undergoing severe rejection, and the constant stress has accelerated the deterioration."

Billy's fingers trembled as he forced out the question.

“How much time does Mr. Moss have left?”

“Three months,” Melvin replied, his tone edged with pity. Wesley was so young, so striking, yet unmarried and without children. What a tragedy.

Seeing the devastation written across Billy’s face, Melvin added quietly,

“If Mr. Moss fully commits to treatment, he might gain another three months. But he must give up his work completely and remain hospitalized.”

“Thank you, doctor. I’ll do my best to convince him,” Billy said heavily.

He pushed open the ward door and found Wesley already awake. Before Billy could speak, Wesley’s calm voice cut through the silence.

“I know my condition. There’s no need for that look of despair.”

Billy paused, then said,

“Mr. Moss, Gabriela doesn’t know yet...”

“Don’t tell her,” Wesley replied firmly. “In three months, I’ll hand the company over to Brenden and take a trip abroad. After that... I won’t be coming back.”

Hearing Wesley’s composed plans, Billy’s sorrow only deepened.

“Don’t worry, Mr. Moss. I’ll support Mr. Saunders fully.”

Wesley nodded. “With you at the company, I’ve always been confident.”

Wesley’s hospitalization was kept strictly under wraps. Anyone who inquired was told he was away on a business trip in another city.

Gabriela arrived at the company, preparing for a meeting, when Farley called.

“Truett’s crying nonstop, and nothing we do is helping,” Farley said.

Gabriela asked Kaleb to lead the meeting in her place and rushed home.

Truett had been irritable for days, but today was far worse. He refused food and sleep, his cries relentless.

After Farley managed to get some formula into him, the crying started again soon after. Gabriela gathered Truett into her arms, but every attempt to soothe him only made his wails intensify.

“He’s crying so much; something must be wrong. We need to take him to the hospital,” she said.

Gabriela and Farley brought Truett to the hospital, where an examination revealed stomach indigestion as the cause of his discomfort.

“Babies don’t know their limits,” the doctor explained while prescribing medication. “If you keep feeding him, he’ll keep eating. Feed him on a schedule, in moderation, with small, frequent meals.”

Thanking the doctor, Gabriela headed off to pay the fees and spotted Billy in the first-floor lobby.

She approached with concern. “Billy? Are you unwell?”

“It’s not me.” Billy’s gaze drifted to the child in her arms, an uneasy feeling stirring in his chest.

He had intended to tell Gabriela the truth, but the words stuck. Instead, he said, “Mr. Moss has been overworked. His heart’s weak, and he collapsed today.”

Gabriela's face clouded with worry. "Which ward is he in? Can I visit him?"

No matter how distant Wesley had been, the news of his illness made every past grievance feel insignificant.

Billy hesitated. "Mr. Moss values his privacy while he recovers. Not even Loretta or Miriam are allowed in."

"I only want to take a look," Gabriela pleaded. "You can open the door. I'll stay outside and won't go in."

Seeing her so anxious, Billy felt a trace of relief on Wesley's behalf. "Come with me then."

Gabriela quickly handed Truett to Farley, gave a few instructions, and hurried after Billy.

Farley stood holding the child, letting out a quiet sigh.

Father and son both falling ill, in the same hospital no less—it was a cruel coincidence.

When Gabriela arrived at the ward, Wesley had already taken his medication and drifted into sleep.

“You can go in,” Billy said.

Gabriela tiptoed inside and sat at the bedside.

Wesley’s face was pale, his lips drained of color. He was only in his early thirties—the prime of a man’s life—yet he lay there lifeless, so still it seemed he could slip away at any moment. Her chest tightened with pity. She reached out and held his hand gently.

She thought sadly, “Wesley, why don’t you take better care of yourself?”

Money can’t buy health. Sacrificing your well-being for work is never worth the cost.”

She remembered the days when, as his secretary, she could at least try to stop him from overworking. But once Rebecca married him, she would no longer have the right to sit here, hold his hand, or even look at him this way.

Seeing Gabriela’s sorrow, Billy felt a pang of guilt. He hesitated, then began, “Gabriela, actually... Mr. Moss’s illness...”

Before he could continue, Wesley’s eyes opened.

He turned his gaze to Gabriela. Their eyes met, and at the sight of her red and watery eyes, he faltered, momentarily stunned.

Then he drew his hand back. "Gabriela, why are you here?"

She quickly composed herself. "I brought Truett to see the doctor today and heard you were hospitalized, so I came to check on you."

Wesley frowned and looked toward Billy, who immediately lowered his head.

The warmth of Gabriela's fingertips still lingered on Wesley's hand, and for a moment, he let himself feel it. But his voice was cold when he spoke again. "You should go back. If Rebecca finds you here, she'll get the wrong idea."

Gabriela froze, then quickly said, "I'm sorry. I just wanted to see you. I didn't mean to cause trouble." She even bowed slightly to him.

Her flustered apology twisted something inside Wesley. He almost reached out to steady her.

But before he could move, Gabriela hurried out of the ward. Wesley's eyes followed her retreating figure, unwilling to let go even after she disappeared from sight.

"Mr. Moss," Billy muttered.

Wesley's cold glance silenced him. "Why did you tell her that I am sick?"

Billy ventured, bracing for the reprimand, "Gabriela truly cares for you. And you... you can't let her go either. Why not tell her the truth? At least let her stay by your side—"

"Leave!" Wesley's tone was cold, cutting Billy off before he could finish.

Because he couldn't bear to hear it.

He had imagined it countless times—throwing caution aside and telling Gabriela everything. Even if he only had a month at most, he could cling to her through the long nights of pain, drawing comfort from her presence.

And he wanted her to remember him forever—wanted her to never love another.

That thought was dangerously tempting, almost sweet. But he could not, must not, let himself dwell on it.

Chapter 607

Gabriela lingered outside the hospital, the weight of her visit pressing heavily on her.

The sun blazed relentlessly, its heat simmering in the air.

Summer had long since taken full control.

Yet Gabriela's heart remained frozen, untouched by the sun's fierce rays, shrouded in the shadows of her deepest sorrows.

She had loved Wesley deeply enough to bear his child, only to face the painful truth that his heart would never belong to her. Even while he was ill, he still worried that his fiancée might misinterpret her visits.

Had she been honest about her feelings for Wesley sooner, she might have built a life with him long ago...

Gabriela stood beneath the scorching sun for nearly thirty minutes, until her head began to spin from the heat.

Abruptly, reality pulled her back.

She was a mother now, and her young child was waiting for her at home.

Moreover, after her recent clash with the Howard family, she had to stay alert for whatever moves they might make next.

There was no room for romance.

Steeling herself, Gabriela returned home to tend to Truett, gave him his medicine, then rushed back to the office.

The meeting had already ended, and Kaleb provided a concise summary before they dove straight into planning the next event.

The rising heat mirrored Gabriela's escalating workload.

On one front, Addie from GD Fashion had been exceptionally cooperative, entrusting Haynes Group with three major event plans for the year, all of which had already been approved.

On another, the hotel project was nearing completion, with inspections approaching and the grand opening fast on the horizon. Naturally, her company would oversee the hotel's opening ceremonies.

With tasks piling up, Gabriela barely had a moment to breathe.

Noticing her exhaustion, Kaleb offered his sympathy and suggested hiring a dependable assistant.

While poring over documents, Gabriela nodded. "I trust you to find the right person, Uncle Kaleb."

Kaleb then added, "Gabriela, did you hear? Wesley is about to marry Rebecca."

Gabriela's hand faltered briefly over the papers before she flipped to the next page. "Yes, I'm aware."

Her packed schedule left little room to dwell on Wesley.

She had long braced herself for this news, preparing her heart so thoroughly that she could even muster a smile and offer her congratulations.

"Wesley was my former boss and always treated me well. Please select a thoughtful gift for him and send it on my behalf."

Kaleb hesitated, his own resentment toward Wesley fueled by Truett's situation.

Gabriela's soft plea came gently. "Please, Uncle Kaleb."

Unable to deny her heartfelt request, Kaleb relented. "Fine, I'll choose something fitting."

Meanwhile, Matthew was frustrated that Rebecca had prematurely announced the wedding to Wesley.

After confirming that Truett was his grandson, he suspected Wesley was the father.

Though he hadn't secured a chance for a DNA test, he secretly wished Rebecca would call off the engagement.

Seeing Wesley's aloofness toward Rebecca, Matthew feared a marriage would trap her in a life of bitterness.

"Rebecca, Wesley hasn't agreed to this marriage. Why would you announce it?"

Matthew's sharp tone upset Rebecca.

"Dad, Jasper already spoke with Roger. The wedding's set for three months from now."

Matthew pressed, "I want to know if Wesley himself agreed."

Rebecca shifted uncomfortably. "Well, Roger's approval means Wesley won't object."

Regardless of Wesley's feelings, Roger's consent ensured Wesley would comply.

Recalling the tense exchange he had with Wesley outside Gabriela's home, Matthew's frustration deepened. He didn't want his daughter tied to such a man.

Chapter 608

"Are you certain?"

Rebecca's irritation flared. "Dad, what are you implying? Why"

"Why wouldn't Wesley marry me?" Rebecca shot back. "I'm his fiancée—everyone knows that. Marriage is the natural next step."

Matthew's voice rose with anger. "What everyone knows is that Wesley's fiancée was caught in a scandal at Blue Star!"

Just days earlier, at a charity gala, a friend had cornered Rebecca.

"I heard you went to Blue Star and picked Roderick and Marcus. Are they as handsome as Wesley?"

Caught off guard by the swirling rumors, Rebecca snapped, "I've never set foot in a place like that!"

Her so-called friend pressed on mercilessly. "Then why was it all over the trending topics? Wesley's fiancée—that's you, isn't it?"

Another woman chimed in, "They say Wesley was so furious he shut down Blue Star. Wasn't that because of you?"

"It's all lies!" Rebecca seethed. "Someone set me up!"

Her friend smirked, undeterred. "Don't get so worked up. I didn't believe it at first either, but why were you at Blue Star that day? There are photos, and they don't look edited."

Another added fuel to the fire. "And Wesley still hasn't mentioned a wedding. Is he planning to drop you because of the Blue Star incident?"

"Wesley's so striking, yet you went chasing after other men. Were you implying he wasn't enough for you? No man would tolerate that."

The gossip swelled as others joined in.

"If I were engaged to Wesley, I would never look twice at men like Roderick or Marcus."

“You’re pushing a good man away, Rebecca.”

“Honestly, your behavior comes across as desperate to men.”

Rebecca’s composure shattered. Her grip tightened on her wine glass until it nearly cracked in her hand. That night, she became the gala’s punchline.

The moment she got home, her pent-up rage exploded, and she tore through her room, smashing anything in her path.

Later, she turned to Jasper in tears, clinging to him until he took her to the Mosses’ house, where they finally settled on a wedding date.

Once the date was confirmed, Rebecca tasked Cindy with spreading the news far and wide.

Cindy had been enduring Rebecca’s torment—locked in a room with a defanged cobra one moment, then trapped in a dark chamber crawling with massive, venomous spiders the next. Given a chance to prove herself, Cindy threw herself into the task, determined to win Rebecca’s approval.

The announcement raced through their social circles, proclaiming that Rebecca had not been cast aside by Wesley—they were set to marry.

Rebecca felt the sting of her humiliation finally begin to fade.

But her father's fierce opposition blindsided her.

"Dad, you know it wasn't me that night," she said, her voice heavy with frustration and hurt.

"What does it matter what I know?" Matthew shot back. "If you had never stepped foot in a place like that, how could they have photos of you? I know you followed Gabriela there, scheming to trap her in a scandal." His voice dripped with disappointment. "You are a refined young woman. How could you stoop so low to win over a man?"

"What did I do wrong?" Rebecca countered, her polished façade crumbling. "Wesley is the kind of man everyone wants. If I don't act, someone else will steal him away!"

Matthew's chest heaved with fury at his daughter's obsession. He barked, "This marriage doesn't have my blessing, and that's final!"

Chapter 609

Matthew concluded the discussion with a firm, authoritative tone.

Rebecca, accustomed to getting her way since childhood, could not stomach her father's interference in her plans to secure the man she desired. In a fit of frustration, she secluded herself in her bedroom all day, refusing to eat.

Lauren, gripped by concern, begged her daughter to come out, but Rebecca's stubbornness held firm.

Meanwhile, Matthew lingered in his study for hours, sifting through videos related to Gabriela. Each clip deepened his heartache, revealing a pattern of her enduring hardships alone.

To the world, she was merely an orphan, navigating life's challenges without support.

Now, if he stepped forward and claimed to be her father, would she even welcome him?

Overwhelmed with grief, Matthew stayed in the study for an entire day.

Outside, Lauren's eyes burned with suppressed resentment. She had not anticipated that, years after Alanna's death, her daughter would resurface to cause trouble.

How had they slipped through her control back then?

Fuming, Lauren turned away, determined to devise a flawless plan to erase Gabriela for good.

The next morning, Matthew rose early and instructed the chef to prepare an elaborate breakfast to take with him.

The chef stood baffled, as Matthew rarely showed interest in fine cuisine. In his eight years with the Howard family, even artfully crafted dishes barely earned a glance, yet today Matthew not only chose the menu but supervised its creation.

“How odd,” the chef muttered.

Meanwhile, carrying the gourmet breakfast crafted by a celebrated chef, Matthew stepped into the Haynes Group’s office on the fifth floor of the Lakeshore Building.

He had earlier tasked his driver with investigating the building and had learned that this floor was the least expensive, a crowded space filled with noise and clutter. Half of it served as a storage area for odds and ends, creating a less-than-ideal setting.

Frowning at the disarray, Matthew quietly instructed his driver, “Arrange a meeting with the building manager soon. I would like to lease this floor exclusively to keep it private.”

The driver nodded respectfully, and only then did Matthew proceed into the Haynes Group’s office.

A receptionist, unfamiliar with him, courteously requested, “Excuse me, sir, all visitors must sign in as per our policy.”

Before the driver could assertively introduce him, Matthew raised a hand to calm the situation, took the pen offered, and neatly wrote his name in the guest log.

The receptionist, struck by the bold, confident strokes of his handwriting, instinctively adopted a more respectful tone, saying, "Right this way, Mr. Howard."

She guided him to a waiting area, offered him coffee, and explained, "Miss Haynes is in a morning meeting, so please wait briefly."

With a warm smile, Matthew replied, "That's okay, carry on with your duties."

After she left, he wandered through the office, his poised demeanor catching the attention of employees who assumed he was a high-profile visitor from another firm and refrained from questioning him.

This allowed Matthew to effortlessly find his way to Gabriela's office, a modest space with simple furnishings.

Standing in the center, he slowly took in the room, noting a worn-out sofa chair, an aged coffee table, and a chipped flowerpot.

When Gabriela returned from her meeting, she was startled to see Matthew fixated on a painting hanging on the wall, lost in a moment of deep contemplation.

Surprised, she asked, "Mr. Howard, what brings you here today?"

Snapping out of his reverie, he managed a smile and inquired, "Is this painting your mother's work?"

"Yes," Gabriela replied curtly, hesitant to discuss personal matters with someone she barely knew. "Is there something specific you need?"

## Chapter 610

A wave of complex emotions swirled in Matthew's mind, but the distant gaze in his daughter's eyes felt like a cold shock, stirring a quiet ache in his heart.

He glanced at his driver, whose helpless expression mirrored his own turmoil. If anyone else had caused Matthew such pain, the driver might have reacted with his fists, but this was Matthew's cherished daughter.

Before the driver could act, Matthew dismissed him, saying, "Bring the breakfast and then you're free to go."

Relieved, the driver handed him the breakfast and made a quick exit.

Matthew arranged the extravagant breakfast on Gabriela's desk, saying, "Gabriela, have you had breakfast? The chef made something special today, so I brought it for you to try."

Gabriela, however, was not pleased. Her desk was covered with important documents, and food risked staining them. Moreover, Matthew's unsolicited familiarity unsettled her.

"Thank you, Mr. Howard, but I have already eaten," she said. Ken's cooking was wholesome and sufficient, unlike the opulent spread Matthew brought.

Disappointed, Matthew urged, "Just a small taste, it's really delicious."

"No need, really. Thank you," she replied firmly, her tone cautious. She eyed him warily. "Is there a specific reason for you coming to see me so early, Mr. Howard?"

"I was just in the area and thought I would stop by to see your workplace," he said casually.

Gabriela found this odd—what concern was her workplace to him? She kept the thought to herself, opting instead to say, "I've been quite busy lately, Mr. Howard."

"It's alright, go about your tasks," he responded lightly. "I'm just looking around."

Gabriela fell silent, at a loss for words.

She quietly moved the food to a side table and resumed her work.

Matthew, seeing her ignore the breakfast, felt a pang of disappointment but stayed silent, watching her focus intently.

As noon approached and the office grew warmer, Gabriela switched on a fan.

Noticing this, Matthew asked, "Why not use the air conditioning?"

She glanced at the unit and explained, "It's out of order, and I haven't had time to fix it. If you're uncomfortable, Mr. Howard, perhaps you would prefer to leave."

Her words hinted at wanting him gone, but Matthew seemed oblivious and quickly said, "A little heat doesn't bother me."

Though Gabriela found Matthew's behavior odd, her own busy schedule left no time to ponder it. She ended their brief conversation and got back to her tasks.

Meanwhile, Matthew messaged his driver to purchase a top-notch air conditioner and have it delivered.

Gabriela worked steadily through the morning, nearly clearing her backlog of paperwork.

A sudden rumble in her stomach finally pushed her to take a restroom break, which ended up taking longer than expected. Two of the stalls were out of order, and the only functional one was occupied for what felt like an eternity.

While she was away, the air conditioner Matthew had ordered arrived, and he personally guided the technicians as they removed the broken unit and installed the new one.

However, the building's outdated wiring could not handle the high power consumption. The office lights flickered violently before the entire fifth floor went dark.

When Gabriela returned to a powerless office, her first thought was that a rival company must have sabotaged them, and she immediately called an electrician.

Stepping into her office, she quickly realized the true cause of the outage as she spotted the installation crew and a visibly remorseful Matthew.

Struggling to keep her composure and failing, she snapped, "Mr. Howard, what on earth are you doing?"

Her unsaved documents flashed through her mind, a knot of dread tightening in her chest.