

His kiss 731

Chapter 731

Billy went tense at the order.

Just minutes ago, Wesley had been composed, but after a single phone call, fury twisted across his face.

Not daring to waste a second, Billy hurried to the adjoining room to find Gabriela.

Inside, Gabriela sat with her meal untouched, the soft glow of her phone lighting her face as she video-chatted with Farley. On-screen, Farley held little Truett in his arms, guiding the boy's gaze toward the camera.

"Look, Truett! There's Mommy!"

Truett, cheeks flushed from a lingering fever, had been restless for days—fussy and refusing food. The moment his eyes landed on his mother, his lips trembled.

"Mommy... come home!" he whimpered.

The sight gutted Gabriela.

His round cheeks had slimmed, and his small frame looked weary. When tears welled and slid down his face, Gabriela felt as though her heart had cracked clean in two.

“Don’t cry, baby,” she whispered, forcing her voice steady. “Mommy will be home soon.”

The food in front of her turned to ash.

Ending the call, she set her phone aside and began to pack with quiet resolve.

That was when a knock sounded at the door. It was Billy.

“Ms. Haynes, Mr. Moss wants to see you.”

Gabriela’s hand stilled over her half-packed bag. Concern for Truett tugged at her, and she frowned.
“But I—”

Billy’s expression was grim, his voice urgent. “Mr. Moss doesn’t look well. I don’t know what triggered it. Please, Ms. Haynes, come quickly.”

The reminder of Wesley’s fragile heart jolted Gabriela. Without hesitation, she followed Billy to the next room.

The moment she stepped inside, her gaze collided with Wesley's. His eyes were dark and fathomless, yet glimmering with contempt.

Gabriela's steps faltered. She drew in a breath and asked quietly, "Wesley... why did you call me here?"

Wesley's lips curved into a faint, cold line. "Did you make these dishes?"

Her eyes followed his gesture to the food laid neatly on the table.

She didn't deny it. "You don't like hotel food, so I thought—"

Wesley cut her off, his voice sharp as a blade. "These are the same dishes you used to make for Allan, aren't they?"

Gabriela froze. "Why mention Allan all of a sudden?"

"Answer me." Wesley's tone deepened, slicing through her hesitation. "Did you cook these for Allan as well?"

"Yes." She nodded slowly. "Back then, Allan often helped me. I cooked for him to show my gratitude."

A bitter sneer twisted Wesley's mouth, his brows furrowing. "To show your gratitude, you also planted white roses with him, and even took care of him all night when he was ill?"

Gabriela's heart lurched. She stared at him, stunned. "How do you even know about that?"

Wesley's words fell one by one, like stones sinking deep. "So Myah was telling the truth. You came to me because of Allan. Your meals, your care, your tenderness—it was never about me. It was all for him."

"No!" Gabriela's voice broke as she realized this was the thorn tearing at him.

She stepped forward, her eyes shining with desperation. "Wesley, you're wrong. I love you. Truly. I never thought of marrying Allan, not once. All I want now is you. To marry you. To stay by your side forever. Please, believe me."

Chapter 732

Outside, the drizzle thickened, raindrops whispering against the glass.

A gust pushed through the open window, carrying in a chill until the room itself seemed to shiver.

Billy, doing his best to fade into the background, moved quietly to shut the window. He was about to slip out unnoticed when he caught sight of Wesley.

Wesley's hand closed around Gabriela's, gripping firmly as he tugged her out of the room, down the corridor, and toward the hotel's entrance.

Alarm prickled in Billy's gut. Something was about to happen, and it wouldn't end well.

He hurried after them.

At the doors, Wesley released her hand. His eyes, flat and unreadable, fixed on her.

"You want to marry me?" His voice carried no warmth. "Then prove it. Show me just how much you want me."

Gabriela lifted her face slowly, bracing herself. "What do you want me to do?"

Wesley's lips curled into a cutting sneer. "You never stood in the rain for Allan, did you? If you claim you love me, then stand here for one hour. Do that, and I'll marry you."

His jaw clenched, the words forced between his teeth. "If you can't, then don't come near me again."

Gabriela froze.

A test? In this bitter cold, with rain sluicing down in sheets?

Her heart lurched with disbelief. “Wesley, are you insane? Standing here in weather like this? I’ll fall ill!”

Wesley didn’t flinch. His gaze dropped to his wristwatch. “It’s 12:32. I’ll give you three minutes to decide.”

His eyes flicked up to hers, hard as glass. “Show me how true your love really is.”

Then he turned, his back to her. “Starting now.”

Gabriela’s pulse hammered in her ears.

What had happened to him in Athea? What shadows had carved this harsh, unyielding man from the one she once loved?

But one thing was clear. If she failed this test today, Wesley might never let her back into his life. And if she stood in the rain, at worst, she might catch a cold.

Squaring her shoulders, she strode straight out into the storm.

“Wesley,” she called over her shoulder, voice steady despite the trembling in her chest, “I hope you’ll keep your word. After one hour, I expect you to propose to me properly, in front of everyone. And give me the beautiful wedding our love deserves.”

Wesley had only meant to push her, to test the depth of her devotion. He hadn’t expected her to agree without hesitation.

Instinctively, his hand shot out to stop her.

But she was too quick. His fingers brushed only the damp edge of her sleeve before closing on empty air.

And then she was outside.

Rain pelted down mercilessly, soaking her hair and clothes until she shivered from the bitter cold. Still, she stood firm, her figure unwavering beneath the gray veil of the storm.

A sharp ache twisted through Wesley’s chest. He turned away abruptly, unwilling—or unable—to watch.

Back inside, Billy followed anxiously at his heels. “Mr. Moss, it’s freezing! Minus three at least! With rain this heavy, how could a fragile woman like Ms. Haynes possibly endure it?”

Wesley sat down, his face carved from stone. He lifted a stack of documents, pretending to study them with grave focus.

“She made her choice.” His voice was flat, without a ripple of emotion.

Chapter 733

Yet his mind betrayed him.

Back in Athea, Gabriela had been little more than a hazy image in his memories—a figure Myah spoke of, but one he felt little toward. And he didn’t know enough about Allan to care.

But the moment he returned and saw Gabriela again, truly saw her, he realized he was already in too deep. He had wanted to marry her almost immediately. And yet, a stubborn thorn remained lodged in his heart—resentment he couldn’t shake.

If she endured this, if she proved her devotion beyond doubt, then perhaps, at last, he could let go of the past.

Billy, watching him bury himself in papers, was nearly frantic.

“Mr. Moss, you may not remember, but we all do,” Billy said, voice tight with urgency. “Two years ago, Ms. Haynes never left your side. She cared for you night and day, not Allan. Everything she did was all for you.”

Wesley kept his eyes on the documents, though the words blurred into nothing.

He knew he was being unreasonable, but the stubborn part of him craved proof—proof that Gabriela’s devotion was his, and his alone.

“The rain’s worsening,” Billy muttered, parting the curtain for a glance. His tone cracked with worry. “Ms. Haynes jumped into an outdoor pool just to retrieve a ring. For you. How could she hesitate to stand in the rain? But this—”

He gestured toward the window. “This will break her body. She’ll be sick for days.”

Wesley’s jaw tightened. Billy’s relentless pleading grated against his already fraying patience.

He snapped the file shut with a sharp crack. “Enough! Go and bring her inside. And for once, spare me the endless chatter.”

Despite his harshness, something inside him loosened—an ember of anger finally dimming in the cold, sodden day.

Billy exhaled in relief, snatched a towel from the stand, and hurried after Wesley as they headed downstairs.

But when they reached the lobby, Gabriela was gone.

Billy froze, his gaze darting left and right in panic.

Outside the glass doors, rain poured beneath the streetlamps, silver sheets against the dark pavement. Not a soul passed by—no pedestrians, not even the hum of a car.

Wesley's anger, tamped down moments ago, erupted once more.

A shadow tightened over his sharp features, storm clouds gathering in his expression.

Billy's chest tightened with dread, an ominous weight pressing down.

Wesley flicked a cold glance at his watch, a mirthless sneer tugging at his lips.

So this was her love? She couldn't even endure twenty minutes—

Billy rushed to defend her, words tumbling out. "Mr. Moss, it's freezing outside. Perhaps Ms. Haynes went back upstairs. Even Mr. Saunders fell ill after jumping in the pool. Ms. Haynes is delicate, she—I—"

Wesley cut him off with a look and strode back inside.

He went straight to Gabriela's room and rapped firmly on the door.

No answer.

He knocked again, harder.

Silence.

Billy's palms were slick with sweat. He fumbled for his phone, summoning the hotel manager to unlock the room.

The door swung open.

Empty.

Not a single trace remained. Her luggage, her belongings—everything was gone.

Gabriela had already left.

Wesley's brows knitted into a stormy frown. For the first time, his assistant's nervous chatter grated unbearably against his ears.

Chapter 734

Wesley turned and strode away.

He couldn't believe he had truly held out hope for Gabriela.

Billy parted his lips, eager to offer a kind word on Gabriela's behalf, but the words failed him entirely.

He trailed a few paces behind Wesley and discreetly called Gabriela, only to find her line unreachable.

Hastening to catch up, he ventured, "Mr. Moss, Miss Hayes's phone isn't connecting. She's not familiar with the area around here. Do you think something might have gone wrong?"

Wesley's brooding, thunderous scowl shifted in an instant, a trace of unmistakable worry surfacing. "Have the hotel review the surveillance footage."

"Right away," Billy replied.

The hotel manager promptly retrieved the recordings.

They showed Gabriela rushing out of the hotel with her suitcase, without so much as checking out. Exterior cameras caught her slipping into a taxi.

In that instant, a cold sweat trickled down Billy's back.

Yet on reflex, he rose to her defense. "Mr. Moss, perhaps Miss Hayes had some pressing emergency..."

"You speak too freely," Wesley replied, his face a mask of neutrality. "From this point forward, do not utter her name in my presence."

Myah had impressed upon him time and again that Allan held the foremost place in Gabriela's affections. Wesley had demanded proof, and the outcome... proved dishearteningly true.

Gabriela had no idea Wesley had already written her off.

Gabriela hurried back to Okburg. Earlier that day, Truett had spiked a sudden high fever.

Though Farley and Ken had already rushed him to the hospital, Gabriela's anxiety compelled her to leave without a word to Wesley. She planned to call and explain once she was in the car.

But her phone had died, likely from the earlier drenching rain or a depleted battery.

With no way to reach him, she could only urge the driver to hurry.

The driver replied wearily, "This downpour makes the roads treacherous. Speeding is too risky."

Gabriela nodded and held her tongue.

The trip dragged on for more than three hours before she reached Okburg and went straight to the hospital.

Truett lay hooked up to an IV, the bag nearly empty.

Spotting his mother, he dissolved into tears, whimpering, "Mommy," through his sobs and stretching his arms for her embrace.

Gabriela swept him up at once, murmuring soft reassurances.

Perhaps the fever reducer worked its soothing magic, because he drifted off to sleep against her not long after. Farley noticed Gabriela's ashen complexion and asked if the travel had worn her out.

She shook her head, dismissing it as simple fatigue from the long drive.

Two days passed before Truett's fever finally broke, and Gabriela could breathe again.

Only then did she work up the courage to call Billy.

Billy answered with evident discomfort. "Miss Hayes, why did you leave so abruptly that day? Mr. Moss was furious."

The incensed Wesley had cut his stay at Eventide Vale short, returning to Okburg in under half a day.

"Truett fell ill," Gabriela explained. "Could you put Wesley on the phone? I need to explain."

"I'll give it a try."

Billy approached the office with trepidation. "Mr. Moss, it's Miss Hayes on the line. She wants to explain what happened that day."

Wesley's fingers clamped around the pen with vise-like force. "Out!"

The curt command sent a frost through the air, as if the room itself had iced over.

Billy withdrew in haste, murmuring into the phone, “Miss Hayes, Mr. Moss is tied up with pressing matters.”

Since Wesley refused the call, Gabriela decided to confront him at his office in person.

Yet this time, the Apex Group reception desk barred her entry—a threshold she once crossed without hindrance.

“I’m sorry, Miss Hayes, but to meet with Mr. Moss, an appointment is required.”

Unable to secure an appointment, Gabriela had no choice but to linger in the company lobby. She endured the wait through most of the day.

Chapter 735

Restless, she stared out at the downpour.

If she hadn’t left that day, she and Wesley might have mended their rift by now.

Yet now, it might take a hundredfold effort just to soften his opinion of her.

At 4:35, Wesley finally stepped out of the elevator, followed by Billy and the six-member advisory team. He gave them quiet directives, with Aaron and Billy nodding occasionally in agreement.

He looked strikingly handsome, radiating an air of refined authority that eclipsed the accomplished group at his heels.

Gabriela rose and called his name. "Wesley."

The others spotted her and promptly parted, clearing a path for Wesley and Gabriela.

But Wesley spared her only a fleeting, icy glance, his features etched with impatience. "What are you doing here?"

"Wesley, I didn't leave for no reason that day." Gabriela stepped closer, her voice gentle. "Truett had a fever..."

"No explanations necessary." Wesley averted his gaze, his face impassive. "Since you couldn't follow through then, honor your word and leave me alone."

Gabriela reached out quickly, clutching his sleeve. "Wesley, can't you spare even a moment to hear me out?"

“Don’t you understand? We’re finished!” Wesley peeled her fingers away one by one, then addressed the security guard at the entrance. “Keep a close watch. Gabriela is no longer an employee of Apex Group—bar her from entering again.”

The guards looked toward Gabriela and confirmed the order at once.

Gabriela could scarcely believe her ears.

Wesley had always been reserved, but he knew how to handle things with poise and decorum. Now, his unfamiliar, detached stare struck her as profoundly cruel.

A wave of sorrow washed over her.

Before his time abroad, she and Wesley had shared such deep affection.

How had it unraveled so abruptly?

Anxiety tightened its grip.

Drawing a steadying breath, she pressed on. “Wesley, may I make up for what you asked that day? It’s raining again today.”

Wesley refused to meet her eyes, a chill smirk curling his lips. “Do you have trouble comprehending plain speech?”

He motioned for security to escort her away.

At that moment, his driver pulled up, extending an umbrella to shelter Wesley as he walked to the vehicle. Wesley got in without a single backward look.

Gabriela chased after him. “Wesley, Truett had a high fever that night. I rushed back to Okburg—that’s why I couldn’t do what you wanted. You may not remember me, but surely you haven’t forgotten Truett, have you? He’s your son!”

Wesley had already raised the window, sealing off her voice.

“Drive,” he said.

Billy’s lips parted as if to interject, but Wesley’s stifling aura smothered any impulse to speak. The car receded into the distance.

Gabriela remained rooted in the rain, Wesley’s words echoing in her mind: They’re finished.

Soaked by the downpour, she looked utterly bedraggled. Through the rearview mirror, Wesley caught sight of her forlorn figure, and an unforeseen tenderness stirred within him. Agitation churned in his chest, his fingers drumming absently against the glass.

“Drive faster,” he ordered.

The driver complied at once, pressing the accelerator. As the vehicle vanished around the bend, Wesley left her behind.

Gabriela sank slowly to her knees in the rain. The cold pierced her, leaving her curled and trembling.

Abruptly, the rain stopped falling on her.

A spark of hope ignited. Gabriela lifted her gaze—only to find an unexpected figure: Stewart.

He was dressed in a pristine white suit beneath a sleek black trench coat.

Disappointment tugged at Gabriela. “Why are you here?”

Stewart knelt before her, clasped her chilled hand, and let out a resigned sigh. “I swore I wouldn’t meddle in your affairs anymore. But how did you let yourself end up like this?”

Chapter 736

Gabriela tried to pull her hand free, but Stewart's grip held fast and unyielding until she finally relented.

"When did you get back, Stewart?" she asked quietly.

Two years had passed since she turned down his confession. He had left soon after, disappearing overseas, and in all that time, neither of them had reached out.

"I returned a few days ago," he replied, steadying her as he pressed the umbrella handle into her palm. "It took everything in me not to come running to you the moment I arrived."

His gaze flickered toward her, shadowed with regret. "I didn't expect your situation with Wesley to be this tangled."

Without waiting for her protest, Stewart slipped off his coat and draped it over her shoulders, his fingers brushing her collar as he adjusted it with quiet care.

"Come on. I'll take you home."

With a subtle nod, he signaled Erik to pull the car around. Then, steering her gently but firmly, he guided her into the back seat before she could object.

“Turn the heat up,” he said to Erik curtly.

Warmth soon cocooned Gabriela, easing the chill from her bones. She drew a deep breath, her voice low. “Stewart... I can’t go home like this.”

She was drenched and shivering. Her family would panic if they saw her in this state, and worse, they might start weaving the wrong assumptions about Wesley.

“Not home, then?” Stewart’s tone softened, but his eyes held hers as he leaned in. “Would you rather stop at a hotel nearby to dry off? Or...”

He paused, deliberate. “Would you rather come to my place?”

There was something magnetic about Stewart, so unlike Wesley’s cool indifference. His presence radiated warmth—steady, yet invigorating—and it tugged at Gabriela’s senses in a way that unsettled her.

A prickle of unease crept along her skin, urging her to retreat. She shifted back, her voice firm despite the tremor in it. “I should go home.”

Stewart didn’t press further.

Without another word, he had Erik drive her through the rain-soaked streets, silent but watchful. By the time they reached her house, Gabriela was still shivering, her clothes clinging cold and damp to her skin.

Farley and Ken rushed to the door the moment she stepped inside, their eyes widening in shock at her bedraggled state.

Matthew was there as well. In the past two years, things between Gabriela and Matthew had softened.

She still couldn't bring herself to call him "Dad," but the sharp dismissals had vanished. Now she allowed him space with Truett—and even with her.

"What happened, Gabriela?" Matthew demanded, striding forward.

The three men surrounded her at once, pressing towels into her hands, offering hot milk, their concern almost suffocating.

Before Gabriela could reply, Stewart's voice cut in smoothly, explaining on her behalf. "She went to speak with Wesley, but he wouldn't see her, and he wouldn't even let her into his car. She waited outside in the downpour, and by the time I found her, she was already soaked through."

A heavy silence fell.

Matthew's expression darkened, thunderclouds gathering on his face.

Word of Wesley's condition had rippled through Matthew's circle, but he had been too consumed with finalizing his divorce from Lauren to pry into the details.

Now, hearing that Wesley had left Gabriela in the rain, his disdain hardened.

"That's not true. Wesley was in a meeting—" Gabriela began, attempting to defend him, but Farley raised a hand, his brows drawn tight. "Gabriela, that's enough for now. Go take a shower before you catch a cold."

Gabriela hesitated, knowing any protest would be wasted. Numb from the cold and exhausted by explanations, she gathered her clothes and slipped away toward the bathroom.

Farley set a steaming mug of coffee on the table in front of Stewart, offering it with quiet gratitude for bringing Gabriela home.

"Thank you, Farley." Stewart lifted the cup, took a slow sip, then turned his gaze to Matthew. "Mr. Howard, I hear you're in the middle of a divorce."

Matthew gave a small nod, his expression shadowed with unease.

Lauren had been sentenced to a year and a half, yet she had languished in prison for nearly two years before being released just months ago.

Only after she was settled did Matthew push for divorce. But prison had only sharpened her volatility. She refused to part quietly, lashing out instead.

She hurled accusations that Gabriela was the product of an affair, wielding it as supposed proof of his betrayal. Then came demands that he be stripped of everything, even the Howard family shares.

For Matthew, those shares were the one line he could not cross.

Beverley, too, was adamant they not fall into Lauren's hands.

And so the divorce dragged on, tangled in conflict for over a month with no end in sight.

"Mr. Howard," Stewart said carefully, "if you trust me, I may have a way forward. She can smear you with false accusations, but you're not without options. When she married you, she didn't exactly do so legally. I can secure evidence from the Hopolis project—"

"No." Matthew's voice cut like ice, his refusal sharp and absolute.

Though his heart no longer held anything for Lauren, Matthew refused to sink to her level.

Their bond through Rebecca remained, and he could not bear for his daughter to witness her parents tearing each other apart in bitterness.

He cast Stewart a detached glance. "Young man, don't be reckless. I know what you're after, but understand this: my opinion carries little weight with Gabriela. You don't need to trouble yourself earning my favor."

"You've misunderstood me, Mr. Howard," Stewart said evenly. "This isn't about winning anyone's favor. A few years ago, Lauren hired someone to kill her enemy, and I got caught in the crossfire. I nearly lost my life. Forgive me, but I can't let her walk away unpunished."

The memory of Stewart shielding Gabriela from a blade flickered through Matthew's mind. For a brief moment, his sternness eased.

The conversation shifted. They spoke of lucrative projects, deliberately skirting around Gabriela's name.

As the hour stretched on, Matthew invited Stewart to stay for dinner.

Chapter 738

Just as the meal was about to begin, Myah stepped into the villa. She halted at the sight of Stewart.

He looked up, his smile warm. "Hello, Myah. It's been a while."

Composing herself quickly, she returned the smile and drew closer. "You're Stewart, aren't you?"

"Sharp memory," Stewart replied with a knowing curve of his lips. "So where have you been all day, Myah?"

"I visited Wesley this morning," she said, avoiding his gaze. "He's having a pond dug in the yard for water lilies. I stayed to watch the workers plant them."

She turned to Gabriela, her tone brightening. "When the lilies bloom, let's go see them together, all right?"

Gabriela murmured her agreement, though her mind was elsewhere.

The thought of Wesley turning her away before she could even step into the garden weighed heavily on her chest, his cold indifference pressing down like a stone.

Dinner passed in heavy silence. Even Truett kept his head down at the table.

Only Myah broke the stillness, her voice bright and careless as she prattled about the pond and the lilies.

Then, with a careless laugh, she dropped Rebecca's name like a stone into water. "Rebecca showed up at Wesley's place this morning. You won't believe it! She's got his fingerprint and password! What on earth is Wesley thinking? He wasn't even home. I had to step in with the workers to drive her away. She stormed off, absolutely livid!"

Across the table, Gabriela's eyes glistened, her composure slipping.

Stewart's gaze flicked toward her, then back to Myah. He said softly, "Myah, talking at the table ruins the appetite."

The quiet warning in his tone was unmistakable.

Myah faltered, her bravado wilting. She ducked her head and ate in silence, no longer daring to provoke.

After the meal, Stewart's hand closed firmly around Gabriela's wrist. "Come with me. We need to talk."

He led her into the garden behind the villa.

The rain had left the air fresh, the ground littered with osmanthus blossoms, their sweetness sharp against the cool night.

Gabriela pulled free, bristling. "What do you want?"

His eyes held hers, steady and intense. "Gabriela, Wesley treats you horribly. Be honest with me. What are you holding on to?"

"That's none of your concern." Her reply was sharp, almost desperate. "Wesley's attitude is between us. You don't get to interfere."

A bitter laugh escaped Stewart as he stepped closer, his presence pressing in like heat. "Not interfere? Gabriela, what exactly do you think I am to you?"

The warmth of him, the vitality he carried so easily, unsettled her. Gabriela retreated a step, her voice trembling with earnestness. "Stewart, you're my closest friend. That's all."

Stewart scoffed, the sound cutting through the night. He closed the gap again, voice low and charged. "Seven years ago, when you sought me out, persuading me to design a reading lamp for the blind, was I just a friend then? Two years ago, when you twisted my confession to force Wesley into admitting his feelings, did you tell me not to interfere then?"

Chapter 739

Stewart's gaze dropped to Gabriela, sharp and unyielding, his eyes burning with a force that pinned her in place.

He had always carried himself with elegance, a man of calm restraint, but this edge of raw aggression was utterly foreign to her.

Two years apart, and now the man standing before her felt like a stranger.

A ripple of unease urged her to cut the exchange short. "That's an entirely different issue!" she snapped, turning as if to walk away.

Without lifting his head, Stewart's hand shot out, catching her wrist with effortless ease.

Gabriela flinched, tugging against his hold. "What are you doing?"

When her eyes met his, she saw the faint curl of a smile tugging at his lips.

"Relax. I'm joking. Didn't expect you to scare so easily." His tone softened, and he tapped her forehead lightly with his fingertip. "After all these years, you still don't know what kind of person I am?"

Gabriela rubbed the sore spot with a frown.

His expression was calm again, refined, as though that sharp edge from a moment ago had never existed. Yet she couldn't deny that after two years apart, he felt changed.

She slipped her hand free and took a step back. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

Stewart chuckled. "I only wanted to see your reaction. Sorry if I startled you."

Gabriela forced a small smile, pushing away her unease. "It's fine."

"Then let's speak plainly." Stewart exhaled, his voice carrying unexpected weight. "With Wesley's memory in shambles, he mistreats you, refuses to even recognize his own son. How long do you intend to keep waiting?"

"As long as it takes," Gabriela answered without hesitation. "Stewart, I'm not weak. I can work, I can endure, and I'm not exactly lacking in looks either."

Her voice steadied into conviction. "Even if Wesley doesn't remember me... he loved me once. And I'll make him love me again."

At the mention of Wesley, her eyes lit up, her whole face glowing with determined radiance.

Stewart's chest tightened under the blaze of her devotion. He turned his gaze aside, masking the sharp sting of jealousy. "Well, you are quite amazing, Gabriela. Of course Wesley is going to fall in love with you again," he said.

Her face brightened with joy. "That's more like it! You believe in me, don't you?"

Stewart didn't answer right away. After a pause, he said lightly, "It's getting chilly. Let's head back."

"All right," Gabriela replied.

As they approached the entrance, Stewart suddenly stopped. "I think I left something outside. Gabriela, you go on in first."

Once Gabriela disappeared inside, Stewart turned down a side path.

A row of large potted flowers released their fragrance into the night air.

"You can come out now," Stewart said.

For a moment, silence. Then Myah stepped from behind the blooms, her expression unreadable.

"You were listening?" Stewart's voice was calm, but there was steel beneath it.

Myah tilted her head, feigning innocence. "What could you possibly be telling Gabriela that needs hiding? Stewart, I don't like her marrying Wesley, and I don't like you chasing after her either."

Stewart gave a low chuckle. "You can't decide who Gabriela loves."

"She belongs to Allan," Myah replied stubbornly, her eyes glinting.

Stewart's face cooled, his tone sharpening. "Think whatever you like, but watch your words and actions."

Though her bravado faltered under his gaze, Myah muttered, "You can't order me around. I haven't done anything to hurt Gabriela."

"There's no point arguing." Stewart exhaled, patience thinning. "If you really want to stop her from marrying Wesley, you'd first need to make her stop loving him. Otherwise, with her spirit and persistence, winning his heart again will be effortless."

Myah puffed her cheeks, masking her unease with false pride. "So even you admit Gabriela's remarkable. Not that it matters, because unreliable men like you aren't good enough for her anyway."

Stewart's eyes narrowed. He had no interest in further debate. His voice dropped, low and warning. "I don't want you eavesdropping on us again. If Gabriela learns of this, you won't like the outcome."

Chapter 740

Her fingers twitched, and though her pride stung, Myah whispered, "Fine."

Inside, however, Myah's mind spun. She had a plan that could drive Gabriela away from Wesley once and for all. She just wasn't ready to use it. Not yet.

Wesley had no inkling that Myah, the one he trusted most, harbored schemes against him.

At that moment, he was seated at the Gilded Fork, waiting for a client.

Half an hour later, Jaycob finally arrived, his face riddled with apologies.

"Mr. Moss, the downpour today was relentless. Traffic was a nightmare. If the rain hadn't eased just now, I'd still be trapped on the road," he explained.

At the mention of "rain," Wesley's expression shifted, his mind slipping elsewhere.

Platters of food were laid out, and Jaycob launched into details about the Eventide Vale project.

Yet Wesley barely heard a word. His gaze flicked again and again to his watch.

Two hours had passed. He wondered if Gabriela had returned.

She'd lingered at the office all day, waiting for him to listen, and he had turned away. Was she still out there, standing in the rain?

As Jaycob spoke, he quietly studied Wesley, noting the restless tension etched across his face.

Whenever Wesley wore that look, it was always because of Gabriela.

Jaycob caught the shift, exchanged a glance with Billy, then murmured an excuse and slipped out toward the restroom.

Left behind, Billy studied Wesley's expression, treading carefully. "Mr. Moss, the rain's stopped now... I wonder how Miss Hayes is doing. Should I call the front desk and check?"

Wesley gave a slight nod, as though it hardly mattered.

Taking that as permission, Billy dialed quickly.

The receptionist answered at once. "Miss Hayes isn't outside anymore. Not long after you left, a man came and took her away."

Billy froze. "Did you see who it was?"

"I couldn't get a clear look. He was tall, though, and handsome, I think," the receptionist replied.

A chill shot through Billy's chest. His fingers trembled so badly he nearly dropped the phone.

Wesley's voice cut in. "What is it?"

"Nothing," Billy said hastily, clamping a hand over the receiver. "Mr. Moss, Miss Hayes has already gone back. No need to worry."

Wesley held out his hand. "Give me the phone."

Panic spiked in Billy's throat. He regretted making the call at all. "Mr. Moss, I already confirmed everything."

"Hand it over." Wesley's tone dropped, cold and sharp. "Or do I not even have the right to hear the receptionist's words myself?"

Billy's protests died. Silence weighed between them.

Reluctantly, Billy placed the phone in Wesley's hand, praying he only wanted to confirm details.

Wesley's voice was low but firm as he said into the phone, "Tell me about Gabriela."

Startled, the receptionist straightened on the other end, speaking more carefully this time. "The rain was coming down too hard. I couldn't see him clearly from a distance, but from the way he acted, he seemed very concerned about Miss Hayes. And he gave her his jacket."

Billy's stomach twisted. He stood frozen at Wesley's side, dread creeping up his spine.

It took no more than three seconds for Wesley's expression to shift.

Billy nearly groaned—why did Gabriela always manage to stumble into trouble at the worst possible moments?

He scrambled for an excuse. "Mr. Moss, perhaps... perhaps it was Mr. Howard who picked her up. He's an old man, yes, but he's well-kept. From a distance, he could still look like a tall gentleman."

His voice faltered, growing weaker with every word. Even he didn't believe his own excuse—how could it convince his boss?

Wesley pressed his lips into a hard line, saying nothing.

He returned the phone to Billy with deliberate calm, but his eyes were ice, warning of the storm about to break.