

His kiss 751

Chapter 751

Gabriela stood tall, her eyes gleaming with quiet confidence. In contrast, Rebecca suddenly seemed small and petty.

For a heartbeat, Rebecca was cornered. If she accepted Gabriela's challenge now, then even if she secured a deal later, the credit would never truly be hers. It would only brand her a fraud, a subject of whispered jokes.

Yet refusing outright would expose her as a coward—too timid to face Gabriela directly.

How infuriating. Why did Gabriela have to be so insufferable? As if being able to fight wasn't enough, she also wielded words like blades.

The poise Rebecca had just regained crumbled, replaced by a raw desire to wipe that composure from Gabriela's face.

Around them, guests exchanged knowing glances, laughter muffled behind polite hands. Rebecca's prestige was unraveling fast.

From the sidelines, Bess frowned in worry. Why couldn't Rebecca just hold her ground? Despite being younger, Gabriela carried herself with far more restraint.

Stepping in smoothly, Bess slipped her hand into Rebecca's. Her voice was warm yet deliberate.

"Rebecca, isn't it time to announce tonight's donations? After all, you're the host. Don't forget your role."

The words snapped Rebecca back. She seized the opportunity at once.

"Ah, yes, I nearly took up too much of everyone's time. Thank you for the reminder, Grandma."

She hurried to the main stage, delivered polished thanks to the guests, and moved on to the donation list.

As each donation was announced, waiters carried the items forward. Soon, the guests' attention was wholly fixed on the spectacle.

The list glittered with rare jewels, antique treasures, and dazzling necklaces shimmering under the chandeliers. One donation stirred particular excitement: "The Muse's Melody," a renowned painting offered for auction. It was precisely for this masterpiece that Bernice had come.

The items paraded out to buzzing interest as Rebecca read the list in a steady, elegant tone.

Then, quite suddenly, she lifted her voice in feigned surprise. "It's Gabriela Hayes's donation—an original design handbag!"

Her words sent a ripple of amusement through the crowd. Faces turned curious, some skeptical.

Rebecca leaned into the moment, her smile playful, her tone barbed. “Since becoming Ms. Presley Crawford’s protégé, Gabriela has grown rather bold, hasn’t she? Only two short years in the field, and she already dares to auction her own work. Let’s hope this handbag finds a buyer.”

Gabriela’s brow furrowed. She had donated a bracelet worth over half a million. How had it transformed into this bag? Yet the bag on display was unmistakably one of her own designs.

Her thoughts flickered back. Under Presley’s often indifferent guidance, she had designed several bags over the past two years. One, in particular, she had parted with reluctantly.

Emersyn Thorpe.

That persistent woman had once pestered her for a design from Presley. Presley, famously selective, rarely agreed to custom work unless the client held significant influence. Gabriela could not get one for Emersyn.

“If not Presley, then you,” Emersyn had insisted with disarming warmth. “You’re her protégé. Your work must carry at least some of her brilliance.”

Emersyn’s persistence won out. Gabriela eventually crafted a design, which Emersyn purchased for eighty thousand.

Now, here it was, paraded as Gabriela's donation.

So that was the game.

But the list was already set, and Gabriela had no intention of causing a scene. If the handbag sold, fine. If not, the Howard family would foot the bill.

Losing money was their problem. Losing face? She could survive that.

She didn't care for others' opinions.

With the formalities complete, the auction began. Number cards were distributed, and a dozen items went under the hammer, the hall alive with competitive energy.

The treasures were dazzling, each reflecting the wealth and taste of the elite. Guests won rare prizes while earning praise for their generosity—a flawless exchange of prestige and indulgence.

Then came the crown jewel: "The Muse's Melody."

Bernice swept it up with a winning bid of thirty-six million.

Gabriela, who hadn't lifted her paddle all evening, nearly dozed off until that final number jolted her awake.

Chapter 752

Bernice? Thirty-six million? On a single painting?

The extravagance of the rich truly belonged to another universe.

At last, only one item remained: the handbag Gabriela had designed.

Rebecca presented it with a graceful smile, though the disdain in her eyes was unmistakable.

"This bag's design is simple yet carries a touch of elegance. The embroidery is... unique. Though Miss Hayes's career is young, her craftsmanship shows promise."

Her gaze swept the room before settling on Gabriela.

"The estimated value is eighty thousand, with a starting bid of the same. Each increment must be no less than ten thousand. Now, who will open at eighty thousand?"

The air shifted. Where earlier items had ignited eager competition, now there was silence.

Who would pay tens of thousands for a bag by an unknown designer? True, Gabriela was Presley's protégé, but her own name held little weight. Yet she dared to price it at eighty thousand—laughable, arrogant, out of touch.

Worse, Wesley's cold indifference earlier had sent a clear signal. No one wanted to risk his displeasure by siding with Gabriela.

Rebecca let the silence linger, her smile refined, eyes glinting with mockery.

"It seems Miss Hayes's handbag hasn't captured interest. But no matter, the Howard family will, of course, take responsibility—"

Before she finished, a paddle lifted.

"I'll bid five hundred thousand," Mason said steadily.

Behind his composure, Mason's situation was precarious. His factory's two-year transition had drained finances. He had come tonight, with his ailing wife, hoping to forge connections. Five hundred thousand was no small sum. He felt the weight of it, even as the words left his lips.

Startled, Gabriela immediately turned her head and whispered to him, “Mr. Garner, you don’t need to do this. The Howard family will end up buying it back anyway. Let them bear the loss.”

She was content to let the Howards bleed money.

But Mason shook his head, his eyes softening as he looked at his wife. “Whitney likes this bag. Joy isn’t measured in coin.”

Beside him, Whitney gave a faint, earnest nod. Gabriela could say no more.

Then, as the atmosphere settled, another paddle rose—Bernice’s. Her movement was unhurried, her tone cool.

“One million.”

The hall erupted. No one expected it. A bag by a relatively unknown apprentice had drawn a seven-figure bid. Was it genuine appreciation, or a move to elevate Gabriela’s standing?

Rebecca’s smile wavered, a hint of sourness creeping in.

“It seems Ms. Thomas has taken a liking to this piece. One million. Do we have a higher offer?”

The crowd assumed the bag was Bernice's, until a clear voice cut through.

"One million one hundred thousand."

Gabriela's eyes widened. It was Alissa, the girl who had mocked her at the entrance.

Her mother frowned, whispering sharply, "Don't be foolish. Why waste money on an unproven designer's bag? You'll only bring trouble."

But Alissa sat straighter, defiance on her face. "I like the bag. With Presley as her mentor, Gabriela is bound to rise. Buying it now is an investment."

Under the public gaze, Alissa's mother held her tongue. Taking Alissa's bid at face value, Mason and Bernice chose not to compete further.

The gavel fell. The bag was sold to Alissa for one million one hundred thousand.

Rebecca's smile tightened visibly.

Gabriela quietly marked Alissa in her memory.

As the auction concluded, Rebecca suddenly raised her voice again.

“This year’s highest bidder is Mr. Lyman Blakely. Congratulations. Tomorrow, the Howard family will personally deliver the cooperation contract to your company.”

Lyman rose, basking in applause.

Then Rebecca turned, her smile aimed like a blade at Gabriela.

“And this evening, we are unveiling a special new rule: at our charity gala, not only will the highest bid be rewarded... but the lowest winning bid will also face a consequence.”

Tonight, the lowest winning bid was one million one hundred thousand—for Gabriela’s handbag.

Gabriela’s chest tightened.

So this had been Rebecca’s scheme all along.

Chapter 753

The instant Rebecca’s accusation slipped into the air, a voice cut sharply across the room before Gabriela could even draw breath to defend herself.

“You can’t be serious! She shows up at the charity gala, contributes generously, and instead of recognition, she’s threatened with disgrace? Tell me, who would ever dare support an event like this again?”

The speaker was Alissa, the very woman who had proudly secured Gabriela’s handbag. Her words dropped like sparks into dry tinder. For a long, loaded moment, the crowd could only watch her.

Bold, breathtaking, and unafraid to bare her defiance, she commanded the room in a way Rebecca never could.

From the corner, Maddie Hopkins, Alissa’s mother, seized her daughter’s arm and hissed furiously, “Why meddle in something that isn’t yours? Stay quiet. Not another word.”

But Alissa was never one to be reined in. Raised in opulence and spoiled by privilege, she had long grown accustomed to sneering at those beneath her. Her arrogance was infamous, her temper quick. Yet beneath all that hauteur lay a fatal flaw that always betrayed her: her hopeless weakness for beauty.

Gabriela’s beauty was disarming. After teasing her earlier in the parking lot, Alissa now felt an odd urge to make amends.

“This so-called rule was pulled out of thin air at the last minute. How can anyone call that fair?” she protested. “And if we’re bending rules on a whim, what’s next? Do we just cancel the prize for the highest bid because it suits someone’s mood?”

What had sounded like a reasonable penalty now rang hollow. Alissa's challenge turned the tide.

Suddenly, everyone saw it for what it was: a calculated strike against Gabriela, dressed up as regulation. To weaponize authority so brazenly at a charity gala was vulgar.

The crowd stirred with uneasy murmurs.

Amid the whispers, Gabriela stepped forward. "Thank you," she said quietly to Alissa.

Alissa turned her head, trying to mask the sudden rush in her chest. "Think nothing of it. Call it my apology for earlier," she muttered.

But the moment she looked away, she hid her face in her hands. Gabriela had smiled at her just then, and Alissa felt utterly undone.

How could anyone be so impossibly, heartbreakingly beautiful?

Rebecca, meanwhile, was seething beneath her serene façade. She had assumed the penalty would pass unnoticed—after all, it cost the others nothing.

Where had Alissa Hopkins, of all people, suddenly come from? There was no history of friendship between her and Gabriela.

But the words were out. Retracting them now would only expose weakness.

So Rebecca curved her lips into a polite smile and said smoothly, “Miss Hopkins, I wasn’t aware you and Gabriela were close. There’s really no need for tempers. It’s nothing more than a harmless little penalty.”

Her eyes flicked to Gabriela, her tone sharpening like a blade hidden beneath silk. “Unless, of course, Miss Hayes is afraid to play by the rules?”

Chapter 754

Rebecca stood at the center of the room like a queen who needed no crown. Her very presence carried an ingrained arrogance that pressed down on everyone else.

But Gabriela remained unshaken. She didn’t even bother to entertain the remark.

“Yes, to be honest,” she replied calmly. “I’m new to these things.”

Alissa nearly burst into applause. That was exactly how she should deal with a venomous diva in silk gloves.

A crease formed between Rebecca's brows. Her voice sharpened as she struck where it hurt.

"With that kind of cowardice, Gabriela, it's no wonder Wesley left you."

The provocation was barefaced.

Gabriela could have dismissed it, but the thought of Wesley and the Moss family hearing of this humiliation gave her pause. She had honed herself for years, polishing every aspect, determined that when she finally stood beside him, there would be no reason to cast her aside.

Her hesitation was all Alissa needed.

Planting her hands on her hips, she snapped, "Rebecca, enough circling! Just spit it out. What's the penalty? Don't tell me she's supposed to agree blindly. What if you order her to do a striptease? Should she oblige?"

Her bluntness cracked the tension, drawing laughter and nods. For once, the room leaned away from Rebecca.

A flicker of malice danced in Rebecca's eyes, though she quickly buried it.

"Don't be absurd. The punishment is harmless. Gabriela only needs to dance a lively number with one of the gentlemen here."

"I don't dance," Gabriela said flatly. She had been too busy surviving and working to ever learn such frivolities.

"That's precisely why it's a punishment," Rebecca replied with a lilting laugh. "If you could dance, it would be a showcase, not a punishment."

This was no casual suggestion. Rebecca had begged for control of tonight's banquet. Now, with Matthew conveniently kept away, she wasn't about to squander her chance. Every word was a carefully laid snare, and Gabriela was her prey.

Gabriela hesitated only a moment before nodding. "Fine. Let's get this over with."

Alissa immediately shot to her feet. "Then I'll dance with her."

Rebecca's lips curved. "Ladies are not permitted."

Her eyes swept the room. "So, gentlemen, who wishes to partner Miss Hayes?"

Whispers rippled through the crowd. Gabriela's beauty was undeniable, an invitation most men would leap at. Yet Wesley's presence hung over her like a silent warning, making them hesitate.

Then, a voice broke the lull.

“I’ll do it.”

It was the man in the white suit, the one who had earlier presented Gabriela with a white rose.

He strode toward her with impeccable poise and bowed. “May I have the honor of this dance, Miss Hayes?”

Believing his intentions genuine, Gabriela studied him for a moment before extending her hand.

But just as her fingertips were about to brush his palm, another hand closed firmly around hers. The grip was strong and unyielding.

Chapter 755

She looked up, startled, and her eyes locked with Wesley’s dark, fathomless gaze.

“I’ll be the one to dance with her.”

The air shifted instantly. Wesley’s cold authority radiated through the room. His gaze swept toward the man in white like a blade, and the latter faltered, retreating without a word.

Without asking, Wesley slid an arm around Gabriela's waist and guided her to the center of the floor.

Silence swept the hall. Hadn't Wesley already left? Why return now? And why, of all things, to stake a claim on Gabriela?

Rebecca's composure cracked for a second. She hadn't anticipated his return. This dance was only bait, a distraction until the drug took hold.

The plan had been flawless: the white-suited man would lead Gabriela off afterward; Cindy would summon the crowd; and once Gabriela was compromised, the story would be spun that she had gone willingly to sleep with him.

Her reputation would be ruined. Wesley would despise her, and the Moss family would cast her aside.

But Wesley's return tore the entire scheme apart. In a single step, he had unraveled everything.

On the dance floor, Wesley's gaze bore down on Gabriela, sharp and unreadable.

"Disappointed it wasn't him standing here with you?" he asked, his voice laced with ice.

Gabriela blinked, startled. "What are you talking about?"

Her confusion only seemed to fuel his ire. His jaw tightened.

"Every time Allan is involved, you lose all sense. Do you even realize when you're being played?"

Gabriela didn't argue. Instead, she slipped her arms around his waist, rested her cheek against his chest, and whispered playfully, "Wesley, I knew you'd come back for me."

For the briefest instant, his lips curved upward, but he quickly smothered it.

"Sweet talk won't work this time. Let go. We need to dance properly."

But Gabriela only clung tighter, tilting her face up, her eyes sparkling.

"Wesley, you promised you'd always look after me."

That wide-eyed, almost puppy-like look tested his restraint. Even knowing her heart might still be tangled with Allan, he felt the urge to yield.

Instead, he steeled himself, keeping his movements measured as they turned slowly. It was less dancing and more swaying in place with her clinging to him.

“Stand properly,” he muttered. “This isn’t how it’s done.”

“I don’t care,” Gabriela said with a small laugh, tightening her grip. “I only want to hug you.”

Gabriela finally understood that Wesley was jealous of Allan.

Explaining seemed futile. But with him this close, his warmth enveloping her, she wasn’t about to let go.

Her tenderness was wearing down his defenses, though pride held him back. He masked the softness stirring within with a cool warning.

“Gabriela, everyone’s watching. You can’t behave like this.”

Gabriela tipped her head, feigning innocence.

“Then take me home. Will you?”

Wesley stumbled, nearly stepping on Gabriela's feet.

Gabriela caught him with playful boldness, looping her arms around his neck and rising on tiptoe, her lips brushing dangerously close to his ear.

"Wesley... I like you. Let's go home. Whatever you want, I'll say yes."

Her cool, teasing whisper sent a shiver down Wesley's spine. A jolt shot through him, but his expression darkened.

"Stop this nonsense!"

Before he could protest further, Gabriela pressed a quick kiss to his cheek.

Heat surged through him, his grip tightening on her waist as though against his will.

"Do you even know what you're doing?" he asked, his voice unsteady.

Gabriela gazed up with wide-eyed innocence, though her eyes held an unshakable gleam.

"I do."

Wesley's chest constricted.

That look... It was the same one she'd worn two years ago at the Blue Star, right before he discovered she'd been drugged. His jaw tightened.

Without another word, he caught her wrist to still her, then slid an arm firmly around her waist and practically swept her out of the hall. Not a single courtesy was spared for Rebecca.

All eyes followed them. Whispers rose like a tide until the room erupted in murmurs.

Gabriela dared to pull such a stunt? From Wesley's reaction, something was clearly about to unfold between them tonight.

Alissa tugged on her mother's sleeve, grinning. "Mom, do you see? Wesley clearly cares about her! Who said they weren't getting along?"

She leaned closer. "And Mom, I told you Gabriela isn't just beautiful, she's kind too. Don't you think?"

Maddie paused thoughtfully before nodding. "You're right."

Around them, young women glittered in jewel tones, ruffles, and daring cuts, each vying to outshine the other.

Only Gabriela stood apart, serene in a simple black gown draped with a white shawl. Modest, refined—her attire was perfect for a charity ball, neither flashy nor bland.

Maddie finished her appraisal with a sigh and flicked her daughter's forehead. "Look at you, dressed like an overdone peacock. Learn something from her."

Normally quick to retort, Alissa only nodded. "Yes."

The ladies nearby blinked in disbelief. This was Alissa, after all, known for her stubbornness.

Gabriela's beauty wasn't sharp or intimidating; it was gentle, drawing people in quietly. The longer they looked, the more radiant she became. Winning Alissa over like this was no small feat.

One woman whispered curiously, "Alissa, so you bought that bag not for the prestige, but just to support her?"

Alissa's lips curved. "I just can't stand people who look down on others."

Rebecca listened to the rising chatter, her jaw clenched so tight it ached.

She had never considered herself the type for such vile tactics as drugging someone. But the substance she'd acquired tonight—powerful enough to strip away all restraint, to turn composure into raw desire—had seemed like the perfect weapon.

If it could shatter Gabriela's pristine image, what did a little dignity matter?

Yet she hadn't accounted for Wesley's sudden return. That was what truly maddened her. Once again, luck tilted in Gabriela's favor, delivering everything into her lap without effort.

Chapter 757

Meanwhile, just outside the Howard estate...

Wesley practically bundled Gabriela into the car, slammed the door, and started the engine.

"Where are we going?" Gabriela asked softly.

"I'm taking you home," Wesley replied.

"To my villa," she said, her fingers curling around his arm as she lifted pleading eyes to his. "Please?"

It was that look again—the one that unraveled his composure. No matter how he fought it, even the hardest heart couldn't withstand it, least of all his where she was concerned.

"Fine. Your place."

On the way, he stopped at a convenience store and returned with two bottles of cold water.

"Is this for me to drink?" Gabriela asked sweetly, tilting her head.

"To cool you down," Wesley muttered, and pressed the bottles gently against her flushed cheeks. "I'm driving. Keep them against your face. Understand?"

The icy touch sent a shock through her nerves, snapping her back to clarity.

But Wesley's uncharacteristically gentle tone was something she rarely heard.

Even clear-headed, she chose to play along, lowering her lashes obediently. "Okay."

By the time they reached Rosemont Gardens, Gabriela still held the chilled bottles to her cheeks.

Wesley, watching from the corner of his eye, found the sight oddly satisfying.

Just as he cut the engine, she slipped her hand through his arm and leaned close.

“Wesley, would you like to come in for wine?”

Wesley searched her expression. The haze was gone from her eyes; she was perfectly lucid now. Part of him ached to say yes, but he forced restraint into his voice.

“You’re a young woman living alone. Think carefully. You shouldn’t invite a man in so casually at night.”

“Don’t you want to see Truett?” she asked softly. “He walks so steadily now, and he speaks clearly. Every day, he waits for his dad to come home. Wesley, it’s been two years. Don’t you miss your son? Don’t you want to see who he takes after?”

Wesley’s throat tightened. Words clawed at the silence. He swallowed hard.

“Truett?”

Gabriela’s gaze held steady. “Yes. Your son, Truett.”

His resolve crumbled. "Come on. I'll walk you in."

Together they entered the house.

In the living room, the clock hadn't yet struck nine. Truett, still awake after his bath, sat neatly on the sofa while Farley gently towel-dried his damp hair.

Truett swung his small legs. "Farley, why isn't Mommy back yet?"

Farley smiled. "She's working late tonight. Don't wait up, all right? Be a good boy and go to bed."

Truett nodded. "Okay."

But then footsteps sounded in the hall. His head snapped around, and his eyes widened at the sight of Gabriela and the tall man beside her.

Truett had stared at Wesley's photo countless times, memorizing every detail. In an instant, he knew the man before him was his dad.

For a heartbeat, he froze, mouth agape as if caught between disbelief and a dream. The next second, he bolted off the sofa, bare feet pattering as he stumbled forward.

“Daddy!” he cried, flinging his little arms around Wesley’s legs, hugging with all his might.

“Daddy, you finally came home! You’re so tall! I can’t even see your face!”

He tilted his round, rosy face up, eyes sparkling like black grapes.

Wesley’s thoughts scattered, his chest tight. Almost on instinct, he bent and scooped the boy into his arms. His voice softened, unrecognizably gentle.

“How did you know I’m your dad?”

Truett nestled against him with innocent certainty. “Mommy has your photos.”

Holding his son close, Wesley lifted his gaze to Gabriela. For the first time in years, the thorn buried in his heart loosened, giving way to something warmer.

Allan belonged to the past. Even if Gabriela still carried him in her heart, so what? Could Wesley—proud president of Apex Group and heir to the Moss legacy—ever lose to a ghost?

“Daddy, you’re even more handsome than in the photos!” Truett beamed, then asked, his voice tinged with worry, “Daddy, you won’t leave again, will you?”

Wesley’s lips curved into a rare, gentle smile. He nodded. “No. I’m not going anywhere.”

“Hooray!” Truett clapped his small hands before wriggling down. “Daddy, come! I’ll show you my drawings!”

Tiny fingers curled firmly around his, tugging him upstairs.

“Truett, your hair isn’t dry yet!” Farley hurried after them, towel in hand.

Wesley reached back and took it with quiet authority. “I’ll do it.”

Gabriela stood rooted, watching father and son disappear up the stairs. Her eyes shimmered, the edges reddening.

Inwardly, she whispered a fierce cheer to herself, “Come on, Truett. This time, it’s all up to you.”

Farley caught the unusual glimmer in her expression. “Are you feeling all right, Gabriela?”

Gabriela quickly blinked the emotion away and lowered her voice. "Farley, I'm not feeling well. I need your help."

Startled by her flushed face, Farley asked quickly, "What's wrong? Are you sick?"

Gabriela shook her head, lowering her eyes. Her cheeks burned as she whispered, "No... but I need you to prepare an icy cola for me."

Farley hesitated. "Are you sure you can handle cold cola at night?"

"Yes," Gabriela replied, her blush deepening. "I need to cool down. Please, Farley. I'm going to take a shower first."

Without waiting for a reply, she hurried into the bathroom.

The icy water hit her skin like a thousand needles. A violent shudder racked her body, and she barely stifled a cry. It was too much. Gasping, she turned the knob back to hot, but the heat inside her refused to fade.

Her heart clenched with frustration. If she couldn't calm this fire, then Wesley would just have to face the consequences.

After all, if it weren't for him, Rebecca would never have targeted her like this in the first place.

Chapter 759

Gabriela stepped out of the bathroom feeling refreshed. Her damp hair brushed her shoulders, and a sense of calm washed over her.

When she reached the stairs, Farley had already set a glass of icy cola on the table. He gave her a warm smile. "Here is the cola."

"Thank you, Farley," Gabriela said, her voice softening. Her gaze drifted toward Truett's room.

Catching her glance, Farley's mouth curved knowingly. "Those two have been upstairs the whole time," he remarked. "Not once have they come down."

Though he had never fully approved of Wesley, Farley knew there was no changing Gabriela's feelings. Besides, Truett had spent two years longing to meet his father.

If Wesley could truly cherish them both, that would be the happiest outcome Farley could wish for. At the very least, Gabriela's story wouldn't repeat her mother's mistakes.

"I'll go check on them," Gabriela said, turning toward the stairs.

As she reached the landing, she froze, her hand tightening on the rail.

Myah stood there in the dim light, silent, her long hair spilling over her shoulders, her expression unreadable.

Startled, Gabriela gasped. "Myah! Why aren't you in bed? What are you doing here?"

Myah blinked, as though snapping out of a daze, then offered a small, sweet smile and raised the cup in her hand. "I was just thirsty."

Relieved, Gabriela exhaled and gently patted Myah's head. "Go drink your water and get some rest. Even with your eyesight better, you still shouldn't stay up so late."

"I know." Myah dipped her head obediently before padding downstairs, her footsteps soft in the quiet house.

Watching her slender figure retreat, Gabriela felt a faint unease stir in her chest. She silently resolved to keep a closer eye on Myah from now on.

With that thought, she walked to Truett's room and slowly pushed the door open.

Truett lay nestled in Wesley's arms, his lashes drooping as sleep crept in. Wesley's voice flowed low and soothing, weaving the bedtime story into a gentle lullaby.

That deep, resonant voice could command a room, but softened like this, it wrapped around them like a blanket.

Clinging to Wesley's arm, Truett mumbled drowsily, "Daddy, I want you to read to me every day."

The quiet plea tugged at Gabriela's heart, a mist rising in her eyes. No matter how much love she, Farley, and Ken gave the boy, they could never provide the unique sense of security that only a father's presence could offer.

She took a step forward, but Wesley caught the movement and pressed a finger to his lips.

Gabriela froze, swallowing her words.

Within minutes, Truett's breathing evened out. Wesley lowered him carefully onto the bed, smoothing the blanket over him with patient hands. Then he crossed the room and drew Gabriela into the hallway.

"Truett is asleep," he murmured. "Were you looking for me?"

Gabriela, still wrapped in the warmth of the scene, felt her eyes rimmed red, her thoughts slow to gather.

When Wesley asked, the words slipped out before she could stop them. “I came to you to... cool down!”

Wesley stared at her, momentarily speechless, a frown touching his brow. “Are you still feeling the effects of the drug?”

Heat rushed to her face, her cheeks burning scarlet the moment she realized what she’d said.

Gathering herself quickly, she forced a cheerful smile. “Farley prepared some icy cola—it helps me cool down. You should have some too.”

The earnestness in her eyes drew an involuntary chuckle from Wesley.

Even after two years apart, she hadn’t lost her charm. She might not have changed much outwardly, yet she had raised Truett with such devotion, growing into a remarkable mother.

Gabriela caught his faint smile and seized the moment, slipping her fingers into his.

“Come on, let’s go downstairs and have cola.”

Chapter 760

Her palm felt warm and soft, small in his grasp.

At that moment, Wesley decided to let go of everything else—Allan, the transplant, the tangled memories.

If Gabriela would stay by his side for the rest of their lives, even if part of her still saw him as a substitute, he didn't care.

He would dedicate himself to her and help her love him until the shadow of that other man faded completely. He refused to lose to someone who no longer existed.

With a subtle turn, Wesley's fingers curled around Gabriela's hand.

Feeling his quiet response, Gabriela's heart gave a sudden, sharp beat. Her nose prickled, yet her lips curved into a smile.

They had made it through the hardest part—every sacrifice, every tear had been worth it.

Downstairs, Myah was chatting with Farley.

"Farley, why did you give icy cola to Gabriela so late?" she asked, curiosity glinting in her eyes.

Farley's tone was patient and warm. "Gabriela's been working late a lot lately. She's under quite a bit of stress. This icy cola helps her relax. Would you like some?"

"My throat's dry anyway, so yes," Myah said lightly.

Farley handed her a glass.

Just as Myah accepted it, her gaze fell on Gabriela and Wesley coming downstairs, hand in hand. She went rigid, shock locking her in place. The glass slipped from her grasp and shattered, cola splashing across the floor.

Gabriela instinctively released Wesley's hand and rushed over. "Are you hurt?"

Farley hurried over as well, his face full of concern as he bent to check on Myah.

Myah offered a sheepish smile. "I'm fine. It slipped from my hands. Sorry for the mess."

She crouched to gather the shards, but Ken stepped in, gently stopping her. "Careful—you might cut yourself. Let me handle it."

By the time it was cleaned up, night had already settled in.

Everyone had their cola before quietly retreating to their rooms.

As they walked upstairs, Gabriela hesitated. “You came so suddenly—I didn’t have time to prepare a guest room. Maybe you could...”

Wesley couldn’t stand seeing her worry. With a faint, resigned sigh, he cut her off. “I’ll stay in your room.”

Gabriela blinked at him, startled, her breath catching for a moment.

In those first days after his return, Wesley had been cold—throwing away her ring, leaving her in the rain. Even at the banquet tonight, he had acted distant. Wasn’t this sudden tenderness too abrupt?

When Gabriela didn’t respond immediately, Wesley’s brow furrowed. “You don’t want me to?”

So she claimed to care for him, yet the thought of sharing a room still gave her pause?

“No!” Gabriela caught his hand in both of hers, looking up with earnest, glistening eyes.

“Wesley, you remember what happened at the Blue Star two years ago. You remember Allan. Most importantly, you remember me. So why can’t you remember proposing to me? We stood before that

chapel, promising our lives to each other. Marriage certificate or not, I've been your wife since that day. Even if you've forgotten everything else, don't erase the fact that we once shared a bed."

Her face held a fierce resolve, her piercing gaze locked entirely on him as if no one else existed.

Wesley gave a nod.

Gabriela guided him back to the bedroom, pulling out a fresh set of pajamas and laying them neatly on the bed.

"Would you like me to draw you a bath?"

"That won't be necessary," Wesley replied.

When he stepped into the bathroom, he paused and took in the space.

Two towels hung neatly side by side, one blue, one white, like a quiet symbol of harmony. Matching toothbrush cups sat on the sink, perfectly aligned. Everything came in pairs.

It felt as if she had been preparing for his return this entire time.