

## His kiss 82

### Chapter 82

Fresh from a hot shower, Gabriela was ready to crawl into bed when her phone erupted with an unending stream of notifications. The screen lit up again and again—every one from Phyllis.

“You’ve got one minute to remove that post—don’t test me.”

“Give me back my hair, now!”

“You rotten witch! I’ll make you pay, sooner or later!”

Phyllis had clearly seen the photo Gabriela had posted. Rage practically dripped from every word, as if she wished she could rip Gabriela apart with her bare hands. But lacking the nerve to confront her in person, she hid behind her phone, firing off venom from a safe distance.

One message followed another—ten in quick succession—each packed with insults sharper than the last, a relentless barrage meant to claw under Gabriela’s skin.

Still basking in her good mood, Gabriela typed back with unhurried confidence. “Screenshots saved.”

The torrent of abuse cut off instantly. Moments later, Phyllis called, her voice ragged with fury. “What the hell do you want, Gabriela?”

Gabriela's tone was almost lazy. "That's something you should be asking yourself. Just pray Rhys doesn't cross my path tomorrow. Because every stunt he's pulled on me? I'll make sure you suffer it ten times worse."

On the other end, Phyllis faltered, memories flashing of the wild punks Gabriela had run with in high school. The thought made her jaw tighten—but she swallowed her resentment and fell silent.

Her fingers brushed the sore spot on her scalp where the hair had been ripped out, a mix of fear and simmering hatred twisting in her chest. Inwardly, she swore she'd bide her time and make Gabriela pay for it.

Gabriela's phone finally fell silent. Deciding Phyllis wasn't worth another second of her evening, she tossed it aside, set her alarm, and resolved to be up early. Wesley had gone out of his way to help her today; the least she could do was prepare an extravagant breakfast to thank him.

She had just pulled the covers over herself when a sharp knock echoed through the quiet.

Annoyance flared instantly. Certain it was Phyllis trying to push her luck, Gabriela strode to the door with her jaw tight and her glare ready.

But when she swung it open, Josh stood there.

Gabriela's anger still clung to her like static, and Josh's eyes flickered with uncertainty. Softening his voice, he asked, "Can I come in?"

Without a word, she stepped aside, and Josh slipped inside with quick, almost furtive movements, shutting the door behind him.

"Uncle Josh." Gabriela mustered a polite smile. "Why are you still up?"

"Sleep just wouldn't come to me." He stepped inside, his gaze drifting over the room's plain, almost stark interior.

A bed, a desk, and little else—none of the cozy trinkets or splashes of color one might expect in a young woman's space.

The sight made his chest tighten, a wave of guilt and tenderness washing over him. He lingered for a moment before speaking, his voice edged with hesitation. "About what you said to Phyllis earlier..."

Gabriela answered evenly, "It was the truth."

Josh lowered his head slightly, regret darkening his eyes. "This is my fault." His chest tightened with guilt, the words tumbling out rough and uncertain. "All these years, Marie's been handling everything. Sometimes she'd even say good things about you. I assumed you and Phyllis were fine... I didn't realize you'd been putting up with so much. I'm sorry, Gabriela."

Gabriela let out a faint smile. “It’s fine.”

The worst storms were long past. She’d made it to adulthood intact, and that alone felt like a gift she had no intention of tarnishing with resentment.

“Gabriela...” His words seemed to hang in the air, and her calm expression only deepened the ache in him. On impulse, Josh fished a thick fold of bills from his pocket and pressed it into her palm. “Here. Use this for yourself.”

“That won’t be necessary.” Gabriela quickly pushed the money back into his hand. She knew too well how tightly Marie gripped the household finances—this was surely scraped together in secret. Her voice softened, steady with quiet pride. “I’ve got a job now. I can take care of myself.”

“You’ve only just started working—how much could you possibly earn?” Josh sighed, sliding the money toward her again. “A young woman should treat herself—buy some decent clothes, maybe a bit of makeup. Just take it.”

Gabriela could feel the sincerity behind his gesture. With a helpless smile, she accepted the money, warmth flickering in her chest. “I appreciate it, Uncle Josh.”

Her earlier spat with Phyllis seemed to fade as she held the money in her hand, the warmth of Josh’s care offering a small, unexpected comfort.