

His kiss 83

Chapter 83

Phyllis replayed in her mind, and she was grateful it hadn't upset him enough to strain his heart.

Josh's gaze softened. "I didn't even notice—you've grown so much." He reached out, ruffling her hair with a fond, almost paternal touch, a quiet smile lifting his face. "When I first moved into this house, I promised your mother that when the time came, I'd put the deed in your name. Looks like that day's finally here."

Gabriela froze, blindsided by the revelation. Tears welled in her eyes, her throat tightening. "Uncle Josh, I don't even know what to say..."

"Phyllis can be a handful sometimes—always ready to throw a tantrum," Josh said with a weary sigh. "But at the end of the day, she's still your cousin. Try to be more forgiving. When life turns rough, you two might have no one else to lean on but each other."

Gabriela could hardly picture herself ever relying on Phyllis for anything, but she didn't want to crush Josh's hopeful tone. She let out a quiet hum of agreement. Relieved by her softened expression, Josh's shoulders eased, though a shadow of worry lingered in his eyes. "By the way," he added, his voice hesitant. "Is it true you've been seeing... an older man?"

The brief warmth Gabriela had felt vanished in a flash. "Of course not! That's just one of Phyllis's ridiculous lies."

Nevertheless, Josh remained somewhat skeptical.

He figured Gabriela was unwilling to admit the truth. After all, why else would Phyllis sound so convincing?

In his mind, Gabriela's behavior was the result of his own past negligence, the lapse that had allowed her to go astray.

His voice grew hoarse with emotion as he asked, "Can you please end things with that man?"

A prickle of unease ran through Gabriela at the tremor in Josh's tone.

Just as expected, a heartbeat later, he clasped her hands and broke down. Nearly fifty years old, yet unable to stop the tears spilling down his weathered face, he choked out, "I failed your mother. She asked me over and over to watch over you, and I betrayed her trust... I'm so ashamed."

Gabriela's gaze lingered on the streaks of silver in Josh's hair, and she exhaled in weary resignation. "I do have a boyfriend," she said softly, forcing a wry smile. "But he's young and handsome, not some older man. Honestly, I'm telling the truth."

Josh only tightened his grip on her hands, tears streaming down his weathered cheeks as though her words barely reached him. He wept for what felt like an eternity, and it wasn't until Gabriela swore—again and again—that she would introduce him to her boyfriend at Phyllis's wedding that his sobs finally subsided.

By the time she'd calmed him, Gabriela felt more drained than after an eight-hour workday. She all but collapsed onto her bed, sinking into the mattress, and was asleep before she could even pull up the blanket.

Her sleep was deep and untroubled. But elsewhere, rest was impossible. Rhys lay in bed with his fractured wrist strapped into a splint, every throb a hot spike of pain that kept him wide awake. By dawn, the mirror offered no mercy—his reflection stared back at him, pale, disheveled, and worn down to the bone.

His eyes burned with venom as he wished he could storm over to Gabriela's house and beat her up.

When Haley Fox, Rhys's mother, heard about his injury, she got up at dawn and went to the hospital to take care of him. She set out breakfast on the table. As she urged him to eat more, she launched into a tirade about Gabriela. "How could a girl like her have enough influence to make someone break your hand? Well, she's probably sleeping with her boss. Girls nowadays have no shame at all."

Her voice sharpened with every word, the flush in her cheeks deepening until she slammed her palm on the table. By the time she'd finished, she had worked herself into a full-blown fury, vowing to march straight into Gabriela's company and confront her face-to-face.

Until she did, the bitterness in her chest wouldn't ease.

Billy's warning echoed in Rhys's mind, sending an icy shiver down his spine. He forced a tense smile and muttered, "Mom, don't do anything stupid. I've got it handled."

Gabriela's boss might be young, but the man radiated danger—someone Rhys had no intention of crossing again.

For now, he'd have to bide his time, watch, and wait. The next time he caught Gabriela alone, he'd ensure she got laid—and capture the moment in photos to use as leverage against her.

That way, she'd be utterly at his mercy—with no way out.