

His kiss 841

Chapter 841

Brenden shook his head with a crooked smile. “Only three percent? The Dewitt family wouldn’t even bat an eye at that.”

Fiona shot him a sharp look. “But you lived, didn’t you? That means Mr. Guzman was right.”

A primal fierceness flickered in her eyes. “Listen carefully — you’re my husband now. Until there’s a divorce decree, you stay faithful to me.”

A shadow crossed Brenden’s face, his features half-hidden in the dim light. “Even if I’m stuck like this forever, you’d still stay?” He exhaled, sounding tired and bitter. “If you want out, I can sign the divorce papers right now and hand you the shares.”

Fiona let out a disdainful snort. “Keep dreaming. You’ve barely opened your eyes and you’re already planning to dump me? What do you want — our entire circle laughing behind my back?”

Slowly tilting his head, Brenden lifted his gaze to her face. Fiona’s delicate, spirited features carried a hint of defiance, her sharp eyes sweeping the world as if nothing could truly impress her. She had a knack for scheming in small, playful ways, though never with malice. Back when he first met her, Brenden had been struck dumb by how dazzling she was, too awed to treat her like any ordinary woman. Never in his wildest dreams had he imagined that one day he’d be lucky enough to call this proud, aloof woman his wife.

With his one working hand, he slowly drew her into his arms, his voice dropping to a quiet murmur. “Fiona... thank you.”

He couldn't offer her any grand promises — not in his current state — but he swore to himself he'd fight to recover, fight to become a husband worthy of the woman who had saved him.

Fiona stiffened at the sudden embrace, her grievances swallowed with a breath. When she finally spoke, her tone was cool and composed, carrying her usual grace. "You're welcome."

After the marriage certificate was finally put aside, Fiona made her way out to get some water, only to overhear the nurses' soft gossip drifting from the break room.

"Myah's a wreck — beaten so badly she'll never see out of her right eye again. Gabriela must be downright ruthless."

"And what proof do you have that Gabriela was the one who sent them?"

"I saw her slap Myah across the face right after Brenden's accident. You'd have to truly despise someone to hit them like that..."

These were the VIP-ward nurses, well-acquainted with the affairs of the city's upper crust, and their lunch breaks were prime time for whispered scandal.

"I actually witnessed Mr. Moss throwing Gabriela out."

The words weighed on Fiona's chest as she stood frozen outside the doorway.

After seeing Brenden through his lunch and reminding the caregiver to watch over him carefully, she left for the Haynes Group.

Inside the company office, Gabriela sat with Alissa, sifting through a backlog of documents. In the days since Brenden's accident, the workload had only grown heavier, guaranteeing she would stay well past nightfall. Fiona knocked once and stepped inside, taking in the scene before her. Gabriela and Alissa sat side by side at the desk, heads bent over paperwork, their sharp, businesslike energy filling the room.

For a moment, Fiona marveled — after everything Wesley had put her through, Gabriela still managed to keep her focus and keep the money flowing.

"Gabriela," Fiona said.

At the sound of her voice, Alissa stiffened, glaring like a guard dog. "Fiona, what are you doing here?"

"I need a word with Gabriela," Fiona replied.

Alissa moved as if to usher her out, but Gabriela's voice cut through quietly. "Alissa, step outside for a moment."

Though she and Fiona had always butted heads, Gabriela couldn't deny she respected the woman who had chosen to marry Brenden right when everything was falling apart. Alissa shot Fiona a series of pointed, warning looks before storming out.

Gabriela set her papers aside and leaned back slightly. "What is it you want to talk about?"

Without a trace of embarrassment, Fiona fixed her gaze on Gabriela. "Gabriela, I'm the one who ordered the hit on Myah."

Chapter 842

Fiona spoke swiftly, without the slightest hesitation in her tone, which caught Gabriela off guard.

"Why would you tell me this?" Gabriela asked.

It was a matter without proof — as long as Fiona kept silent, the truth could remain buried forever.

"I sent people after Myah because I simply couldn't swallow the injustice," Fiona said, lifting her chin with her usual lofty expression. "To take the blame on my shoulders for no rhyme or reason? That is not a burden I'll accept."

There was no deep-rooted enmity between her and Gabriela. Now that her affection for Wesley had faded, she looked at Gabriela with less hostility. In fact, she had no wish to see Gabriela wronged.

Gabriela curved her lips into a faint smile and asked with quiet seriousness, “Have you thought about the cost if I tell Wesley? How would he strike back at the Dewitt family?”

Fiona faltered for a moment before answering stubbornly, “At worst, he’ll wrest away some of my father’s business contracts. Nothing more.”

“You truly don’t understand what Myah means to the Moss family,” Gabriela replied, letting out a weary sigh. “This time, I’ll take the blame for you. But don’t ever repeat something like this again.”

Her voice softened, almost breaking. “However hateful Myah may be, you have no right to take her sight.”

Myah’s eyes were the knot tied around Allan’s heart. Even if prison awaited her, Allan would still have shielded her vision with his life.

Fiona frowned, incredulous. “What power does Myah hold? Why does Wesley treasure her so? And why do I sense that even you... care about her?” Could it be that simply because she had beaten up Myah, Wesley would go so far as to avenge the Dewitt family? Fiona shook her head, unwilling to believe it.

Gabriela explained with resignation, “The one they protect is not Myah — it’s Allan.”

Allan was gone, but his only sister remained, carrying the echo of his spirit. Gabriela believed that even if Wesley discovered Myah had deliberately struck Brenden with her car, he still wouldn’t lay a hand on her. Even Gabriela herself couldn’t bring herself to truly harm Myah — for in their hearts, they all owed

Allan. His simple plea, "Please take care of my sister," had become an invisible shackle around every life it touched, an unbreakable chain none could shake off.

Seeing the sorrow clouding Gabriela's eyes, Fiona paused and asked, "So what are you going to do? Leave Wesley dangling in uncertainty like this?"

She remembered the first time she had met Gabriela — a girl whose eyes sparkled free of care. Despite a childhood carved with suffering, Gabriela had grown into someone lighthearted and full of warmth. In certain ways, she mirrored Brenden. But now Gabriela's gaze was weighted, stripped of the pure joy she once found in earning her own way.

"Let's leave it here," Gabriela said quietly. "Before Myah fell for Wesley, everyone could coexist. But now, with her love declared and Wesley unable to ignore it, if I refuse to step aside, it will only deepen the pain for all three of us."

Fiona gasped, stunned. "You're truly giving up on Wesley?"

Gabriela didn't answer directly. "I'll let things take their course."

She had tried to rekindle their old flame, but perhaps Wesley had never loved her deeply enough. Otherwise, why would the mere mention of Allan sway his heart so easily?

Fiona's eyes widened as she realized Gabriela's affection for Wesley was already slipping away. Frustrated, she muttered, "Had I known, I would've fought you for him. Such an exceptional man — why should he end up wasted on someone like her?"

In her mind, Fiona compared the two men. Wesley, she thought, was even more unlucky than Brenden. At least Brenden had married a good woman like her, while Wesley was shackled to Myah, that reckless girl.

“You’re already married,” Gabriela reminded her with a hint of amusement. “Best not to say things like that in front of Brenden.”

“Fine,” Fiona pouted. “But don’t think taking the blame for me gives you the right to preach.”

Chapter 843

Then, after a pause, she asked hesitantly, “Are you really covering for me on this? I’m not afraid of his revenge — should I just tell him myself?”

Gabriela looked at her steadily. “Fiona, ever since you secretly married Brenden, have you gone back to see your mother?”

She no longer wished to tangle herself with Wesley. Let him pay the debts he owed — whether another misunderstanding arose or faded no longer mattered. At the very least, she could shield Fiona and earn her goodwill.

Fiona pressed her lips together. Gabriela’s calm composure unsettled her. Awkwardly, she admitted, “You’re not so bad after all. I owe you this time. If you need me one day, I won’t turn you down.”

Gabriela nodded with a smile. "Alright."

After leaving the Haynes Group, Fiona slipped quietly back home. Janet, the housekeeper, lit up in surprise. "Miss Dewitt, you've returned!"

Fiona motioned for silence, then asked about her mother. On hearing she was in the rear garden, Fiona dashed there without hesitation.

Though winter lingered, the garden still held traces of bloom. Lavinia sat among the plants, sighing softly to herself. Fiona called out, "Mom."

Lavinia turned, stunned at first, then her eyes welled with tears. "Fiona, at last — you're home."

Brenden might have woken, but he was paralyzed. What mother could rejoice, knowing her daughter had married into such hardship? Sleepless nights and untouched meals had become Lavinia's routine. She regretted, with every passing day, the weakness that had let Fiona proceed with the marriage. If only she had waited for clearer news about Brenden's condition, Fiona might never have been trapped in such a fate.

"Mom, this is for you," Fiona said, handing Lavinia the household documents and the agreement transferring three percent of Saunders Group shares. In a tender voice she asked, "How's Dad been? Still furious?"

“Humph. You knew I’d be angry, yet you still took the documents without asking!” The chill of Hanley’s voice drifted from behind.

Fiona jumped, then turned to see her father empty-handed. Relief washed over her. Trying to appease him, she held out the agreement. “Dad, look at this.”

Hanley’s anger flared. “Just three percent of shares for my precious daughter? The Saunders family plays their game well!”

Though his words stung, Fiona sensed his tone had softened. “Actually, marrying Brenden isn’t so bad,” she said gently. “At least I don’t have to deal with difficult in-laws. And the doctor says he has every chance of recovery — he won’t be bedridden forever.”

“Even if he stood tall with perfect health, he would still fall short of my daughter,” Hanley replied coldly. He had never thought Brenden worthy.

“Dad, if I’m so exceptional, then why doesn’t Wesley want me?” Fiona challenged. “Brenden may be paralyzed, but he’s still CEO of Apex Group, while I’m jobless. Looking ahead, Brenden’s future will outshine mine.”

“You’ve been married a few days, and already you side with someone else?” Hanley jabbed her forehead in annoyance. “When Brenden secures the Apex Group seat beyond doubt, then you may bring him here and speak such bold words.”

Fiona knew he had already forgiven her. She clung to his arm with a smile. “Dad, I’d never turn against you. I’ll bring Brenden back, and he’ll honor both you and Mom.”

Hanley gave a cold snort. “Look at you — thin as a reed. Stay home today and eat properly.”

Seeing father and daughter reconciled, Lavinia’s smile returned. She quickly arranged a hearty meal.

During the meal, Fiona ventured, “Dad, what do you think of Gabriela?”

Hanley’s brows furrowed. “Fiona, you’re married now. Leave Gabriela alone.”

“Who do you take me for?” Fiona’s displeasure flashed. “I only thought — since our commercial building is nearly complete, perhaps Gabriela could handle the opening ceremony.”

Chapter 844

Hanley harbored doubts that Brenden might have manipulated Fiona’s perspective.

“This is absurd,” he declared. “The Haynes Group is a modest firm, incapable of managing a grand commercial event for the Dewitt Group.”

Fiona, savoring a bite of braised beef, responded mid-chew, “Dad, you’re being shortsighted. If Gabriela lacked skill, why would GD Fashion Week secure a two-year deal with her?”

Hanley reflected briefly before countering, “GD Fashion Week likely factored in Wesley’s influence...”

Fiona cut him off sharply. “And what about two years ago at Lilian’s eightieth birthday celebration, when Beverley was undermining things behind the scenes? Gabriela stepped up and fixed everything. If she weren’t competent, would she have been chosen to organize Lilian’s birthday banquet? She even convinced Bernice to join.”

Hanley, taken aback, remarked, “Fiona, why are you defending Gabriela now? Weren’t you her biggest critic before?”

Fiona mumbled, “Let’s not dwell on the past. If you’re not giving her the opening event, just drop the useless talk.”

Hanley tapped her forehead sternly. “Who taught you to mumble in front of me? Speak clearly when you have something to say!”

“I’m done talking — let’s eat,” Fiona replied curtly.

She had mentioned the event casually. If her father entrusted the opening to Haynes Group, it would be her small gesture to repay the debt owed to Gabriela. If he refused, she would find another way to repay the favor later. For now, she needed to hurry back to the hospital to be with Brenden.

Noticing Fiona’s subdued demeanor, Hanley eased off. He was open to giving Gabriela a chance, but such decisions required discussion with other executives. Once finalized, he would inform Fiona.

Fiona was eating too fast, and it irritated him. "Slow down. I'll arrange caregivers for Brenden so you don't have to worry about the hospital."

"Thank you, Dad!" Fiona dropped her fork, wiped her mouth, and kissed both parents on the cheek. "I'm full — I'm heading out."

Lavinia called after her, "Don't stay overnight at the hospital. Come home to rest."

Fiona, already leaving, replied, "I'll see how it goes."

Hearing Fiona's lively tone fade down the hallway, Lavinia grew anxious. "Was letting her marry Brenden a mistake?"

Hanley snapped, "There is no point regretting it now. You've spoiled her, and any hardship she faces will be her own fate."

Lavinia, struck by a thought, added, "Our family's wealth is enough — we don't need a match of equal status. A high-status marriage might force Fiona to bow to difficult in-laws." The more she spoke, the more it resonated with her. "The Saunders family is decent. Brenden's mother gave Fiona a three percent share right after the marriage, and she's not a meddling mother-in-law."

"Fine — since Brenden's our son-in-law, I'll support him," Hanley said grimly. "But it hinges on his recovery. If he is permanently paralyzed, I have ways to help Fiona divorce him."

Seeing Hanley's stern expression, Lavinia quickly shifted topics.

Though the doctor had said Brenden had a fair shot at walking again, over two weeks had passed. With the New Year drawing near, his legs remained unresponsive. Thankfully, his left hand was regaining some feeling, offering Fiona and the others a sliver of hope.

Meanwhile, Myah's injured eye showed no progress. She became increasingly withdrawn, refusing to leave her hospital bed. This New Year, the Moss family found themselves stranded in the hospital.

Chapter 845

On the day before New Year, Gabriela brought homemade dishes for Brenden and Fiona. Fiona, well aware of Gabriela's culinary talent, shared the meal joyfully with Brenden. Despite his limited movement, Brenden's smile was warm and sincere.

Watching them, Gabriela felt a pang of something she couldn't quite name. If she and Wesley hadn't drifted apart, they might have been sharing a meal happily too. But Allan remained an unresolvable wedge between them. What was she still hoping for?

In another room, Myah noticed Loretta arrive alone with food and asked, "Isn't Gabriela coming?"

Loretta smiled gently. "She's visiting Brenden. She might stop by later."

Myah stared at the door for a long time, but Gabriela never appeared. Her eyes brimmed with disappointment.

Deep down, she knew Gabriela wouldn't have sent someone to harm her. That day in the hospital, fear and anger had led her to wrongly accuse Gabriela. Yet Gabriela hadn't argued — and hadn't visited since. To Gabriela, Brenden seemed to matter more than Myah did.

"Loretta, I hurt Gabriela's feelings," Myah whispered, tears falling. "She won't care about me anymore." She looked pitiful, her head bowed low.

Loretta patted her head comfortingly. "Gabriela is just busy. She is handling everything at home alone. After the New Year, when she has more time, she'll visit. You're her dearest person."

Yes, Gabriela should have cherished Myah most. Yet she had struck Myah for Brenden's sake and brought food to him. Their rooms were so close — yet Gabriela hadn't come.

"Myah, don't cry. Your eyes are already bad," Loretta said, watching her distress mount. Helpless, she called Wesley to come to the hospital.

Wesley's voice betrayed exhaustion. "Alright."

As he reached the hospital, he spotted Gabriela exiting, clutching a thermal container. Their paths crossed at the entrance. Gabriela wore a charcoal plaid sweater over a relaxed beige blouse, complemented by a wool skirt and retro shoes, radiating an effortless elegance. Her striking appearance

turned heads — but Wesley noticed the subtle shadows beneath her eyes, betraying her deep fatigue. It struck him like a wave: he hadn't truly seen her in what felt like forever, longer even than the two years he had spent abroad in Athea.

He froze, her name on the tip of his tongue.

Gabriela, visibly drained, her hair falling loosely over her shoulders, offered only a weary nod before gliding past him.

Feeling dismissed, Wesley tugged at his tie, unsettled. His legs moved instinctively, urging him to follow, to reach for her hand, or at least offer a New Year's greeting. But her figure swiftly disappeared through the hospital doors.

Wesley lingered, rooted to the spot, before finally heading upstairs to Myah's room.

"Wesley, you're here!" Myah's face brightened, eager to draw him into conversation. But his mind was elsewhere, his chest tight with a searing ache.

Amid the emotional storm, he tried to untangle his bond with Gabriela. Before he left for Athea, they had been unbreakable — set to wed upon his return. Yet his treatment had clouded his memories, leaving him unsure whether her heart had ever truly belonged to him or to Allan. His pride had driven a wedge between them. Now, even Myah seemed to be drifting from Gabriela. Did that brief, distant glance today mean Gabriela was ready to sever ties with both of them? The thought that she no longer wanted him sent a chill through him, shattering his composure.

Abruptly, he asked, "Myah, do you know Randall Kirk?"

Myah hesitated. “Why are you asking about him, Wesley?”

“Do you know him or not?” Wesley’s voice was sharp, edged with a restless urgency.

Chapter 846

Ever since the Howard family’s charity gala, Wesley had been quietly investigating Randall’s past.

At Loom & Bloom, Gabriela had spotted him — the same man who, four years ago, had dragged her into that nightmare and sent the car plunging into dark water. The revelation had spurred Wesley into action; he immediately hired the best private investigator in Okburg.

Yet the findings were disappointingly scant. Aside from a handful of half-forgotten anecdotes from Randall’s university days and the fact that he had recently made contact with Rebecca, there was nothing. After Allan’s death, it was as though Randall had vanished entirely.

Wesley’s suspicions deepened, though even he couldn’t fully explain why, in that moment, his thoughts had turned to Myah.

She blinked at him in bewilderment, taken aback by the sudden edge in his voice. “I don’t know him,” she blurted, the denial tumbling out too quickly.

The haste in her words pressed on Wesley's chest like a weight, and something flickered in his eyes.

Seeing the shift in his gaze, Myah rushed to add, "But Allan — I've heard him mention Randall before." Her brow furrowed as a memory stirred. "Back then, I couldn't see, so I never knew his face. Allan didn't know him well either — just mentioned him once in a while."

Wesley lowered his eyes, fixing them on her with quiet intensity, as though he could strip away her defenses and drag the truth into the open.

A ripple of unease ran through Myah, and she lightly tugged at his sleeve. "Wesley, why are you suddenly asking about him? Did something happen?"

Loretta glanced at them curiously, sensing the shift in him as well. Even the elders had begun to notice, in recent days, that Wesley's patience with Myah had been wearing thin.

But just as quickly as his sharp gaze had settled on her, it softened. His face resumed the familiar gentleness she trusted. He brushed his hand over her hair and murmured, "It's nothing. You should rest."

After offering Loretta a polite excuse, Wesley stepped out of the hospital room and made his way down the corridor to Brenden's ward.

From inside came bursts of muffled but warm laughter. Whatever the conversation, it was lively.

Wesley knocked, then pushed the door open. Brenden looked up in surprise. “Wesley! What brings you here?”

“I heard your left hand is starting to recover,” Wesley replied, his eyes instinctively dropping to Brenden’s bandaged hand.

Brenden wriggled his fingers with effort, pride lighting his face. “Look — two of them can move already!” Even in hardship, he found a reason to be cheerful.

Wesley’s expression gradually eased, a faint smile curving his lips. “That’s good. Keep up with the doctor’s treatment and you’ll be back to normal before long.”

“Alright.” Brenden nodded, then gave a small sigh. “But Wesley, why didn’t you come earlier? Gabriela was just here. She even brought us spaghetti — you missed her by a few minutes.”

Chapter 847

Wesley’s face remained unreadable as he echoed flatly, “Spaghetti?”

“Yeah,” Brenden replied with a grin. “Gabriela’s cooking is still top-notch.” The words seemed to catch him off guard. “Wesley, you’re not having any of her spaghetti this year?”

A faint, humorless chuckle escaped Wesley’s lips.

Gabriela hadn't looked at him as anything more than a stranger for a long time. Spaghetti from her hands? Unlikely.

Across the table, Fiona quietly sliced fruit, piling it onto a platter. She stole a glance at Wesley. Even on New Year's Eve, he was dressed in a black suit, a long coat, and a dark blue tie — the very picture of controlled distance. Yet the white scarf draped around his shoulders softened the sharp edges of his face, its simple texture sitting oddly against his refined attire.

Fiona couldn't decipher his peculiar choice, but Brenden had already noticed it too. Only Wesley could carry such a mismatch; no matter what he wore, the authority he exuded remained undiminished.

"Wesley," Brenden blurted out, "isn't that the scarf Gabriela knitted back at the manor?"

Wesley's expression darkened, a wry curve tugging at his mouth. "You've got sharp eyes."

Even carefree Brenden felt the shift in the air. Just earlier, at the hospital gate, Gabriela hadn't even glanced at Wesley — yet here he was, wrapped in something she had once made for him. The ice in Wesley's gaze held Brenden in place. Unsure what he had said wrong, Brenden pulled back, suddenly too cautious to utter another word.

Fiona's eyes flickered with unease. Poor Wesley still hadn't accepted the truth. How long would it take for him to realize that Gabriela had moved on? For all his cold composure, his heart betrayed him; he cared for her more than he would ever admit. Her thoughts drifted to a phrase she had once seen online: *Pride comes before a fall*. That arrogant heir was still posturing as though the world revolved around him — sooner or later, he would face the consequences.

Wesley didn't remain long in Brenden's hospital room, offering only a brief word to rest well before slipping away.

But instead of returning to the manor, he turned toward his apartment.

With Loretta staying at the hospital with Myah, the thought of sitting alone at the New Year's Eve dinner table felt hollow.

As Wesley stepped into his apartment walkway, he stopped short. The potted plants he maintained had thrived under consistent care, their greenery vivid against the evening light. A gust of cold wind seeped through a slightly open window, stirring the leaves. Yet Wesley's eyes held no joy. To him, these plants could never compare to the quiet grace of white roses — and with that realization came an ache of regret sharp enough to hollow his chest.

He shouldn't have torn them all out.

If they were still here, he might have had a reason to call Gabriela over, to let her see them and perhaps stay a little longer.

Chapter 848

Restless, Wesley tugged at his tie, his fingers brushing the soft white scarf still draped around his neck. The touch stirred something in him — faint, but insistent. It was New Year's Eve. Why condemn himself to silence in an empty apartment?

Without further thought, he got into his car and headed for Rosemont Gardens.

The guards at the gate recognized him instantly, straightening before offering warm smiles. “Mr. Moss, here to see Ms. Haynes? The house is lively tonight.” Wesley gave a brief nod, murmured his thanks, and drove straight to the villa’s parking area.

At the door, he pressed the bell, and a moment later Ken appeared. “Mr. Moss!” he greeted with a cheerful grin. “Perfect timing — we’ve just started dinner.” Without hesitation, Wesley stepped inside.

The dining room was alive with voices and laughter, a warmth that spilled into the hallway as Wesley entered. For a moment, his composure nearly cracked.

Matthew’s presence was expected. Tyler and Tessa? Understandable. But Stewart — there he was, comfortably settled in a spot near Truett, engaged in easy conversation.

The sight tightened Wesley’s chest with a surge of agitation he could no longer contain. Gabriela had spent the afternoon cooking spaghetti and taking it to Brenden and Fiona at the hospital, deliberately leaving him out — yet somehow Stewart had earned a seat at her table on New Year’s Eve. What entitled him to that place?

As if twisting the knife deeper, Stewart leaned close to Truett, his tone soft and indulgent. “Truett, eat more vegetables. You don’t want cavities, trust me.”

The little boy pouted, quick to counter. “Mr. Williams, you still owe me a wish! I wish you’d eat all my vegetables tonight instead.”

Laughter broke out around the table, ringing brightly in the air — the kind of sound that felt like an open door he was locked out of.

Wesley stepped forward, the sharp tap of his polished shoes cutting through the merriment as he strode into the room.

The sudden intrusion of footsteps silenced the room, all attention turning toward him.

Ken offered a genial smile. “Mr. Moss, please take any seat you like. I’ll bring you a fresh set of dishes.” Wesley swallowed back his irritation and answered evenly, “Thank you.”

At the sight of him, Gabriela’s bright smile faltered before she coolly averted her gaze.

With no hint of emotion on his face, Wesley gave his fingers a subtle flex, then carefully removed his scarf and coat and laid them aside.

“Daddy!” Truett called out, his voice bright with happiness. He scrambled down from his high chair, little legs pattering across the floor. Wesley bent to meet him, arms open, and Truett launched himself forward, wrapping his small arms around Wesley’s neck.

Holding Truett close, Wesley felt the ice in his chest melt into something soft and warm. Missing Gabriela's cooking still stung, but the irritation was beginning to loosen its grip.

With Truett in his arms, he strode to the dining table and stopped beside Stewart. Lifting his head, Stewart acknowledged him with a courteous nod. "Mr. Moss, what a coincidence."

Chapter 849

"It would seem so," Wesley replied, his cool gaze sliding over him, voice edged with quiet disdain. "Shouldn't you be dining with your own family tonight?"

The message was clear — Wesley had arrived as part of this household. Guests who didn't belong should excuse themselves.

Rather than take offense, Stewart rose with deliberate grace and pulled out a chair. "Mr. Moss, please have a seat."

Wesley lowered himself into the chair, face set, saying nothing more. Stewart retreated to an empty seat further down the table.

Truett, however, remained unfailingly sweet. "Thank you, Stewart," he chirped.

After settling Truett back into his high chair, Wesley corrected him with measured firmness. "Call him Mr. Williams."

Truett tilted his head in confusion. “Why?”

Wesley’s gaze shifted toward Stewart, his voice cool and deliberate. “Mr. Williams is our guest. It’s more appropriate — and more polite — to address him that way. Do you understand?”

“Oh, I see!” Truett’s face lit up at once. He nodded vigorously, then turned and called out cheerfully, “Mr. Williams!”

The name hung in the air. Stewart, usually so composed, was struck speechless.

When he didn’t respond, Truett peered at him with wide-eyed curiosity. “Mr. Williams, why don’t you have a wife yet?”

Stewart stayed quiet for a long moment, his jaw tightening before he gave a short, derisive snort. Wesley’s casual display of possessiveness struck him as tasteless — hardly the kind of behavior Gabriela would admire.

Leaning slightly forward, Stewart patted Truett’s head. “Because I’m waiting for the right person. Waiting for her to rethink things. Waiting for her to finally see me.”

The implication was not lost on Matthew. His fork stilled midway to his mouth, a frown carving a clear line of disapproval across his face.

“Poor Mr. Williams,” Truett remarked with childish bluntness. “You should get married soon, or people might call you a lonely old bachelor.”

Stewart gave a low laugh. “Fair point. I’ll see what I can do.”

Wesley’s expression chilled instantly, the muscles along his jaw tightening. What was Stewart implying? Was he bold enough to pursue Gabriela right in front of him?

Given the occasion, Wesley swallowed his temper and forced himself to stay composed. He cut a sidelong glance at Gabriela. She, however, kept calmly eating, as though the tension at the table had nothing to do with her — and that calmness only stoked the fire in his chest.

Across the table, Tyler and Tessa shared a quiet, uneasy look. Neither of them had spouses waiting at home — Tyler was divorced — and tonight they had come simply to enjoy a warm meal. Instead, they had stumbled into something charged. Both kept their heads down, focusing on their plates.

Ken appeared just then with an extra set of dishes, momentarily easing the tension. Matthew cleared his throat pointedly, and both Wesley and Stewart forced themselves to eat in silence.

By the time the meal ended, night had begun to settle outside.

Stewart’s phone buzzed several times in the quiet, and each time he answered curtly, claiming to be busy before hanging up.

Chapter 850

“Is your family trying to reach you?” Gabriela asked, her voice carefully neutral. “If you need to go, you should.” The air between them was already stiff with unspoken words. Still, considering how much Stewart had helped when Truett went missing — and the fact that he had come for dinner — she couldn’t bluntly send him away.

Stewart offered an easy smile. “Didn’t you mention you were making apple pie tonight? I still haven’t had the chance to try yours.”

Gabriela hesitated, then let out a soft, helpless laugh. “Alright. I’ll make it now.”

The dessert itself was simple enough; the real work had been in the preparation. Thankfully, Ken had already readied the pie crust and filling that afternoon. All that remained was for Gabriela to assemble and bake it — about an hour’s work.

She stepped into the kitchen, rolling up her sleeves, and Ken followed to assist.

Matthew stayed at the coffee table, sipping with practiced elegance. Between measured sips, he said with quiet pride, “Gabriela can manage a household, command respect in business, and still create wonders in the kitchen. I can’t think of a man truly worthy of such a daughter.”

Truett clapped in delight and dashed over. “Gabriela is my mommy, and she’s the best!”

With a warm laugh, Matthew scooped Truett onto his lap. “That’s right. Truett’s mommy is the best.”

Across the room, Wesley caught the deliberate note in Matthew’s words. He knew he had wronged Gabriela before, leaving her to shoulder too much pain. Tonight was meant to be about mending fences — picking a fight with Stewart would only cheapen the moment.

Wesley leaned forward and poured Matthew a fresh cup of coffee, his tone steady but edged with quiet insistence. “Mr. Howard, Truett can have only one father.”

Matthew raised his brows in mild surprise. This young man dared to speak with such conviction? He was about to offer a dry retort when Truett suddenly wriggled off his lap and scurried over to Wesley, hugging his leg. “Truett has only one dad,” he announced with a bright grin, “and that’s you, Daddy!”

Wesley’s expression softened, clearly pleased. “Truett is a clever boy.”

Matthew was left speechless, his lips parting without sound. Wesley had used his son’s affection to stake his claim — and that, it seemed, was his strongest card.

Gabriela worked efficiently, and within forty minutes the aroma of baked apple pie drifted through the air. She emerged from the kitchen carrying the golden-brown pie, its lattice crust perfectly glazed.

The sight caught Stewart off guard. His breath hitched, his fingers curled into his palm, and his pulse quickened. Who had decided that Truett could have only one father? He had invested time and effort to create this opportunity. There was no way he would surrender without a fight.

Oblivious to the storm in Stewart's chest, Gabriela sliced the pie and passed portions around — first to Matthew, then to Ken, and finally to the others.

Stewart finished his slice quickly, then flashed a smile. "Gabriela, your baking puts the pastry chefs at my club to shame. May I take a piece home?"

Gabriela saw no reason to refuse Stewart's small request and swiftly packed two portions of apple pie, placing them carefully into an elegant gift box.