

His kiss 921

Chapter 921

Fighting down a wave of nausea, Gabriela clenched her teeth and spoke sharply. "Wesley, we're done. How can you still not understand that? I don't care about what's happening on your side anymore."

With quiet approval, Myah brought her hands together in a slow, deliberate clap.

"Gabriela! Do you really need to end things with me at a moment like this?" Anger and urgency tangled together in Wesley's voice.

Gabriela said nothing more and ended the call. She turned immediately toward Myah. "Is that enough for you? Where is Truett?"

"Not yet," Myah answered calmly. "I need to speak with Wesley first."

She reached for her phone and placed the call. The instant he answered, tears spilled into her voice. "Wesley, I'm so tired. I don't want to keep dragging you down anymore."

"Myah?" Still shaken by Gabriela's cold dismissal, Wesley's alarm was instant. "Don't say things like that. Tell me where you are right now!"

“There’s no need to worry about where I am. From this moment on, you’ll never see me again.” Myah’s voice stayed fragile, almost trembling — yet her eyes swung toward Gabriela with unmistakable triumph. Noticing Gabriela’s stunned reaction only deepened her satisfaction.

“Myah, please don’t do anything reckless,” Wesley said. “If you don’t want to go abroad for treatment, you don’t have to. Just tell me where you are.”

Myah drew a slow breath. “Wesley, there’s something I’ve hidden from you for a very long time. I stayed silent because of Gabriela, but the pain has become unbearable. If today is the day I die, you need to hear the truth.” A few seconds passed before she continued, as though she had finally made up her mind. “Wesley, I’ve fallen in love with you.”

Surprise hit Wesley all at once, and an uneasy feeling rose sharply in his chest. In his eyes, Myah had always been like a younger sister. At what point had her feelings shifted into something far beyond that?

“Wesley, I’m suffering so much,” Myah continued, her voice thick with sorrow. “I know the person you love most is Gabriela, and I know I can never be with you. Even so, I couldn’t stop myself from wanting to see you every single day. I’m sorry for deceiving you. I pretended to be ill just to see you more often. I even fought with Gabriela over you and took her ring. Now Gabriela hates me, and I truly don’t want to keep living like this anymore. Goodbye, Wesley.”

Standing nearby, Gabriela watched the performance continue, her senses dulling. Myah spoke of agony while delight shone plainly across her face.

“Wesley, I’m leaving now. I won’t interfere with you and Gabriela anymore. I wish the two of you happiness.”

“Myah, what do you want from me?” Wesley broke in, urgency spilling over. “Just tell me. As long as it’s something I can do, I won’t refuse.”

“Really?” Timidity crept into Myah’s voice, and she switched the call to speaker so Gabriela could hear every word clearly. “Then, Wesley — I want you to marry me. Can you do that?”

Chapter 922

Tension closed around Wesley’s throat, and the pressure made it impossible for him to speak at once.

“Wesley, I knew you would never agree,” Myah said, sounding crushed. “Then this is where it ends.”

“I will!” Fear drove Wesley to answer without hesitation. “Tell me where you are, and I’ll come to you right now.”

Triumph flashed across Myah’s face. She pressed on. “I also want Gabriela’s ring. Will you give that to me as well?”

Hoarseness roughened Wesley’s voice as he closed his eyes. “Yes. I’ll give it to you.”

“You and Gabriela already have Truett. After you marry me, will you still sneak away to see him?”

Despite the strain reddening his eyes, Wesley answered firmly. “No. I swear.”

“Alright. Then wait for me in the ward. I’ll return shortly.”

Relief escaped Wesley in a long, heavy breath.

After a brief pause, Myah spoke again with deliberate surprise. “Wesley, I think I just saw Gabriela.”

Concern tightened his voice immediately. “Is Gabriela with you?”

“No,” Myah answered smoothly. “I’m at my brother’s place. I have no idea why she’s here, but I saw her just now. Gabriela dislikes me these days, so I don’t want to speak to her — I’ll leave through the back door. Wesley, when I come back, you’ll marry me. You must wait for me. If I return and you’re not there, I’ll jump from the ward window. I mean it.”

She ended the call.

Turning to Gabriela with a bright smile, she said lightly, “Gabriela, call Wesley again and tell him that Truett is missing. Tell him he needs to come here right away.”

Gabriela understood Myah’s intention at once. Wesley had promised to stay in the hospital room and wait for her. Without proof, any claim that Truett had gone missing would sound like a lie to him. And

even though Gabriela had chosen to let Wesley go, he was still Truett's biological father. Deep down, she didn't want to hear the response she feared he might give.

Growing impatient, Myah's voice sharpened. "Hurry up. Just tell Wesley that I kidnapped Truett. I don't have much patience."

With two lives resting in her hands, Gabriela didn't dare push back. She reached for her phone and called Wesley once more.

Still weighed down by Gabriela's earlier harshness, Wesley felt his spirits sink further when her call came through again. A hollow ache settled in his chest as he answered. "I know what you were trying to say, Gabriela. Please don't worry. I promise I'll stay out of your life from now on."

"Wesley, Truett has disappeared," Gabriela said, her words rushing out. "There's a real chance Myah took him. Can you come to Allan's place immediately?"

A heavy feeling pressed against his chest. "Gabriela, what reason would Truett have to disappear? Why are you at Allan's place? Are you genuinely certain Myah is behind this?"

"You need to get here right now!"

Chapter 923

Without warning, Myah snatched the phone from Gabriela's hand, ended the call, and hurled it against the wall until it shattered into pieces. The entire thing unfolded in seconds.

Fear kept Gabriela silent. She didn't dare question the outburst — she only pleaded quietly. "Myah, I followed every demand you made. Please return Truett to me."

With cruel amusement, Myah let her wait. "One more hour."

The drive from the hospital to this house could be done in forty-five minutes if Wesley pushed the speed. "If Wesley truly cares about Truett enough to come — then I'll let the boy go. Does that sound fair?"

Clarity washed over Gabriela as the truth settled in her mind. Myah wanted her to watch who Wesley chose. Truett or her. A memory surfaced — the question she had once asked Wesley, wondering who he would choose if both she and Myah faced danger at the same moment. He had given her only silence.

Now, somehow, the answer no longer felt uncertain.

"There's no reason to wait," Gabriela said quietly. "Wesley isn't coming. In his heart, you matter most. Myah, you've already won — please return Truett to me."

"Do you really think you understand what this is about?" Myah said, wagging a finger. "If Wesley stays away, Truett stays with me."

Anger finally broke through Gabriela's restraint. "Myah, what do you gain from this now? You already got what you wanted — why keep Truett?"

“Because I find it entertaining,” Myah replied, her tone light, her expression almost guileless — though every word she spoke was laced with poison.

“Ever since my brother brought you into our lives, I’ve wanted to see what you’d look like when you were completely cornered.” She gestured around the room. “This space is tiny. There was never any beautiful furniture — only bare walls. Not even a proper window. I lost my sight when I was young and needed injections twice a month. Back then, I believed my life was unbearable. But compared to yours, Gabriela, you had it even worse. And yet you smiled every day. I couldn’t see you, but I could sense that your happiness was real. You lived in misery, yet Allan adored you completely. After he died, you attached yourself to a rich and handsome CEO. Brenden and Stewart both favored you. While I lived in endless darkness, I kept asking myself — why does everyone choose you? I’ve waited a long time to see what you’d look like when you finally fell apart.”

Not a single word came from Gabriela. It was clear Myah had already slipped somewhere beyond reason.

With her teeth pressed into her lip, Gabriela refused to provoke her further and instead pleaded quietly for Truett and Farley to be released.

Myah dismissed her entirely and glanced at the time on her phone. “Fifty-five minutes remaining, Gabriela. Try to stay calm. If Wesley doesn’t care enough about Truett to show up, you can’t fault me for what happens next.”

Chapter 924

Heat rushed to Gabriela’s eyes. All she could do was swallow the pain and wait — silently praying that Wesley would come for Truett, if only because Truett was his own flesh and blood.

At the hospital, doubt pressed against Wesley's thoughts — but he knew Gabriela. She was never the type to fabricate something so serious. Something had clearly gone wrong.

After barely a minute's consideration, he was already moving. He pushed out of the ward and strode toward the exit. If harm came to Myah, he was prepared to answer to Allan with his own life. But the thought of Truett being hurt was something he would never forgive himself for.

His steps faltered the instant he entered the lobby.

Farley stood there, Truett cradled in his arms.

For a brief moment, Wesley questioned whether his eyes were deceiving him. Only moments ago, Gabriela had told him Truett was missing and that Myah had taken him.

"Daddy!" Truett cried out, his voice wounded the instant he spotted Wesley. Something felt wrong immediately — Truett hadn't run toward him the way he always did. Moving closer in alarm, Wesley saw the injury on his foot.

He took Truett gently into his arms and held him until the sobbing eased. Only then did he ask, "Farley, how did this happen?"

Frustration edged Farley's voice. "We were at Sunfield Market. Some people started arguing with the owner and the crowd closed in — we couldn't move. Someone shoved me from behind, I fell, and Truett's foot got stepped on. In the chaos, my phone was stolen too."

A shadow crossed Wesley's face. "Where is Gabriela? Does she know about this?"

"I borrowed a phone to call her, but couldn't reach her," Farley said. "Truett was crying from the pain, so I brought him straight here."

Wesley carefully examined the injury. "It's not severe — just a small fracture." He completed the registration quickly, arranged the X-ray, and saw to the treatment. The doctor prescribed anti-inflammatory medication, and Wesley walked with them toward the pharmacy.

Midway there, realization struck him — sudden and sharp.

His expression shifted immediately. Truett noticed and asked in a small voice, "Is something wrong, Daddy?"

Wesley turned to Farley, his tone urgent. "Take Truett to collect the medicine. Stay inside the hospital and don't leave until I contact you. I'll send an assistant to be with you."

Unease spread across Farley's face. "Mr. Moss, what's happening?"

"Nothing you need to worry about right now. Just watch Truett closely and don't let him out of your sight." Wesley kept his voice controlled, though his jaw was tight. He walked out of the hospital, already dialing Billy. "Send two dependable assistants to the hospital to stay with Farley and Truett. Arrange two bodyguards as well."

Billy agreed immediately. He wanted to ask more, but the call had already ended. Wesley was crossing the parking lot, moving fast.

Chapter 925

The truth had finally assembled itself in his mind, and it hit him like ice water. He had been careless — dangerously so. Gabriela had already made the breakup clear, and she would never have called him again simply to repeat herself. After those cutting words, another call had followed — this time telling him Truett was missing. And then Myah's call had come almost immediately after, as though the two had been carefully arranged in sequence.

Myah had mentioned she saw Gabriela. Both women had been at Greenview Road. And now Gabriela's phone could no longer be reached.

He should never have doubted her. Not for a single second.

Anger turned inward, sharp and unforgiving. He had wasted precious time talking himself into questioning her.

"Damn it," he said through clenched teeth.

His foot pressed harder on the accelerator. Every passing second felt like a wound, and all he wanted — all he needed — was to reach Gabriela before it was too late.

Inside the house on Greenview Road, Myah sat atop the bed, unbothered by the thick dust coating its surface. She let her legs swing back and forth with idle ease, her posture entirely at peace. As the minutes slipped by, satisfaction crept slowly across her face. What pleased her most was that Wesley had never appeared — exactly as she had wanted.

Meanwhile, tension had wound itself so tightly around Gabriela's chest that her heart felt ready to leap free. Please don't fail me this time, Wesley. I can't bear it if something has happened to Truett.

Unable to hold that thought, she held her breath and willed the moment to stretch a little longer.

Without warning, a sharp alarm rang out — the hour was up.

Wesley had not come.

Gabriela flinched and turned to Myah immediately. "Myah, this is exactly what you wanted. Wesley didn't show up. I'm begging you — please let Truett and Farley go."

Myah nodded with deliberate solemnity. "Yes. I'm very satisfied."

From the beginning, Myah had only wanted to confirm whether Wesley would actually come. His arrival would have meant he never crossed paths with Truett and Farley at the hospital. If he had shown up, she had already decided she would force him to return her brother's heart on the spot. Since he never arrived, a twisted sense of fulfillment settled over her. At last, someone had chosen her over Gabriela.

Even so, Myah had no intention of stopping there.

“But I always keep my promises,” she said evenly. “Since Wesley didn’t come, I can’t release Truett.”

“Myah!” Gabriela’s gaze sharpened instantly, burning with fury. She drew the dagger she had brought and pressed the blade firmly against Myah’s neck. “I’ll count to ten. Take me to Truett right now — or I will kill you.”

Shock flickered across Myah’s face, and she immediately dissolved into tears. “Gabriela, you really want to kill me? Have you thought about what my brother would think?”

Some people used tears to weaken others, to force hesitation. But Myah’s false crying no longer had any effect on Gabriela.

Without mercy, she pressed the dagger closer. “Stop pretending. Where are Truett and Farley?”

The sharp edge sliced into Myah’s skin, and a thin line of blood slowly surfaced.

Real tears finally spilled from Myah’s eyes. “Gabriela, loosen your grip — you’re hurting me!”

No warmth showed on Gabriela's face. Uncontrollable fury burned in her eyes. "Tell me where Truett is!"

"Actually, I never took Truett or Farley at all. I was only teasing you." Myah fixed her with a wide-eyed, innocent stare. "If killing me will make you feel better, go ahead. My life has never been worth much anyway. Even if Wesley marries me one day, his thoughts will always return to you and Truett. If my death can drag you, Truett, and Farley down with me, then it wouldn't be a loss."

Revulsion twisted through Gabriela. She had never fully grasped how deeply warped Myah truly was — until now.

Burning anger flooded her vision. In one sudden burst, Gabriela shoved Myah onto the bed, seized her collar with one hand, and raised the dagger toward her eyes with the other. With Truett and Farley still unaccounted for, fear had overwhelmed reason, and desperation had taken complete control.

No matter the cost — the only thing Gabriela wanted was to bring Truett home alive and unharmed.

"It was me who helped restore your sight, Myah. If you refuse to release Truett, I will take those eyes back myself."

"You would never do that," Myah replied, staring up in disbelief. "Gabriela, you endured years of abuse from your aunt and cousin without ever fighting back. I'm Allan's cherished sister, and you once cared about me. You're not capable of hurting me."

"Then watch closely," Gabriela said, her eyes blazing with a resolve that left no room for mercy.

For more than ten years, she had endured Marie and her family because their cruelty had never truly mattered to her. Today was different. Today she was ready to show Myah exactly how terrifying a mother could become for her child.

Without hesitation, she raised the dagger — prepared to bring it down the very next second.

“Gabriela, don’t!” Wesley’s shout tore through the room as he arrived at that instant, rushing forward to seize her wrist. “Have you lost your mind? What are you doing? That’s Myah!”

“The one who’s insane is Myah!” Gabriela cried, struggling violently. “Wesley, let me go. I have to stop this little demon!”

From behind, Wesley locked both arms around her, restraining her wrist. At the same time, he urged Myah to run.

Terror drained the color from Myah’s face. She stood frozen, her chest heaving in frantic breaths. Only seconds earlier, she had been certain she was about to be plunged back into permanent darkness. The moment Wesley stepped in front of her, relief surged through her.

So this was Gabriela’s idea of caring, she thought bitterly. After all those years of claiming to love me, she was actually willing to tear my eyes out.

She would not let this end quietly.

Her eyes were the one thing she valued above everything else. Not long ago, Gabriela had already damaged her right eye on Brenden's behalf — it still hadn't fully healed. And now she was trying to blind her all over again, this time for Truett.

Chapter 927

"Myah, get out of here!" Wesley shouted when he saw she was still standing frozen.

In that brief moment of chaos, Gabriela lost control of the dagger's angle, and the blade sliced across Wesley's palm. The wound was deep, and blood poured out almost instantly.

Shock flashed across Gabriela's face.

Seizing the opening, Wesley wrenched the dagger from her grip and hurled it across the room.

The sight only made Myah's resentment burn hotter. Everything today had been carefully planned — so that Wesley would agree to marry her, and so that Gabriela would be frightened into backing down. She had never truly taken Truett and Farley; prison was never part of her future. She wanted to walk into marriage without a stain on her name, to become the most admired bride in Okburg, the woman everyone envied as Wesley's wife.

And now, because of Gabriela, her future husband was bleeding.

Myah made up her mind in an instant.

She spun and bolted out of the room. Hidden in a corner of the living room sat the large barrel of gasoline — something Gabriela had never noticed when she first arrived. Myah twisted the cap open and dumped the fuel across the floor, splashing it over the furniture and along the walls. Then she pulled out a match and struck it.

She held the small flame for a moment and murmured, “Gabriela, this is your own doing. Don’t blame me for being cruel.”

She threw the match down.

Flames erupted at once and raced through the room. Thick smoke billowed through the house as Myah ran back, screaming, “Wesley, the house is on fire! We have to leave right now!”

Wesley grabbed Gabriela’s arm, panic breaking through his voice. “Gabriela, the house is burning. We need to get out!”

“No!” Tears streamed down Gabriela’s face. “Wesley, Truett and Farley are still inside. I have to find them!”

“Truett and Farley are at the hospital,” Wesley said urgently, wrapping his arms around her and trying to pull her toward the exit. “Come outside with me first — I’ll take you to see them right away.”

"I'm not going!" Gabriela shouted, convinced he was lying, and she fought back with desperate force before sinking her teeth into his wrist.

Pain wrenched a sharp reaction from Wesley, and Gabriela tore herself free.

Tears blurred her vision as she stared at him, hatred filling her gaze. "Wesley, why didn't you come sooner? Truett is my entire life. If anything happens to him, I don't want to live either. You bastard — since the day Truett was born, how many days have you truly been there for him? You are his father. Why didn't you come to save him? I will never forgive you!"

Her cries echoed wildly, her voice raw and breaking as she teetered on the edge of collapse.

The pain struck Wesley straight through the chest.

Chapter 928

Even so, there was no time for comfort or gentle persuasion. "Gabriela," he said, forcing authority into his voice, "if you still believe in me even a little, then leave with me right now. I swear Truett and Farley are at the hospital. Come with me and you'll see them within the hour."

The force of his words nearly broke through her resistance — until, from behind him, Myah slowly lifted a silver bracelet and gave it a slight, deliberate shake.

That bracelet belonged to Truett. Matthew had bought it especially for him.

When Gabriela caught Myah's smug, taunting expression, she shoved Wesley away with everything she had. If Myah wouldn't let them go, she would find them herself.

Gabriela shoved Wesley aside and spun around, bolting for the doorway of Myah's room. She knew this house almost by heart, having walked its halls more times than she could count. Beyond the front yard lay the living room, the master bedroom, a smaller bedroom, a storage room, and a bathroom — and tucked into the far corner of the upper level, a narrow, well-concealed attic. Her feet carried her instinctively toward the ground-level storage room.

But heavy smoke had already swallowed the corridor, scorching her eyes, clawing at her throat, drawing burning tears that blurred everything into shadows and firelight. Her foot caught on something unseen and she stumbled forward.

Wesley reacted instantly, closing his fingers around her wrist. Panic tightened his chest — he nearly considered knocking her unconscious, telling himself explanations could come later, if they survived.

Nearby, Myah watched their struggle with unsettling calm, as though observing a distant spectacle. Then her eyes flicked to the dagger resting near the corner. Seizing the moment while they were distracted, she crouched and wrapped her hand around the handle.

Then Myah rushed over and joined Wesley, gripping Gabriela to keep her from breaking free. Working together, they finally hauled her into the living room. The front exit stood only a few steps away — yet the fire had already climbed to the roof, flames roaring upward like beasts unleashed. They were boxed inside a furnace, danger pressing in from every side.

Gabriela continued to thrash and cry out, her voice shredded raw with fear.

“Gabriela, stop!” Wesley barked, forcing the words out through the smoke. “If you leave with me, I swear Truett and Farley will be unharmed. If not, I will give my life for you. Will that finally be enough?”

Shock froze her for a heartbeat. Then, slowly, she stilled — letting him and Myah guide her toward the door.

Just as they were about to cross the threshold, Myah suddenly shrieked. “Gabriela, what are you doing? Don’t shove my hand away—”

Gabriela made no sound and did not resist, perhaps still clinging to the hope that Truett and Farley were somewhere inside.

Smoke thickened until sight became meaningless.

Amid the confusion, the dagger sliced across Wesley’s hand — the sharp pain forcing his grip to slacken on instinct. In that split second, Gabriela was thrust backward into the wall of fire.

Chapter 929

“Gabriela!” The scream tore straight from Wesley’s chest. He turned and lunged toward the flames without a second’s hesitation. He could not allow Gabriela to be hurt. Even if death waited for him, he would still reach for her.

Myah wrapped herself around his waist, sobbing desperately. “Wesley, don’t go back — you’ll be killed in there! She’s not thinking clearly. She believes Truett and Farley are still inside and she’s decided to die with them. Even if you go in, you might not be able to save her.”

“Let go of me!” Wesley ripped her hands away and lunged forward.

At that instant, a heavy wooden rod crashed into his back. The world spun violently, and Wesley dropped to his knees.

Myah caught him as he fell, crying through her tears. “Wesley, I’m sorry. I never wanted to hurt you. I just couldn’t bear watching you throw your life away. Please forgive me.” With great effort, she dragged him out of the house and across the yard until they reached a point several meters from the flames.

The fire surged higher, its blazing tongues spilling out of the living room and racing across the villa until nothing was left untouched. The inferno raged without mercy, consuming everything in its path.

Despair hollowed Wesley out. “Gabriela!” He staggered forward, but after only a few steps his legs gave way and he crashed to the ground. As darkness closed in, his eyes remained fixed on the house devoured by fire. He wondered if this was the day he would lose the woman he loved most.

Then consciousness slipped away.

“Wesley!” Myah shook him frantically, receiving no response. She pressed her fingers to his neck. His pulse was steady and strong. Certain he was alive, her features softened, and a faint smile curved her lips as she gazed at the blaze.

Everything had unfolded exactly as she had planned.

She had never abducted anyone — yet she had maneuvered Gabriela straight into death. At first, killing Gabriela and inventing a believable story would have required far more effort. By sheer luck, Wesley had arrived and witnessed Gabriela's apparent madness, seeing with his own eyes that she had chosen not to escape. Suspicion would never touch Myah now.

Satisfaction gleamed plainly on her face. Even spoiled heiresses like Cindy and Rebecca had failed to overpower Gabriela. But no matter how sharp Gabriela was, no matter how much money she had earned — in the end, she had still danced in the palm of Myah's hand.

And Wesley...

Myah lowered her gaze to the striking man sprawled unconscious at her feet. With a few more tears and carefully staged scenes — Gabriela gone — Wesley would eventually marry her. One day, Truett would have no choice but to call her "mother." If the boy behaved, she might show him kindness. But if he ever dared to speak Gabriela's name, he would learn how cruel adults could be.

Once she judged the fire had consumed all life inside, Myah calmly dialed the emergency number. "There's a fire on Greenview Road. My friend is trapped inside. Please save her." She confirmed the address, ended the call, and waited with practiced composure.

Chapter 930

Fire engines arrived swiftly, followed by an ambulance that carried both Wesley and Myah to the hospital. On the ride back, Myah discreetly took advantage of the paramedics' distraction and dropped the phone she had taken from Farley. Every trace, every witness — gone.

Loretta and Farley were already waiting at the hospital. Farley had been deeply unsettled by Wesley's grim expression and his insistence that he stay put. A dreadful premonition had been pressing on him ever since. Loretta, worried by Myah's earlier disappearance, was equally restless. The two of them could only sit and endure the wait.

Billy arrived after finishing at the company. As he spoke quietly to comfort them, doctors rushed past with a stretcher. Myah hurried along beside it.

Their hearts lurched at the sight of Wesley lying there.

Loretta and Billy followed instinctively, with Farley lifting Truett and carrying him close. After Wesley was taken for examination, Loretta gripped Myah's arm. "Myah, what happened?"

"This is all because of me." Myah bowed her head, her voice thick with remorse. "I'm weak and useless. I didn't want to burden Wesley anymore, so I decided to leave Okburg. Before going, I wanted one last look at the house where my brother and I once lived — and I ran into Gabriela there."

Farley listened, stunned. Dread sank into his chest. He set Truett carefully onto a nearby chair and stood protectively in front of him. "Myah, Gabriela was with you? Then why is Wesley the one being treated? Where is Gabriela now?"

She's gone forever. She'll never come back. The thought nearly sent laughter bubbling up Myah's throat. She swallowed it down, lowering her head even further. "I don't know what happened. The house suddenly caught fire — and Wesley was injured trying to save Gabriela."

"A fire?" Farley's voice trembled. "Then what about Gabriela? Why didn't she come out with you?"

"She was trapped inside," Myah whispered. "No one could get her out. I'm sorry. This is all on me."

Farley's mind went blank.

He could no longer process what Myah was saying. What did it mean that Gabriela was trapped in the fire? Had something truly happened to her?

"How could they leave her behind?" he cried out, tears spilling freely, his voice broken and raw. "You all got out — so why didn't Gabriela?"

Their Gabriela had endured cruelty since childhood and never lost her light. She had survived Marie and that wretched family, rising into a capable and admirable woman. She had given birth to Truett and finally tasted happiness. How could her story end in flames?

Farley's tears coursed down the lines of his weathered face as his legs finally gave way and he collapsed to his knees in raw torment. Billy rushed forward at once, steadying him with both hands, his own chest tightening as if a vise had closed around his heart.

Truett, trembling with terror, clung to Farley and cried through broken sobs. "Farley, are you okay?" His small voice quivered again, confused and frightened. "What do they mean, Mommy didn't get out?"

Farley had no words left. He could only gather Truett into his arms and hold him close, swallowing his own grief for fear of frightening the child further.