

Reading

Stepping Back to Move Forward

Read the text below, choose the correct answers (A, B, C, D).

Gabriella was a boss everyone respected but feared. She was always working, never taking a break, and pushed herself even harder than she pushed her team. She and her husband, Marco, ran a successful company together, but Marco had started to worry about her.

One day, after a long and stressful meeting, Gabriella shouted at a junior employee for making a mistake in a presentation. The employee left the room in tears, and Marco decided it was time to act. That evening, he handed her an envelope.

"What's this?" she asked, raising an eyebrow.

"A gift," Marco replied. "You're going to a wellness retreat in the mountains for two weeks. No work, no phones, no stress."

Gabriella laughed. "I don't need a retreat. I need to fix that presentation."

"No, Gabriella. What you need is to take care of yourself. This isn't a request—it's happening."

When Gabriella arrived at the retreat, she stepped out of the car in her signature heels, a pencil skirt, and full makeup. The lodge had a rustic exterior but offered excellent comfort inside. It was surrounded by trees and utterly silent, which only reinforced her feeling that she didn't belong. The other participants were dressed in yoga pants and running shoes, holding mugs of herbal tea. Gabriella strutted into the welcome meeting as though it were a corporate conference. Heads turned, and one of the coordinators smiled politely. "You might want to change before the forest walk," they said gently. Gabriella gave a tight smile and replied, "I'll be fine."

She wasn't. Within minutes of starting the hike, her heels sank into the mud, and her feet ached. She struggled to keep up with the group, who cheerfully pointed out birds and plants she couldn't have cared less about. By the time they returned to the lodge, Gabriella's shoes were ruined, and she was in a foul mood.

The next shock came at breakfast. Gabriella sat down expecting coffee and a croissant, but instead, she was handed a green smoothie. One sip, and she grimaced. "Is this grass juice?" she asked the server, who replied with a cheerful, "It's full of nutrients!" Gabriella forced it down, realizing there was nothing else on offer. She muttered under her breath, "I'd rather starve."

When Gabriella asked for the Wi-Fi password later, the coordinator's smile widened. "There's no Wi-Fi here," they said. "This is your chance to disconnect." Gabriella's jaw dropped. "No Wi-Fi? For two weeks? What am I supposed to do?" The coordinator handed her a journal. "Write your thoughts. It helps." Gabriella took the journal reluctantly, thinking, *This is going to be torture.*

The first few days were exactly that—torture. Yoga classes exposed just how stiff her body had become from sitting at a desk for years. She couldn't hold any poses, fell out of downward dog multiple times, and spent most of the sessions glaring at the instructor. Meditation was no better. She fidgeted constantly, her mind racing with imaginary emails and missed deadlines.

On top of that, Gabriella was assigned dishwashing as her daily chore. She spent the first day trying to organize everyone else's tasks, snapping when things weren't done her way. The coordinator gently reminded her, "The chores aren't about efficiency—they're about being present in the moment." Gabriella rolled her eyes and muttered, "What does that even mean?"

But as the week went on, something started to shift. One evening, while scrubbing pots after dinner, Gabriella found herself humming along to a song someone was playing. She noticed the warm water on her hands, the smell of the soap, and the rhythm of the task. It was the first time in days she wasn't thinking about work.



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By the start of the second week, Gabriella was changing. She traded her heels for running shoes and wore the hoodie she had borrowed from the lodge. She began to enjoy the morning forest walks, noticing the sound of birds and the way the sunlight filtered through the trees. She even started drinking the green smoothies without complaint, telling herself they weren't that bad if she held her breath while sipping.

During a group mindfulness session, the coordinator asked everyone to write down what was holding them back. Gabriella hesitated before writing, *I always feel like I have to be perfect. But why?* She stared at the words, feeling a strange mix of relief and vulnerability. For the first time, she let herself wonder if her constant drive for perfection was helping or hurting her.

By the end of the second week, Gabriella felt lighter—not just in her body but in her mind. On her last evening, she sat by the fireplace with the group, watching the flames flicker. For the first time in years, she wasn't planning or stressing—she was just being.

When Gabriella returned home, Marco greeted her with open arms. "You look... different," he said, noticing her relaxed smile. Gabriella laughed. "I am. But I would love a cup of my coffee and a croissant."

At work the next day, Gabriella's team immediately noticed the change. She smiled more, paid closer attention to others, and even took proper breaks during lunch. She wasn't perfect—nor did she need to be. Two weeks in the mountains had taught her that stepping back was the best way to move forward.

1. Marco gave Gabriella an envelope because:

- A. He wanted her to fix the mistake.
- B. He believed she needed time to unwind.
- C. He wanted her to leave the company.
- D. He thought she needed to work harder.

2. When Gabriella arrived at the retreat, she felt:

- A. Relaxed and welcomed by the environment.
- B. Intrigued by the new activities on offer.
- C. Out of place compared to the other participants.
- D. Overwhelmed by the complex retreat schedule.

3. What did Gabriella think about the first hike?

- A. She enjoyed the views and the fresh air.
- B. She struggled to keep up because of her heavy bag.
- C. She felt prepared and confident throughout.
- D. She found it exhausting and uncomfortable.

4. What wasn't on the list of challenges that Gabriella encountered?

- A. Food she wasn't used to.
- B. No Internet access.
- C. Household duty.
- D. The rustic accommodations.

5. How did Gabriella's experience at the retreat impact her when she returned to work?

- A. She adopted a more relaxed and flexible approach.
- B. She continued to struggle with work-life balance.
- C. She became more demanding of her team.
- D. She decided to quit her job and start a new career.

