

Master 101

Chapter 101

As Brielle walked into the department, all eyes swung her way—word had spread like wildfire that Emily had been let go, but what

no one knew was the drama that had just unfolded downstairs.

She grabbed the file handed to her and scanned it, finding it detailed a new project—an investment evaluation for a company

named Alpha. She thought she must have read it wrong, and flipped through the thick stack of papers again.

It was indeed Alpha.

Though Dorsey International had long branched out into diverse operations with numerous businesses, this was their first foray

into internet companies.

Rubbing her temples, she had a hunch that this move wasn't Max's brainchild. Probably, because of the scandal that had leaked

about the building, the board was panicking, fearing Max's scrutiny, and was eager to show some results.

In the afternoon, she was summoned to a meeting on the top floor. Stepping out of the elevator, she overheard some gossip.

"Didn't the media just catch Ms. Alivia? When did she come back from abroad?"

"Did you notice the rosary on her wrist? It's identical to the president's. They must be a set."

"I heard Mr. Dorsey personally visited Ms. Alivia's research institute. Seems like he's interested in investing in a project she's

involved with."

"Never thought Mr. Dorsey was the type to splurge for a lady love."

"Well, you've got to consider who she is. Ms. Alivia is top-notch in every way, and they've been childhood sweethearts."

The buzz grew louder and more animated.

Max had never been one for tabloid fodder. His interviews in the financial papers were terse and to the point. Celebrities looking

to latch onto his success had no inroad, and within the social circles of Beaconsfield, one couldn't even snag his contact

information.

Brielle, who rarely paid heed to celebrity news, couldn't help but stealthily check her phone. There was no mention of Max, just a

side shot of Alivia brushing her hair aside, revealing that telltale string of beads.

Phrases like "golden couple" and "match made in heaven" were thrown around with abandon. She pocketed her phone,

struggling to maintain composure, and took her seat.

Max was absent, and the directors' voices were louder than usual.

Especially Ryan, who should have been ousted, had wormed his way back in while Max was away.

And with Max's two other brothers on the board, the atmosphere was tense. However, Ryan, shameless as ever, had pushed

this new project

to the forefront.

"Alpha has been around for years. Their CEO approached me privately last night, inquiring about investment from Dorsey

International. I've reviewed the data and believe this to be a promising endeavor."

Ryan's audacity knew no bounds. Even as others around the table scowled, he dropped Michael's name to silence any dissent.

"The CEO of Alpha and I go way back. I promised Dad that if we could triple the profits this time, he'd let me return. So I hope

everyone will

cooperate."

Ryan's smug expression made it clear he was determined to succeed, gesturing everyone to view the presentation on the big

screen. "This overview shows Alpha's main business areas: social networking, online gaming, digital advertising, and others.

Their social network has

over three hundred million users. With our investment, we could own thirty percent of Alpha. Alpha's battle last year is no secret.

They were blindsided by a rival company's malware, losing many users. They're on the eve of their final funding round. If Dorsey

International invests two billion, we'll be their largest shareholder."

Ryan went on to outline Alpha's potential, making it clear that this project was non-negotiable.

Brielle sat back and laughed softly. The room was silent, making her laughter stand out all the more.

The first to speak was William, pushing up his classic glasses, "What are your thoughts, Brielle?"

William, Michael's eldest and Max's big brother, was known for his scholarly demeanor. He never fought for the spotlight, making

his presence often overlooked. But to Brielle, William was more formidable. than the blatantly aggressive Ryan.

In her three years at Dorsey International, Brielle had never heard a bad word about William. He always played the peacemaker,

offending no one, with barely passable performance that left no room for criticism.

Like now, while others had shown their displeasure with Ryan, William's face was all seriousness, as if genuinely considering

Ryan's spiel.

Now he'd passed the buck to Brielle, letting her be the one to stick her neck out.

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Even though Brielle had no desire to be entangled with William, she had to admit he was spot on—Max truly held his values in

high regard.

Alpha Enterprises' leadership had launched a total of five initiatives last year, sparking a frenzy of competition among the teams.

This not only tested their mettle but also fostered a cutthroat culture within the

company. In the pursuit of high stakes rewards, employees were more inclined to copy successful models from others, directly

transplanting star projects from startup teams. Hence, Alpha Enterprises' growth was always shadowed by a chorus of criticism.

While it was true that business often lacked clear distinctions between "good" and "evil," and sometimes even between "right"

and "wrong," it didn't mean that companies should have been devoid of a sense of social responsibility. Companies shouldn't

have engaged in

competition without any ethical boundaries, nor should they have behaved without constraints.

For now, Alpha was unscathed simply because a few of its leaders had connections in high places. But in the ever-shifting

landscapes of politics and commerce, should their protective canopy fall, a deluge of lawsuits would inevitably await Alpha

Enterprises. Dorsey International getting involved with such a company would only attract trouble.

Brielle hung her head, acutely aware of Ryan's glare—cold, mocking, and venomous. The shadows cast by what Ryan brought to

her that night were vivid in her memory, and she realized she shouldn't have provoked him. But even if she hadn't done so today,

Ryan would never have let her

off the hook.

Ryan narrowed his eyes and switched the content on the big screen. "We invest in a company based solely on its potential

profitability. Other considerations are irrelevant. These are the strategies for the future given to me by Alpha's leaders. Take a

look before we make any decisions."

Originally, Brielle had thought Alpha might go bankrupt and restructure. within the next two years. But after seeing the strategy,

she suspected they might barely last another year.

Ryan was too eager to turn his fortunes around with this investment, and given his longstanding friendship with Alpha's

president, he had overlooked crucial details.

She frowned and slowly put down her pen. To be honest, the strategy was beautifully crafted, a carefully polished piece.

Ryan went on with more talk, each sentence more professional than the last, before finally turning off the big screen.

"Alpha chose Dorsey International because of a personal connection. with me. We absolutely can't miss this opportunity."

Brielle's eyelids lazily twitched as she spoke up in a soft voice, "Investing two billion is a huge sum. Surely it would require Mr.

Dorsey's approval, right?"

Otherwise, what was Max, the president, but a mere figurehead? How could Ryan be so bold?

Caught off guard by Brielle's blunt question, Ryan struggled to produce the explanation he had prepared. He had planned to

break up the investment into smaller portions, like the previous building deal, to avoid requiring Max's approval. Knowing Max's

reputation for integrity, Ryan guessed that just seeing his name, Ryan, would prompt Max to reject the project outright.

Sensing Ryan's hesitation, Brielle couldn't help but smile. "It is such a major project. Mr. Ryan, are you thinking of bypassing Mr.

Dorsey and going straight in? It hasn't been long since the building scandal, and several here are still on Mr. Dorsey's list. If you

were to proceed like this, it might be difficult to explain to Mr. Dorsey."

Ryan took a deep breath, wishing he could wring Brielle's neck. He clenched his teeth and turned to William.

"This project is truly worth the investment, but Max will dismiss it the moment he sees my name. Maybe we can handle this like

last time. The building incident is done, and we can't undo it, but if we triple the profits this time, we'll recover all the losses from

that project. What do you think?"

Brielle also looked at William, curious how he would respond without offending Ryan.

William smiled, removing the glasses perched on his nose, revealing fine lines at the corners of his eyes. Despite his impressive

upkeep, the signs of his fifty years were inevitable.

"Brielle has a point. If we go ahead with this, it'll be tough to explain to Max. Why not have Brielle gauge Max's stance on the matter?"

Without hesitation, he pushed Brielle, the one with no connections, into the line of fire.

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William's move could be described as killing two birds with one stone. In his view, Brielle, who had an engagement with Spencer,

would sooner or later stand on Ryan's side. By nudging her into the spotlight, if she managed to ruffle Max's feathers, and he

decided to yank the director's title from her, William's son, freshly back from abroad, could slip right into that coveted role.

However, once Max learned about the building scandal playing out again, he was bound to start a thorough investigation. Ryan,

the one who proposed this project, couldn't escape the repercussions.

Face it, when Max decided to hold someone accountable, not even his father's prestige can shield them. After all, Max held the

reins with more than fifty percent of Dorsey International's shares; he didn't need anyone's approval.

But in all his scheming, William overlooked one small detail—the relationship between Brielle and Max.

Brielle was itching to wrap up the meeting, so when William suggested she reach out to Max, she feigned difficulty. "Mr. Dorsey's

tied up in meetings, and I, uh, don't have his direct line. But I could try shooting him an email," she said, deliberately mentioning

she didn't have Max's contact to prevent Emily from going ballistic and leaking some scoop about her and Max.

The last thing she needed was the Dorsey clan getting suspicious. By openly admitting she had no private dealings with Max,

she was effectively inoculating herself against any future doubts from the Dorseys gathered there.

Ryan was visibly irked by the turn of events, but with William's words hanging in the air, any further debate would only prolong

the meeting indefinitely. He shot Brielle a look, silently asking her to stay behind.

And she did just that. Once the room cleared, leaving only the two of them, the air felt charged.

"Brielle, has Spencer been chatting you up about work lately?" he asked, a veiled reminder that she had snatched the position

from Spencer and that it was only a matter of time before it would be returned.

Brielle had to laugh. She looked him straight in the eye. "You should know your son's true colors better than anyone."

Spencer wasn't cut out for business. The only reason he'd landed the director gig in the first place was thanks to Max being out

of the country and Ryan's behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Now that Max. was back and taking things seriously, Spencer's

incompetence was laid bare for all to see.

With no one else around, Ryan stepped closer and lowered his voice, issuing a thinly veiled threat.

"Brielle, as long as you're in Beaconsfield, you're in my world. I'd advise you to play nice, don't cross me."

Brielle's grip tightened on her pen, pausing mid-scribble.

Ryan mistook her silence for fear and retreated with a self-satisfied look. "I know how fond you are of Spencer. You've always

looked out for him. Just toe the line, and I'll make sure he treats you right. He's young and restless, that's all."

It was as if he was saying, give Spencer time to sow his oats, and I'll make him come around to you, but that was contingent on

Brielle adding value to the family.

She nearly gagged at the thought but knew better than to confront him. head-on. If Ryan decided to crush her, she stood no

chance.

Taking her silence for compliance, Ryan pressed his advantage. "You can get Max to sign off on the Alpha project, right?" After

all, Max did seem to have a soft spot for her.

A sharp glint passed through Brielle's eyes as she slowly lifted her head. "I'll do my best."

Ryan seemed pleased with her response and left the conference room.

Once the door clicked shut, Brielle finally set the pen down. Getting Max. to invest in Alpha? Ryan was seriously underestimating

him. The figures Ryan presented today might look good on the surface, but they wouldn't stand up to scrutiny.

Alpha might appear profitable, but its free cash flow was pitifully low.

Max's knack for precision in his acquisitions and investments came from a deep understanding of free cash flow and core

values. The intrinsic value behind a company's stock was its ability to generate free cash flow. The long-term state of a

company's free cash flow was the true measure of its investment worthiness. Clearly, Alpha was failing on this front.

Brielle returned to her desk and composed an email to Max. After much deliberation, she couldn't resist sending just a period. It

wasn't until the end of the workday that she received a reply- a single question mark.

Despite a day heavy with gloom, that question mark somehow lifted her spirits. She chuckled, typing back, [Uncle Max on a

business trip for a few days?]

No response.

She lingered in the office until nine, working overtime and awaiting his answer. Before shutting down her computer, she sent over

the meticulously prepared Alpha company data.

Back in her apartment, she powered up again to find his reply. This time, two question marks.

Anyone else might find his brevity dismissive, but Brielle sensed a hint of intimacy in those punctuations. For someone as

serious as Max, it was probably the most casual email exchange he'd ever had.

She flashed a wry smile.

Chapter 104

[Ryan wants to invest two billion in Alpha, and he thinks I can sway you. Uncle Max, does he overestimate me or underestimate

you?]

[No investment.]

Max's reply came quickly, a curt two-word dismissal. Just like when Brielle had sent her initial email, his emotionless response

had been a flat rejection.

She licked her lips, unable to suppress the mischievous thought. [Seems I don't have the charm to cloud Uncle Max's judgment.]

As she sent the email, her palms were damp with sweat. It was a bold flirtation, her heart a mix of sour trepidation and sweet

anticipation.

There was no reply from Max.

While waiting, Brielle researched more about Alpha. Whether they invested or not, appraising the company's value was her

department's responsibility.

At midnight, she dragged her weary body to shower. Returning, a new email awaited her a string of digits, presumably, Max's

private

contact.

Saving the number, she glanced at the clock and texted him. [Uncle Max, is this business trip going to be a long one? Otherwise,

Ryan wouldn't dare show up at the office. He was just demoted. His brazen return must mean he's sure Max's tied up elsewhere.

Max glanced at the stack of documents on his desk as his phone.

chimed.

Across from him sat several middle-aged men in sharp suits, negotiating with Alivia. Confidence graced Alivia's face as she

multitasked, her eyes stealing glances at Max. Once the men left, Alivia stood, poured him a coffee, and ventured, "I didn't

expect you to invest in my professor's protégé, Max. Is this for me?"

Her mentor was a big name in the industry, and any investment in his students would naturally involve her mediation. She'd

mentioned a software developed on campus by the student during a past visit to Beaconsfield, piquing Max's interest. He'd

asked for the technical details and plans, but Alivia insisted on delivering them personally, which delayed matters.

Now, her professor inquired, and she seized the opportunity to accompany Max abroad to the research facility, creating a chance

for

them to be alone.

During the meeting, Max had been quietly listening while replying to an email. Was it an internal company message? She

couldn't help but recall the fleeting face from their last video call.

Alivia never worried about someone stealing Max away. Ever since they emerged as talents in their respective fields, their

families saw them: as a pair. Her motivation was fueled by the name Max alone. She aspired to be the woman by his side, and

she quietly thwarted any Beaconsfield socialite foolish enough to express interest in him.

How could those women, obsessed with fashion and perfume, ever match Max?

Hearing his phone, Alivia noticed Max's typing pause as he reached for

1. it.

Max rarely used his phone beyond making calls. To him, texting was a time-waster. But Alivia clearly saw him contemplating in

front of the screen, as if considering how to respond to the other party.

A flicker of unease stirred within her, and she couldn't help but ask, "Something from the company? I thought you don't like to

handle things via phone?"

Chapter 105

Max finally looked up at her. He'd been sitting there for the better part of the evening, and this was the first time he'd actually

made eye contact. That was just Max being Max, so Alivia didn't think anything of

1. it.

"Personal stuff."

That was all Max said, two words, before he lowered his head to reply to a message. [I'll try to get back home early.]

After sending it, he set his phone down and turned back to the documents beside him.

He had pretty much gone through all the files about the new app, and the venture capitalists had shared their insights. In

summary, the app, currently valued at a mere billion dollars, was indeed a worthy investment.

Even Alivia thought so, considering the app's developer was one of the industry's leading tech gurus, with hundreds of millions of users in the States alone.

Under normal circumstances, such a valuation wouldn't have demanded Max's personal attention, but what he was really interested in was the app's potential impact on international lifestyles. Plus, the developer's mentor was the same as Alivia's—a titan of the industry—so naturally, the project was infused with plenty of professional advice.

Find Peace and Purpose in

Max closed the folder and noticed a new message on his phone.

[Added you on WhatsApp. Accept, please.]

Max didn't even use WhatsApp. He'd registered once, but the flood of contact requests was overwhelming, so he deleted the

app. His life revolved around work, with no time for idle chitchat.

He frowned, deliberating for a moment, before finally relenting and redownloading WhatsApp.

Alivia caught this out of the corner of her eye and her expression darkened. Max, chatting with someone?

She bit her lip, pushing her coffee towards him, "Max, my friend wants to meet with you to discuss the investment in detail."

Her fingers clenched tightly on the table as she pulled out her phone, "So you're finally getting WhatsApp? My brother and his

friends have been complaining for ages. What made you change your mind? Let me add you first. I want to be the first on your

friend list."

"Alivia." Max logged in, his voice cool and eyes half-closed, "I don't really use it, so there's no need to add me."

His tone was nonchalant, and as soon as he logged in, he saw Brielle's friend request. At the same time, there was a whole slew

of

requests—from Andrew, from Kenzo. He ignored them, searching for Brielle's message and accepted it.

Brielle was surprised by how quickly he accepted, feeling unexpectedly flattered. She wanted to continue the conversation, but

glancing at the time, realized it was late and sent a message through WhatsApp instead.

[Goodnight.]

Max didn't reply, just looked at Brielle's profile picture. It was a hexagonal snowflake.

Alivia was sneaking glances the whole time, her hand tightening in her lap.

Who was that in the profile picture? She racked her brain, running through nearly every woman in their circle, but couldn't come up with anything.

Meanwhila May had already flinned bis abono L

his wristwatch clinking softly against the surface. That sound softened Alivia's heart, and she cleared her throat.

"Should we go see my friend now? His app has been valued at a billion dollars by companies after less than six months, and

several venture. capitalists are looking to invest."

"Alivia, I have my own plans."

Every time he said her name with that crisp, clear voice, Alivia felt like. melting. She was so into Max, had been since they were

kids, and no one was going to stop her from marrying him. If any other woman dared to encroach, Alivia would ensure she

regretted ever setting foot on this earth.

"Max, if you don't have other plans tonight, maybe you could tour my research institute? The team has a lot of projects they're

working on."

"No need. I'm flying back home in two hours."

Alivia's expression froze. Wasn't he supposed to stay for half a month?

Then she thought of the owner of that profile picture—perhaps that had something to do with his change of plans.

Whether it was a man or woman, she was seething with jealousy.

Chapter 106

Alivia managed to keep her emotions in check as she responded, "Alright, I'll keep a close eye out for you. My friend trusts me

implicitly, since I offered some solid advice during the initial development of the software. He's willing to wait for your offer."

Max rubbed his temples wearily, "If another company comes in with a decent proposal, tell him not to worry about Dorsey

International."

Alivia thought she had misheard. Reflexively, she blurted out, "What?" Was he implying that he wasn't interested in her friend's

project?

Impossible. With so many venture capital firms on Wall Street drooling over this financing opportunity, who wouldn't want in?

Creating at billion-dollar value in less than six months was an extraordinary feat in any industry.

The conference room door swung open, and Patrick stepped in. "Sir, your tickets are all set."

Max nodded and rose slowly from his seat. "There's something in the report I'm not too thrilled about—he's relinquished control of

his company."

Following behind him, Alivia wondered if her friend's willingness to give up control wasn't a positive thing. With Dorsey

International investing, wouldn't that give them majority control? Wouldn't the company's future then be at the discretion of

Dorsey International, and wasn't that something Max should be pleased about?

"Max." She couldn't help but reach out and tug at his sleeve. "This developer and I have a great relationship. Even if you're not

planning to invest, couldn't you at least meet him? Maybe if you heard his thoughts in person, you might change your mind."

She didn't want to miss this chance to forge a closer connection with Max, and what she hadn't told him was that she also had

shares in the

company. If Dorsey International invested, it would only bind them closer together. She wanted to weave herself into every

aspect of Max's life.

"Max, consider it a favor for me."

They had grown up together, and her brother was close to him as well. Max couldn't possibly refuse. That was her confidence.

Indeed, Max turned to Patrick, inquiring about his schedule for the coming month.

Patrick, ever diligent, pulled out a calendar. "There's a meeting right after we land, and it's going to be busy till the start of next month."

Max nodded, reclaiming his sleeve. "I'll come back on the third of next. month."

A smile spread across Alivia's face. "Great, I'll take you for a tour of the research institute then. And hey, you reinstalled

WhatsApp, right? You should add me. My brother and the others will definitely want to add you too."

"I'll do that when I'm back home."

Alivia, completely satisfied, urged him on. "Then you should go, don't want to miss your flight."

She watched him go, barely containing her adoration.

Patrick discreetly looked away, knowing that even the most. accomplished people couldn't hide their emotions when it came to

matters of the heart. He followed Max, pondering before finally speaking up. "Ms. Alivia has been waiting for you for years, sir."

But to his surprise, Max asked, "Waiting for what? Investment opportunities aren't exclusive to Dorsey International. She could

go to Kenzo just as well."

The corner of Patrick's mouth twitched, and he cleared his throat. "You don't suppose Ms. Alivia has feelings for you, sir?"

"I'm aware, but she has rejected the marriage proposal."

"Maybe she lacks confidence."

"It's still a rejection."

Patrick finally understood. Had Alivia not refused that proposal, Max would have accepted. He didn't understand the concept of

liking someone, and if there had been an engagement, Max wouldn't have the relationship he currently had with Ms. Brielle.

Max's relationship world was all or nothing, and he could never do what Spencer did, which was to have a fiancée and still be

entangled with other women.

With Max, as long as you got engaged to him, you won, because he would definitely fulfill his duties as a fiancé.

Having been by Max's side for years, Patrick had come to grasp some of his thoughts, but as for Ms. Brielle, Patrick wasn't so

sure.

"What about Ms. Brielle?"

"When all is said and done, I'll give her a sum of money."

The sum Max was talking about was surely no pittance.

Patrick breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed Max genuinely saw Ms. Brielle as a canary he was keeping. Hopefully, Ms. Brielle

saw it the same way because hitting a brick wall once was quite enough.

Chapter 107

The plane touched down, and Max shook off the jet lag at the Premier Palace before his father's call came through.

"Did you travel abroad with that Alivia girl?"

"Yeah."

"Alivia's all grown up now. In the blink of an eye, you kids are adults. We should set a date for an engagement party soon. She

might not say it, but I know she's been waiting for you to bring it up."

"Dad, I'm not planning on getting engaged any time soon."

Michael had four sons and a daughter, with Max being the youngest and quite a few years apart from the others.

"You're twenty-six, Max. It's time to settle down. Alivia's been the only one by your side all these years. Don't you like her?"

Max remained silent, unsure of what 'like' really meant.

"Max, it's the same with whoever you marry. Alivia is exceptional, the only one worthy of you, and you're not against the idea.

That's enough. She'd make a fine wife for you."

Max flipped through the files on the table, his pale fingers resting on the pages. "I'll think about it."

Michael's furrowed brow relaxed, his voice cheerful. "Good, and there's the matter with your older brother."

"I don't want you meddling in the company business."

With that flat statement, Max shut down anything else Michael might have wanted to say. It was clear that Max was indifferent

not only in matters of the heart but even in familial bonds. He was a man seemingly born with a deficiency in certain human

emotions, rarely empathizing with anyone. Such a man was destined to be a strategist.

And only he dared to speak so bluntly to Michael.

"I won't interfere. Handle it as you wish. Just make sure you settle things with Alivia, and I'll be content."

After hanging up, Max glanced at his phone, which was bombarded with a string of WhatsApp friend requests. Frowning, he

methodically hit 'Decline' on each one. Among them were requests from Andrew and Kenzo.

In the end, only Brielle's profile picture remained, pleasing to the eye.

Andrew, never one to sit still, promptly called. "Didn't Alivia say you reinstalled WhatsApp? Did you slip up?"

"I don't do small talk."

Andrew paused, propping his legs up on the coffee table, narrowing his eyes. "Who's the one with the snowflake avatar? Not a

friend of yours?"

"How did you know?"

"Ha! Alivia's been asking around in the group chat. So you actually accepted this person but rejected me?"

Andrew always had a keen sense for these things, and remembering the voice he overheard on the phone last time, he felt short

of breath. "Don't tell me that person is Brielle."

Max, ever candid, answered without hesitation, "Yes, it's her."

Andrew laughed in disbelief. "After all these years as friends, Max, is this how you treat me?"

Initially unfazed, Max grew uncomfortable under Andrew's rebuke. For the first time in his twenty-six years, he felt an odd

emotion stirring.

"Seriously, Max? I'm going to call Kenzo right now and show him your true colors. And remind him about overhearing you kissing

Brielle last

time."

This was the first time Andrew stood up to him. Andrew was genuinely upset. He simply couldn't stand Brielle. What sorcery had

she used to get Max to go this far?

Was it just her sneaky game that made Max do her bidding?

Andrew put his feet down. "You've got three minutes to add me as a friend."

With that, he hung up.

Meanwhile, Alivia had been doing her own sleuthing, ending up at her brother Kenzo's door, feeling unsettled. After asking

around and finding no one recognized the avatar, she turned to her brother for answers.

Kenzo raised an eyebrow at the image, then opened his own list of contacts. He had added Brielle a while back, and her profile

picture matched the one in question.

[I saw Max chatting with someone with this avatar, and he refused to add me. Do you know who this is?]

Kenzo smiled slightly as he responded. [No idea.]

[How come no one knows her?]

A gentle glimmer touched Kenzo's eyes as he replied after a moment. [Maybe it's Max's alternate account.]

Chapter 108

Alivia's eyes sparkled with a sudden realization, [How could I not have considered that possibility? It must be the case.

Otherwise, why would Max accept a friend request?]

After all, he had turned down his own brother and Andrew. It didn't make sense for him to accept a request from a stranger.

Alivia's mood instantly brightened up.

Meanwhile, Kenzo, looking at his rejected message, couldn't help but chuckle before sending another friend 'request. This time,

it was accepted. His eyebrows shot up in surprise..

Max, seeing his friend list unexpectedly grow, felt an unexplained discomfort. So, when Andrew sent a barrage of messages, he

didn't. reply to any.

He was about to put his phone face down on the table when a message from Brielle caught his eye. It was a voice message, no

less, and fifteen seconds long. This was a clear violation of Max's unspoken.

rules.

Even in meetings, he despised long-winded speeches, let alone in private conversations. Without hesitation, he flipped his

phone over, deciding not to listen.

Brielle had just woken up and noticed a message from Kenzo. It was the first time he had initiated a conversation with her.

Remembering her offer to treat him to a meal, she sent back a voice message, warmly recommending a few restaurants. But she

accidentally sent the message to Max, and it was past the two-minute mark to unsend.

After freshening up, she saw Max had replied: [I never listen to voice. messages over ten/seconds.]

Brielle laughed at the message. It was so Max. [Uncle Max, I just sent it to the wrong person.]

She forwarded the voice message to Kenzo, then put on a face mask and waited for his reply.

Today was Saturday, her day off. If Kenzo was free, it would be the perfect opportunity to return the favor.

Kenzo sent her an address, and Brielle got ready and headed out.

Three years ago, Kenzo had helped her with research for a paper. Even if it was just a kind gesture, she felt indebted to him.

Back at Premier Palace, after finishing some paperwork, Max inadvertently glanced at his phone.

Sent to the wrong person? Who was it intended for?

He resisted the urge for a long while before finally picking up his phone to listen to the lengthy message. [Hey, I didn't expect you

to reach out first. Remember when I said I'd take you out for a meal? I know a couple of great spots, but I'm not sure about your

tastes. If you have any favorites, feel free to suggest them.]

The message was sincere and heartfelt.

Max frowned at the documents in front of him, then turned to his assistant Patrick, "Who do you think this message was meant

for?"

Patrick had been secretly listening in from the moment Brielle's voice played. Upon hearing Max's question, he felt jittery with

anticipation. What surprised him most was Max's sudden use of WhatsApp. Previously, Max had never bothered with the app,

and if Patrick needed to contact him, it was either through work email or a private number. Beyond those, Max rarely engaged

with social media.

Patrick, ever the competent assistant, had collected such basic information as part of his job.

Max looked down, his rational mind telling him not to dwell on such trivial matters. Yet, ten minutes later, he couldn't help but

respond.

Hmm, who was it for?

Brielle, waiting at a traffic light, sent Kenzo's name back. She was unaware that Max was new to WhatsApp and thought

everyone else chatted with him privately just the same. The ease of their back-and-forth conversation didn't strike her as

unusual.

Seeing Kenzo's name, Max's lips tightened, his fingers releasing the documents he was gripping.

Kenzo and Brielle?

How did these two, who were worlds apart, end up going out for a meal together?

He couldn't understand his own feelings at the moment, and before he knew it, the message was sent.

[Compile a report on this company for me.]

Brielle, arriving at the restaurant, almost thought Max was teasing her. Did he know she was out to treat someone to a meal?

Chapter 109

[Mr. Dorsey, can we do this later?] Brielle sent the message just as she stepped into the restaurant.

Kenzo was sitting in a corner, his pale fingertips resting lightly on the glass tabletop, almost dazzling in their whiteness.

Brielle had always known that Kenzo was a man of great poise. Back at Beaconsfield College, there was a daily queue of

admirers eager to confess their feelings to him, but Kenzo always gently turned them down.

He was different from Max. Max seemed unapproachable, so distant that closeness felt like a luxury.

Kenzo, on the other hand, felt close, so close you thought you could reach out and touch him. Yet, he was like warm water

flowing through your fingers, moving on without pause, leaving only the memory of heat on your skin.

“Sorry for the sudden invite, Kenzo. Did I mess up your plans?” she asked as she approached.

Kenzo looked up, smiling warmly, “Being invited by you is an honor.”

He stood up to pull out a chair for her, then gentlemanly handed her the menu. “Choose whatever you like.”

Brielle pushed the menu back to him, “Kenzo, you order. I’m not picky.”

Kenzo didn’t insist. He ordered unagi eel glazed in a rich sauce and a foie gras sushi roll.

“Kenzo, are you planning to write another script this year?”

As the most talented playwright around, Kenzo’s previous scripts had launched many a star’s career. Some were catapulted

straight to A-list status, thanks in no small part to Kenzo’s writing. His standing in the

entertainment world was no less than Max’s in the business sector.

“I’m still pondering. I want to craft a mystery this time, so I went abroad for inspiration.”

After ordering, he leaned back, hands clasped in front of him, the picture of ease. “You probably don’t have time for TV, right?

You’ve been busy since school days.”

Brielle ordered a steak for herself, “I’ve seen your drama series from last year. It was a hit.”

“Brielle, you haven’t changed a bit.”

They had crossed paths at Beaconsfield College when Brielle was graduating and Kenzo had returned to teach for a month.

Brielle spent long hours in the library, often nearly getting locked in. It was during one of those late nights that Kenzo appeared,

umbrella in hand, walking through the gentle rain.

“Mr. Kenzo,” she had greeted him, as Kenzo looked up, key to the library in hand.

It was past eleven, way beyond closing time, but with the downpour, she had no choice but to wait for the rain to ease.

Kenzo unlocked the library door, “Come in and take shelter from the rain. I need to do some research, might be here all night.”

That suited Brielle just fine.

She graduated with honors, her thesis showcased on the university website. Kenzo knew her as diligent, earnest, and clear–

headed. And she was much the same now.

Brielle ordered a juice, “I have changed, actually. It’s you who’s the

same.”

Kenzo chuckled, “Any other plans today? Want to visit the set after we’re done here?”

Curiosity about the filmmaking process tempted her to accept, but then she remembered the text from Max. Right on cue, her

phone pinged with a new message. She ignored it, feeling it impolite to check her phone at that moment.

“I’d like to, but Mr. Dorsey unexpectedly asked me to prepare some documents. I have to go back and work overtime.”

“On a weekend? Max is really squeezing his employees, huh?”

As he spoke, her phone rang again.

“Sorry, I’ve got to take this call.”

She excused herself, seeing the caller ID flash “Sugar Daddy” – a name she’d whimsically assigned in a moment of madness.

Now, with Kenzo’s eyes on her, she felt a wave of embarrassment as she answered.

“Mr. Dorsey.”

She could feel her cheeks burning despite her best efforts to remain composed.

Kenzo averted his gaze politely as the door to the restaurant swung open, and Sophia walked in with a few other socialites.

Sophia spotted Brielle on the phone immediately, her mood soured at the sight. Her eyes then caught the man sitting across

from Brielle, obscured by potted plants, his white suit just visible.

She circled around discreetly until she could see his face, then froze.

Kenzo?

For a moment she thought she was mistaken. How could Kenzo and Brielle be dining together?

She snapped a photo and sent it to her group chat. [Brielle and Kenzo having dinner? Can someone tell me what’s going on?]

After a brief silence, Lillian replied.

[The Barnes family son, Kenzo?]

[That’s him. But what’s he doing with Brielle?]

Sophia bit her lip, recalling the man she’d seen hiding in Brielle’s bedroom. Could it be him?

Chapter 110

Sophia felt like she had just stumbled upon the juiciest piece of gossip, and she couldn’t resist pulling out her phone to snap a

few more pictures. The friends accompanying her noticed her distraction and asked what was up. With a mischievous twinkle in

her eye, Sophia shook her head.

It turned out that the one who cuckolded Spencer was none other than Kenzo, and this was simply too explosive to keep to

herself.

She was dying to shout this revelation from the rooftops, but then she thought about Kenzo’s status and felt a twinge of worry. It

was too late though, and the photos she had just shared were already making rounds.

After all, in the social circles of Beaconsfield, there weren’t many secrets. A bit of news, especially involving someone as usually

discreet as Kenzo, spread like wildfire through dry grass.

Within an hour, pretty much everyone knew about Kenzo's intimate lunch with a mysterious woman.

Tessa saw the photo while she was swallowing her bitter medication, almost making her retch. She quickly grabbed a handful of

grapes to chase away the taste, her cheeks flushing from the effort. After wiping her mouth and rinsing with some water, she sat

by the bay window, lost in thought.

Sophia came in, her eyes brimming with scandal, carrying a box of pastries.

"Tessa, did you see that photo? Brielle and Kenzo out for lunch, and they looked cozy as can be. I told you Brielle was no good.

I'm really worried she might make a move on Andrew."

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Sophia set the pastries on the table, her face a mask of innocence while she stirred the pot. "Emily ends up behind bars because

of her,

and if Andrew insists I apologize to Brielle again, what will I do? I can't end up in the clink with Emily."

Tessa's heart softened when she saw the pastries were her favorite flavor. "Why would Emily be in jail?" she asked, genuinely

puzzled. After all, Emily was part of the Hatfield family, and they wouldn't just stand by idly.

Sophia's eyes gleamed with the thrill of gossip as she opened the pastry box.

"I just heard about it too. Apparently, Emily went after Brielle with a knife, and Brielle called the cops. Emily's been charged with

attempted assault and might be locked up for a while."

That kind of record would make Emily a laughing stock once she got out, which was probably part of Brielle's plan.

Tessa elegantly scooped a piece of the pastry with a golden spoon and savored a bite. She had never met Brielle, but anyone

who could snag Kenzo was clearly no pushover. She wouldn't allow anyone to threaten her position in Andrew's heart. He

needed only to cherish her, and that was enough.

"Sophia, you don't need to apologize to Brielle. I'll speak to Andrew," Tessa assured Sophia, who exhaled in relief, a smug look

crossing her face.

"Tessa, I knew you were the best."

Tessa smiled and set down the spoon. "So, the whole circle knows about Kenzo and Brielle now?"

Sophia nodded. The photo she had sent out had already been forwarded to several chat groups.

"Sophia, send that photo to Spencer personally, and to the Haywood family as well. Don't forget Faith. She adores her son

Spencer. When she sees Brielle so blatantly cuckolding him, she won't stand for it."

This was Tessa's way – using others to deal with Brielle, a bloodless coup.

"Don't worry, Tessa. I'm on it."

Sophia was Tessa's loyal sidekick, immediately sending out the well-angled photos that she had taken, designed to suggest a

liaison.

Before Brielle even knew what was happening, her photo with Kenzo was the talk of the town.