

## **Master of his heart ( Brielle And Max )**

### **Chapter 11**

#### Chapter 11

Tanner didn't waste any time getting to the heart of the matter. "Going public might seem appealing, but it goes against the very ethos we've built at Integral Elements Inc. We've always prided ourselves on the quality of our products, yet the costs of an IPO are astronomical."

For the company, hitting the stock market could mean a surge in funding and the chance to scale up operations significantly. For the shareholders of Integral Elements Inc., it meant a swift cash-out opportunity.

But there was a downside, a heavy one. Going public would mean being held hostage to short-term gains. Cutting corners on quality to meet quarterly targets was a compromise Tanner couldn't stomach.

"Mr. Tanner," Brielle started, her voice steady and convincing, 'a company's purpose is to create jobs and innovate, right? If we end up preoccupied with repaying corporate debts, we'll lose focus on maintaining our standards. You have the helm now, but with Dorsey International's offer, you could take the company public under our wing, all the while retaining your control. Dorsey International is ready to invest heavily in R&D, without forcing a relocation from your hometown."

The prospect of retaining control was tantalizing. Other firms might have dangled fatter checks, but none could offer the reins.

Tanner eyed Brielle, aware that he mustn't seem too keen, lest he lose the upper hand. "Ms. Brielle, if I have Dorsey International's bid on my desk by nine tomorrow morning, we can talk turkey." After all, Brielle's words were just that-words-until they were inked on paper.

Brielle exhaled a sigh of relief. To Dorsey International, Integral Elements Inc. was a mere morsel, and control was a small price to pay for a potentially

lucrative acquisition. Now, the real hurdle was the bid document. Tanner's interest was piqued, and a prompt submission would all but seal the deal.

"Don't worry, Mr. Tanner. I'll pull out all the stops."

The negotiation had been amicable enough. Rubbing her tired eyes, Brielle booked an evening flight back to the city. When Brielle arrived at the company, there were still many people working overtime in the department. Colleagues surrounded Lucinda, showering her with congratulations.

Lucinda was basking in the glow of her apparent triumph. When she caught sight of Brielle, her eyebrows lifted with smug satisfaction.

Brielle's face remained impassive. She had gone to Integral Elements Inc., despite Spencer's call, not wanting to waste the prospectus she'd labored over for nights on end.

1/2

16.05

## Chapter 11

She had also set a trap. Tanner's willingness to consider a partnership with Dorsey International had been swayed by the seventy-five-page document. Otherwise, he wouldn't have given her the time of day. His concern was for the thousands of employees, not names or profits; he wanted a gesture of sincerity. If Lucinda thought she could take her place, a rude awakening awaited her at tomorrow's meeting.

Ten minutes later, Lucinda approached Brielle's desk, barely concealing her triumph.

"Send me those files on Integral Elements Inc., will you? Mr. Spencer has handed me the bid. I'll be the one talking to them tomorrow."

"I've no files."

Lucinda's face paled, her chest heaving with indignation. "What do you mean?"

Brielle's gaze slid away as she chuckled lightly. The data is mine-gathered through my own efforts in the field. It doesn't belong to the company."

Lucinda's ambitions were no longer hidden. "Brielle, don't blame me for speaking the truth. You're just too petty, no wonder Mr. Spencer doesn't like you."

With Spencer's backing, Lucinda felt untouchable. "Hand over the files, or don't bother coming in tomorrow."

Brielle paused briefly, reflecting on her contributions. Discarded like yesterday's news, she, felt a tightness in her chest at the thought. "It's not just tomorrow. I won't be coming back at all. Tell Spencer, without me, the acquisition of Integral Elements Inc. won't go through." Lucinda scoffed. "As if we need you. The deal will go smoother without."

Brielle had no desire to waste any more time in this office. The trap was set, and by morning, Tanner would find the flaws. As she imagined the so-called elite scrambling, a surge of satisfaction washed over her. Did Spencer really think she had no other options beyond Dorsey International? He had no idea that his rise at Dorsey International was largely thanks to her tireless efforts.

Meanwhile, Spencer kept glancing at his phone, expecting an apology from Brielle by nightfall. Offending him meant having to answer to the Haywood family.

With a snort, he twirled his phone in his hand. If Brielle admitted her mistake and promised to stop pestering Lillian, he might just forgive her. After all, Brielle was competent, no doubt about that.

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## Chapter 12

### Chapter 12

But by 10 p.m., Brielle hadn't sent a message. Spencer felt uneasy, as if something was slipping out of control. Yet, thinking of the Haywoods' attitude towards him, which was like they'd gladly gift-wrap Brielle and deliver her to his bed, a flicker of relief crossed his eyes. After all, Brielle would have to give in eventually.

Brielle packed her belongings, printed her resignation letter, and left it on her desk. Then, with a box in her arms, she descended to the lobby.

No sooner had she steadied herself than a blinding light shone on her. She raised her hand to shield her eyes and turned to see a familiar license plate.

Her first thought was whether this man wanted her again. After all, there was hardly any other reason he would seek her out.

The car slowly approached and came to a halt. The door opened. Brielle, still clutching the box, bent down to peer inside and, sure enough, saw the man in a suit, looking a

was dazzling as a painting but just too cold.

"Uncle Max," she called out without any intention of joining him. She really wasn't in the mood tonight.

Max's fingertips lightly played with the rosary on his wrist, his demeanor indifferent. After a long pause, he softly commanded, "Get in."

"If I do, with Uncle Max's stamina, I'm sure I won't be able to leave." She held the box earnestly.

Brielle intended to create a promiscuous persona around Max. It'd be better to keep their entanglements strictly to the bedroom. Otherwise, she feared she might one day fall too deep.

One Spencer was already draining enough, and Max clearly played in a different league.

Moreover, Max never asked if it was her first time when they slept together. He simply didn't care. Adults all knew the rules; it was unreasonable to pretend otherwise.

Max arched an eyebrow, a slight smirk tugging at his lips because of her words. His gaze dropped to the box in her arms. His cool fingertips clasped her wrist and forcefully pulled her in.

“Quitting your job?” The box she held was too conspicuous to go unnoticed.

Brielle didn’t struggle and leaned into his embrace. They’d slept together. There was no point in feigning modesty now. “Yeah, I’ve been cast aside after serving my purpose.”

Since she was resigning anyway, she might as well continue setting a timebomb here with Max. She hoped when the bomb exploded, Spencer would be able to withstand the blast.

1/2

## Chapter 12

“Uncle Max, Dorsey International has so many ventures-can you handle them all? There’s so much opportunity for graft.”

He caught her chin between his fingers, sensing the subtext in her words, “Like what?”

“Have you noticed the building not far from Dorsey International? Spencer and the other directors built it specifically for new product development. It cost a fortune. You probably didn’t receive the approval contract overseas because they split the total investment into smaller amounts, each just under the threshold that would require your personal approval. How much do you think they skimmed off?”

Spencer’s negligence in departmental affairs meant she knew all about these dealings.

Max had mentioned the company’s public accounts on his first day, but the directors’ petty theft was just a drop in the bucket compared to what could be.

“I’ve been to that building. The entrance boasts an antique 18th-century screen and a set of vintage vases. Every chair is a peach wood piece from the French Empire era, beside Empire-style display cabinets adorned with British enamel tableware. The floors covered with \$50,000 Persian carpets. For a research building, why the need for such luxury?”

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Max watched her quietly for a while before looking up and instructing someone in front, "Investigate this." The billion-dollar building, supposedly a research center, was probably just a playground for those directors. It was well hidden.

Brielle's eyes curved in satisfaction. Once the building's secrets were exposed, Spencer would be in for it. Her gloominess at losing her job instantly vanished.

"Uncle Max, they hold a party there every Friday. Spencer calls it the 'Friday Night Decadence Club.' You should raid it then. You'd catch them red-handed."

Spencer was waiting for her apology, right? Ha. She'd use Max to dismantle his happy haven.

Max's fingertips traced her waist before addressing Patrick, "Did you hear that?"

Patrick nodded respectfully and made several phone calls to arrange everything.

Max's chilly fingertips touching her skin sent a tingling sensation like small currents burrowing through her pores. "What reward would you like?" His voice, always cool and indifferent, somehow didn't seem harsh.

"A reward?"

Brielle relaxed her body, her gaze lazily downturned in a seemingly flirtatious yet innocent manner. She wasn't trying to be seductive, but her eyes were enchantingly so.

As she mulled over the idea of a reward, her phone rang. It was Lucinda, likely frustrated after a setback at Integral Elements Inc. With the contract signing the next day, they must have called Tanner tonight. It probably didn't go well.

## Chapter 12

Brielle hung up, only to receive a text message shortly after.

[Brielle, Tanner said you have the prospectus. How selfish to take such an important document. What company would want someone like you? Hand it over now!]

Lucinda was clearly losing her cool. They had called Integral Elements Inc., Tanner had picked up, and when asked about the prospectus, their response was lackluster. Tanner had been blunt and hung up without considering their feelings.

Facing Tanner and Integral Elements Inc. tomorrow would likely result in a tongue-lashing. The thought of the impending embarrassment made everyone nervous. All these people were top talents; they couldn't stand such treatment.

Lucinda sent another message.

– [The data you used company resources to investigate belongs to the company. You have no right to take it.]

Brielle almost laughed at the message. She'd seen shameless, but this was a new level. Having someone like that replace her was Spencer's goal, and indeed, it filled her with defeat and indignation.

No worries, she'd got another trick up her sleeve now, a real doozy waiting for Spencer.

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## Chapter 13

### Chapter 13

Brielle dismissed the barrage of notifications on her phone with a flick of her thumb, "Patrick, could you stop at the next intersection, please?" Her tone was

indifferent, laced with a weariness that seemed to seep into the air around her.

Through the rearview mirror, Patrick tried to glean some sort of cue from Max's expression, a sign of what he might be thinking, but his face was impassive. As they reached the crossroads, he obeyed the request and brought the car to a smooth halt.

Brielle clutched the box a little tighter, a flicker of disappointment crossing her mind. She had half-expected Max to ask her to stay, but he remained seated, his demeanor as detached as a statue devoid of emotion.

"Uncle Max, not even a goodbye?" she teased, resting against the window, her long hair falling around her face, making it seem even smaller. Her eyes caught the reflection of the vibrant streetlights, beautiful and clear. She was just joking, and before waiting for a response, she walked across the pedestrian walkway, carrying her box.

Max watched her in silence, his gaze lingering long after she'd faded from view.

She was like a wounded animal, licking its injuries alone, trying to bristle with soft spines to protect the last remnants of its dignity amidst the turmoil.

Brielle walked with her back straight, only slowing her pace when she was out of the reach of that penetrating gaze.

Her apartment was close by. The chill of the evening breeze was just what she needed. Hope only bred greater disappointment.

The ringtone of her phone cut through her thoughts. It was Spencer calling this time. Anxious about not receiving an apology from her, his impatience was palpable.

Brielle snorted softly and promptly blocked his number.

Soon after, Lillian's call came through. Probably Spencer again. Those two were inseparable. Another number blocked.

Once inside her apartment, she powered on her computer to browse job listings but noticed a new email in her inbox instead, an offer letter for the



position of Director of Mergers and Acquisitions at Dorsey International. The sender was Max.

Her fingers trembled slightly, and her eyes widened in disbelief as she read and reread the

message.

Was she being offered Spencer's job?

She replied with a simple question mark. There was a hint of trepidation, fearing she might be misreading his intentions.

16.05

Max probably hadn't arrived at the Premier Palace yet. He sent it from the car? Imagining him with a stern face, typing each word of this email. Brielle's lips curved up, and she quickly saw the reply.

–[Reward.]

A terse response, yet it oddly warmed her heart.

-[Uncle Max, is this you playing favorites?]

The thought left her feeling elated, as if the world was celebrating with fireworks. She had left feeling suffocated, and now she had an opportunity to return and turn the tables. She wasn't about to let it slip by.

The impending troubles with the Dorsey and Haywood families could wait. For now, the thrill of the moment was what mattered.

Expecting no further replies, she was surprised to receive another email, containing just one word-[Yeah.]

A wave of emotion washed over Brielle. She had never received any gifts from Spencer during their long acquaintance, and in her thirteen years with the Haywood family, all she had to show was this modest apartment. Even the car she drove was bought with her own salary.

The comparison made the disappointment more glaring. Spencer was nothing, not even worth a dime.

[Rest assured, Uncle Max, I am ready to devote myself entirely to the cause.]

She sent the message with a sense of mischief, enjoying this odd game they played. Max seemed to have a peculiar fondness for it.

After sending the email, she closed the job search tab and ordered some late-night comfort food, including a few bottles of wine.

Fresh out of the shower, the doorbell rang.

Assuming it was the delivery person, she wrapped a towel around her hair and opened the door. The man on the doorstep glanced at her attire, his anger giving way to surprise.

Brielle stepped back, pulling her robe tighter, the collar barely hiding the marks on her neck.

Spencer? What was he doing here?

His gaze lingered on the outline of her body beneath the flimsy nightgown; and he frowned in disapproval. "Dressed like that to answer the door? Brielle, you've grown bold." He was incensed that she had the audacity to block him, and moreover, Lucinda had mentioned she was thinking of resigning.

"As if resigning is some sort of threat, he sneered, his eyes finally catching the marks on

her neck

"What's this?" Spencer wasn't a three year old child, and he felt his anger surging "Brielle, you'd better explain yourself!!

He'd left similar marks on Lillian more times than he could count, but seeing them on

Brielle incensed him

Brielle no longer bothered to cover up, her arms crossed defiantly. If there's nothing else. I'd appreciate it if you left.

Spencer shoved past her, his anger palpable as he frantically searched the apartment, checking behind curtains and furniture. It was almost comical.

Just then, the food delivery arrived. Brielle popped open a bottle of wine and began to eat in the living room.

Unable to find anyone, Spencer's fury seemed ready to explode. "Don't forget our engagement! Brielle, you're just like Lillian said, a shameless flirt!"

She chuckled lightly, swirling the wine in her bottle, "And Lillian teaches you about shame while in your bed?"

His body tensed under her gaze, and he clenched his teeth. "Isn't it normal for men to play around? But when a woman does it, it's called promiscuity. You're supposed to be a lady of the Haywood family. If the media gets a hold of this, do you realize the consequences?"

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## Chapter 14

### Chapter 14

Brielle suddenly lost her appetite. She didn't have the energy to listen to Spencer's rage anymore. She went straight to her bedroom, changed her clothes, and stepped out.

Spencer was still in a raging fury, answering Lillian's call at the same time. When he turned and saw Brielle heading out the door, he frowned, "Where the hell do you think you're going this late? Can't you show a little decency? Are you that desperate for a guy?!"

Brielle was already infuriated with his antics. "Whether I'm desperate or not, you wouldn't know, would you? What's the matter, I'm not allowed to find myself some company when you're out with other sluts?"

Spencer's pupils dilated slightly. In a fit of anger, he threw his phone towards her. "Say that one more time! Who are you calling a slut?!" Even now, he was defending Lillian.

The elevator doors had closed, and the phone smashed against the wall, spiderwebbing

the screen.

Brielle held back her frustration. Through the elevator glass, she could see the faint marks on her neck. She was so flustered by Spencer's outburst that she'd left the apartment in a

low-cut top.

However, the thought that these marks were Max's handiwork, a sweet revenge, was oddly satisfying. Everyone treated her like a pushover, but they never considered that one day this pushover would grow sharp teeth.

Feeling somewhat relieved, she got in her car, and right on cue, Aubree called. "Bri, asleep yet, or up for some drinks?"

Aubree had just returned from abroad. She was Brielle's only real friend, and her night was always vibrant.

"You're back in town?"

Starting the car, Brielle thought a drink might do her good. Her celebration had been so rudely interrupted, she'd simply celebrate elsewhere.

"Just landed. How did you handle that snake who dared to mess around with Spencer behind your back? Does she forget who funded her college tuition? The Haywood family! If I see her tonight, I swear I'll tear her face apart!"

Aubree was fiery and never held back her words. When Brielle found out about Spencer's affair half a month ago, she immediately told Aubree. At that time, Aubree couldn't come back because she was abroad and cursed them out over the phone.

Given Aubree's temperament, she'd have blasted them on social media, but Brielle convinced her not to.

Aubree, a heiress to the Clements fortune, had a wide social circle. One post from her, and

1/31

16.05

14

the entire elite community would know.

It wasn't time to burn bridges with the Dorsey family yet. Besides, her current fling with Max was revenge enough. And this covert strategy was more effective than public insults, it hit the Dorseys where it hurt

"How else could I handle it? Spencer's been treating her like she's the apple of his eye"

"Damn, has Spencer gone blind? What does he even see in that little damsel?"

Pulling up to Tequila Sunset, Brielle immediately spotted Aubree at the entrance. Aubree was dressed to kill, her allure starkly contrasting Brielle's demure elegance, as vibrant as a blooming rose

Aubree's sharp eyes caught sight of the marks on Brielle's neck and raised an eyebrow, "No way, you still go down on Spencer after he's slept with Lillian so many times? Aren't you afraid you'll get poisoned?"

"It wasn't Spencer."

Aubree's eyes widened, and she gasped in shock.

Brielle, despite her stunning looks, had always played it by the book. Ever since her engagement to Spencer, she maintained a safe distance from other men. She even once declared she'd wait until her wedding night. And now, in no time at all, she'd gone behind Spencer's back with another man,

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Aubree had always told her, relationships were just that simple went for it when there was attraction. You gotta live in the moment, not the relationship.

She didn't expect that during her time abroad, Brielle had finally come around.

"Who's the guy? How was he? Tsk, those marks have faded. Must have been intense back then, huh?"

Brielle couldn't be as open as Aubree about such matters in public and pulled her toward a secluded booth. However, Aubree grabbed her hand and nodded towards the entrance, "Look, who's that?"

Brielle followed her gaze and saw Lillian being hassled by a few men. Lillian still wore that fragile expression, biting her lip as if on the verge of tears. A few drunk men surrounded her, spouting filthy words.

Tequila Sunset was renowned in Beaconsfield, and they had a membership system-your needed to shell out a million just for the privilege of a membership card, so the clientele was elite.

Lillian had a membership card, obviously bankrolled by Spencer.

Brielle narrowed her eyes. She had created billions in assets for Dorsey International over three years. She orchestrated every major merger and acquisition, and yet, she'd reaped.

2/3

1605

## Chapter 14

none of the rewards. Instead, Lillian was cashing in.

Seeing Brielle, Lillian's eyes welled up, "Bri, please help me."

Aubree cursed under her breath, fixing her glare on Lillian, "You're doing this on purpose, aren't you?"

Lillian shrank back, her lips quivering, "I didn't mean to. I'm sorry. I just thought you both looked really nice tonight, and you're regulars here, so maybe you could talk to them?"

Her words conveyed two things to the drunk men trying to take advantage. One, that Brielle and Aubree were attractive. Two, that as regulars, they were likely more approachable.

“Don’t bother me, go bother them.” That’s her implication.

Not just Aubree, even Brielle found this laughable. However, she was wary that Spencer might show up, especially since he had been on the phone with Lillian before she left.

The sight of them together made her nauseous, best to avoid it, but it wasn’t easy to shake off the group of strangers that had closed in.

“You snake!”

Aubree couldn’t contain her rage any longer, stepping forward to slap Lillian across the face.

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## Chapter 15

### Chapter 15

Brielle was dragging her into the bustling crowd of the bar. “Aubree, if you start a fight, she’ll just end up crying on Spencer’s shoulder.

“Damn! As if I’m afraid of him!”

Brielle knew Aubree wasn’t scared. Hell, she herself wanted to slap Lillian. But this was a nightclub, a regular haunt for the city’s elite. If Aubree and Spencer had a showdown, tomorrow’s headlines would be all about them. The Dorsey family and the Clements family would be dragged through the mud.

“Isn’t your brother going to be on your case if you make a scene?”

At that, Aubree clammed up, her cheeks burning red with frustration.

The dance floor was packed and the DJ had just dropped a beat-heavy track that whipped the crowd into a frenzy. The two of them got separated in the commotion.

Left with no other choice, Brielle found a quiet corner in the hallway to call Aubree.

Aubree, jostled by the crowd, looked up to see a tall, familiar figure at the entrance and felt a shiver of fear. "Bri, where are you? I'm fine, but jeez, I must've walked under a ladder or something today. I just saw my brother. It's all that witch's fault. I want to tear her to shreds right now."

Coming back to town and walking straight into trouble was infuriating.

Just as Brielle was about to calm her down, a deep, foreboding male voice the phone, "Who's clothes are you planning to tear to shreds?" Then the line with a cacophony of noise.

Aubree had been abroad because she ran away from home.

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Her brother, Andrew, was ruthless. Among Beaconsfield's most prestigious famil Clements family ranked second, and Andrew was the heir.

The call cut off, and as Brielle tried to redial to check on Aubree, she backed into a w chest. The hand that now casually wrapped around her waist sported a rosary. She looked up to see a familiar face.

"Uncle Max?" What was he doing here?

The man had an aura of cool detachment about him, even in his casual suit. In the dim, almost intimate lighting of the club, he still exuded a regal presence, but his fingertips. brushing over the marks on her neck betrayed his rougher side-calluses perhaps from years of handling guns, or maybe from wielding knives.

Brielle shivered under his touch, noticing another man standing behind him. Andrew squinted at her, amusement flickering in his eyes.

"Well, well, if it isn't the Max's little canary"



Brielle didn't know him as Andrew. She was good friends with Aubree but had never visited the Clements family.

However, she recognized that face. Just two days ago, at this very club, she had boldly spiked Max's drink with distilled vodka—a high-proof alcohol that could floor even the most seasoned drinker. As she was helping a tipsy Max out, Andrew caught them.

Andrew had a commanding presence, like a dangerously seductive vampire out of a gothic tale.

"Let go of him now, or I guarantee you'll be missing those hands of yours soon." The threat in his eyes was palpable.

Brielle met his gaze with false bravado. "I'm a little canary he kept."

Andrew paused, his menacing aura dissipating as he smirked, surprisingly stepping aside. She managed to whisk Max away to her apartment.

Brielle didn't expect to run into Andrew so soon again, and hearing his words made her cheeks burn involuntarily. She sneaked a glance at Max. His gaze still lingered on the marks on her neck.

After a moment, he removed his jacket and draped it over her shoulders, buttoning it up to cover the mottled marks. Not even the brightest stars could outshine the tender look in his eyes.

A warmth spread through Brielle's chest, and fearing the vulnerability of the moment, she scrambled for a distraction.

"Uncle Max, is he a friend of yours?"

Andrew chuckled at her words, "So, you are a little bird playing around."

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