

Master of his heart (Brielle And Max)

Chapter 16

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The words carried with them a sting of mockery, and even the glances that swept over her felt like the hissing of a venomous snake.

Max had only briefly embraced her before letting go, as if the momentary tenderness had never existed. Maybe Brielle had just seen it wrong.

The manager of Tequila Sunset approached with a deference that bordered on reverence, “Mr. Dorsey, Mr. Clements, your drinks have been delivered to the private booth, if your please.”

Andrew’s lips curled into a smirk, “Max, why not bring your little canary along?”

They were close to the entrance of Tequila Sunset, but the private booth they were headed to was a world apart from the crowd.

Tequila Sunset, though a glittering den of indulgence, had its hierarchies. People like Max and Andrew belonged to a more secluded building out back. Unlike the wild dance floor, the atmosphere there was refined, more suited for romantic escapades or plotting.

corporate conquests.

Brielle knew she shouldn’t go. She started to retreat but then caught sight of two men entering through the main door: Spencer and Cameron.

Cameron was Brielle’s older brother, but since Brielle had only joined the Haywood family at ten, their relationship was distant. And like Miranda, Cameron had shown a considerable fondness for Lillian.

Now that the Haywood family’s reins were in Cameron’s hands, every time he returned from a trip, he would bring Lillian a carefully selected gift, whereas for

Brielle, it was merely something a sales assistant had offhandedly recommended.

Cameron spent little time at the Haywood family home, preferring his own villa and the company of his regular companions, but Brielle always suspected that his affections lay with Lillian, for she had once seen them kiss. Presumably, he was just another man that

Lillian had charmed.

Brielle took a step back, quickly turning her back to them, and buried herself in Max's

embrace.

Spencer caught sight of Max and his demeanor shifted to one of respect, "Uncle Max." Anxiety tinged his face because Lillian had found herself in trouble here. After exchanging pleasantries, he looked ready to leave.

Cameron, however, nodded in acknowledgment and said, "Mr. Dorsey, I've long admired your reputation."

Then his gaze shifted to Andrew, his brows knitting slightly, "Mr. Clements, I didn't expect

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to see you here.

Cameron had spent the last year abroad and had crossed swords with Andrew in a

takeover battle. Andrew's name carried weight in Beaconsfield for he was known to show no mercy to his adversaries. Unlike Max's cold aloofness, Andrew did everything with a fierce edge.

He was fire, bold and brutal, while Max was the coolness of water.

Fire burns bright, and water runs deep

Fire is showy, and water is understated.

When Max and Andrew first met over a decade ago, Andrew had declared he would set Antarctica ablaze.

Antarctica, a land of ice, represented the essence of water, which typically extinguishes fire, but Andrew's bold claim implied that with enough ferocity, he could evaporate all the water. The two never came to blows, as Max had headed to Wall Street. Now standing together, their relationship seemed extraordinary,

Brielle finally snapped back to reality, realizing this must be Aubree's brother. Lost in thought, she felt a cool fingertip pinch and rub her earlobe. Her whole body shivered, her ear instantly flushed red, the heat climbing, leaving her parched and breathless.

Max's action drew the attention of the three other men to Brielle. Spencer was the first to speak, "Ms. Alivia is back in the country?"

The mention of Ms. Alivia drained the color from Brielle's cheeks. In high society, everyone knew of that celebrated young socialite. Brilliant and stunning, she was dedicated to her research, reportedly having a close relationship with the elder Dorseys.

Years ago, the Dorsey family had proposed a marriage alliance with her, which she had declined, opting instead to study abroad, a decision that had become the subject of much admiration.

Could it be that the marriage she rejected was with Max?

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Strangely, a bout of discomfort washed over Brielle's heart.

Spencer was in a hurry to find Lillian, so after exchanging pleasantries, he and Cameron took their leave. As soon as they left, Andrew lowered his head to light a cigarette.

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"Speaking of Alivia, you two really are in sync, wearing the same black rosaries for so

many years."

Brielle looked down and stepped back.

Andrew, ever the stirrer, couldn't resist a jibe, "This little canary, up close she really is a looker. No wonder you haven't snuffed her out He didn't miss the marks on Brielle's neck, clearly the handiwork of Max's roughhousing.

Brielle managed a smile, quickly composed herself, and with feigned delicacy, she clung to Max's arm, "Uncle Max, I was so nervous, afraid that my fiancé or my brother would catch wind of our little dalliance."

Her comment sent a flicker of amusement across Max's eyes, and made Andrew's cigarette drop to the floor. Andrew's face showed rare frustration, his gaze towards Max indescribable. The girl might be pretty, but she was a bit too affected for his taste. He really didn't get what Max saw in her.

Max leaned in slightly, murmuring, "Your choice of words is impeccable."

Brielle rolled her eyes inwardly. He really fell for that act. The romantic thoughts climbing in her heart shattered at the mention of Alivia. She adjusted her clothing. "Uncle Max, if you have business to discuss, I'll get going."

However, a strong hand reached out, pulling her deeper into the corridor.

Meanwhile, not far off, Cameron stood amidst the crowd, his brow furrowed, feeling that the woman had a resemblance to Brielle. Disdain flashed in his eyes as he dialed her number. He rarely contacted this sister; after all, he had been the sole heir to the Haywood family's fortune until this interloper came along to share the pie.

Obviously, he wasn't pleased, but Brielle's only use was that she brought back Lillian, the woman he adored.

Before the call connected, a frail voice came from behind him. "Cameron..."

His irritation vanished as he put away his phone and turned around, wrapping his arms protectively around her shoulders.

"I told you not to work here, didn't I? Lillian, why don't you use the credit card I gave you?"

Lillian's lips quivered, her eyes reddening, "The Haywood family has been so good to me. How could I spend your money? And... and Bri and I had a falling out."

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"Cameron, I want to pay off my debt to the Haywoods as soon as I can. Spencer got me a membership here, and I only found out it costs a million. I don't know how to face him

now

Cameron's heart softened. He loved Lillian's straightforward nature, "It's just a million. Use my card to pay it off. Lillian, I-

He cut off as Spencer approached with a few others, and Cameron fell silent.

Cameron had confessed his feelings to Lillian before. She hesitated greatly, eventually saying that if she really got together with him, it would make things awkward with Brielle. Best friends since childhood would suddenly become sisters-in-law. With Brielle's temperament, it was unlikely she'd accept it. So, Cameron found Brielle even more distasteful, feeling she couldn't stand to see Lillian happy.

Elsewhere in the Haywood family living room, Miranda sighed as she ordered the room to be cleaned. Sitting across from her was her husband, Robert. The mention of Lillian brought a pang to her heart.

"That's the situation. Brielle must have been provoked somewhere to slander Lillian like that. I feel like I don't even know her anymore."

Robert held a newspaper in his hands and frowned at his wife's words. "Hasn't she always been obedient?"

"Yes, she has won so many awards and graduated from Beaconsfield College. I think maybe she has always looked down on Lillian. Lillian is kind but weak, and has always been a bit slow. We hired so many tutors for her, and in the end, we had to pay into a university. So deep down, she feels inferior. Imagine how hurt she must be hearing Brielle's words."

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Robert set down the newspaper he had been reading, ready to share his thoughts, when he noticed the nanny descending the staircase

"Sir, Ma'am, I was tidying up Miss Lillian's room and I found this, the nanny said, presenting a handwritten journal with Lillian's familiar scrawl on it.

The entries spanned years, right up until Lillian turned eighteen and moved out.

Miranda hates spicy food. I must remember not to add chili next time.

Miranda had a few extra helpings of the dessert I made. Seems chestnut flavor is her favorite.

—

Bri got mad again. Not sure if it's because I hired a tutor. I've tried saying no, but it was no use. I just want to study hard and make them proud.

Bri slapped me. I was stunned by her deep resentment. I want to move out but I'm not of age yet.

Robert has a sensitive stomach. I should make some soothing soup for him and keep antacids ready in his study.

– Cameron asked me what I wanted for a gift. I thought about it and asked for a watch Bri likes. But when I gave Bri the watch, she mocked me. Living with the Haywoods, I never wanted to compete for affection.

Miranda flipped through the pages, each one filled with care for her, Robert, and Cameron. And as for Brielle, Lillian always wanted to mend their relationship, despite the hurt she endured.

Miranda trembled with fury. She had never imagined her daughter could be so two-faced. "Can you believe what she's done?! I thought she genuinely cared for Lillian, but it was all an act!"

The journal was old and hidden away, clearly not meant to be discovered. The sincerity in the journal's words laid bare Brielle's true, repulsive nature.

Miranda gritted her teeth. "Both girls came into our family together. I treated them the same. Lillian is such a sweetheart, and Bri... If only Lillian were our own."

Robert's expression soured. Every line and entry were filled with kindness and concern, without a trace of self-pity, only a wish for Brielle's happiness. Had they known, they would have never let Lillian move out, but in the end, Brielle was the daughter of the Haywood family.

"Don't be upset. Once Bri marries Spencer, we can bring Lillian back, or maybe buy her a villa nearby. I heard the poor child's been working hard to repay us. Cameron tried to give her some financial help, even offered her a card, but she wouldn't take a penny. Stubborn

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girl.

Miranda nodded, utterly disappointed in her own daughter.

Brielle, of course, had no idea she'd already been saddled with such a dark reputation. Approaching the private dining room, her phone rang. It was a call from a charity. organization. Stepping aside to a quiet corner, she answered the call.

The moment she earned her first paycheck, she had donated most of her salary to this charity, directing the funds to the Sunflower Children's Home, the place where she and Lillian grew up. Today was the day for her monthly donation, but she had forgotten amidst her busy schedule.

A middle-aged man's voice came through. "Ms. Brielle, hello. We've sent this month's funds to Sunflower Children's Home. The organization recently held an event teaching the children how to make pies. As their largest benefactor, the director has been eager to meet you."

"Thank you. I'll send this month's donation promptly. As for making pies, I'll pass. very skilled, and I'd prefer the director not know it's me donating."

"Understood, Ms. Brielle. We won't disturb you further."

I'm not

After hanging up, Brielle was about to turn down the corridor when she spotted Andrew smoking at the entrance of the dining room, a woman at his side. The dim hallway cast a shadow over the pair, standing too close for mere acquaintances.

The woman wore an outfit Brielle recognized as Aubree's.

Aubree took the cigarette from Andrew's lips and placed it between her own. A bold red lipstick mark soon stained the cigarette filter.

Frozen in place, Brielle remembered Aubree was the adopted daughter of the Clements family, and Andrew was their heir. There was no blood relation between them. Their current proximity was far from sibling-like.

As Brielle pondered this, Andrew grabbed Aubree's wrist and pulled her into the nearby

restroom.

The restroom door had barely shut before Aubree was pressed against the sink, her legs instinctively wrapping around Andrew's waist.

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The door closed slowly, and Brielle remained rooted to the spot, unable to move an inch. She had known Aubree for years but never realized the depth of the relationship between

her and

Andrew. A tumult of emotions churned within her, like waves crashing and winds howling. Didn't Andrew have a fiancée?

Brielle's head lowered, her long lashes casting deep shadows across her face, as she stood motionless.

The hallway was quiet and elegant, but the noises coming from the man had been anything but. Perhaps mindful that Max was still waiting in the private dining room, Andrew had finished quickly. His lips, his shirt collar, were smudged with telltale marks of lipstick.

Leaning against the mirror, legs weak, Aubree raised an eyebrow with a smile, "Tessa didn't take good care of you?"

Andrew, with a touch of cruelty, patted her cheek and said coldly, "This kind of affair isn't something she's cut out for."

Aubree didn't reply, her face ghostly pale.

Andrew left her with a simple command, "Clean yourself up and come out," before he was

gone.

Once the washroom was silent again, Aubree straightened her attire before exiting, only to spot a shadow around the hallway corner.

"Bri..."

Aubree hadn't expected Brielle to be there, and in a flash of panic, she wasn't sure how much Brielle had seen. She knew her actions were no better than those of Lillian, and almost instinctively she tried to justify, "You have to understand, Andrew and Tessa-it's just a business arrangement. There's no love. Besides, Tessa has always been frail and has never cared for romance."

Aubree had a host of excuses to rationalize this twisted relationship. Brielle's eyes were calm as she eventually asked, "Do you think there's love between me and Spencer?"

Aubree shivered and found herself at a loss for words.

The shock to Brielle was palpable. The very person who had just been condemning Lillian had suddenly become the next Lillian.

"Bri, you wouldn't understand love. I've adored him for over a decade, since we were kids.

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The recent runaway episode? It was all because of his engagement to the Rowland family."

Andrew only saw her as a tool, but Aubree was powerless to stop her feelings. If there were a switch to turn off love and retract all emotions, she would give anything to flip it.

"Bri."

Usually cheerful and bold, Aubree had never felt so scared.

Brielle was about to leave when the dining room door creaked open. Andrew appeared, a smirk of smug satisfaction spread across his face, yet it lacked any trace of genuine emotion. "Little Canary, best forget what you just saw."

He had noticed Brielle all along but didn't care.

Unable to bear it anymore, Aubree stepped forward, her hand raised for a slap, but her wrist was caught mid-air by Andrew, who wore a mocking smile, his lips stained with red, "Go back first."

Brielle watched this unfold, frowning, and through the slightly ajar door of the booth, she locked eyes with Max.

Max remained indifferent, toying with a glass of wine, and casually patted the seat beside him.

Brielle, still wrapped in his jacket, just wanted to return it and leave. She didn't look at Aubree or Andrew, feeling the entire situation was beyond comprehension.

Approaching Max, his scent enveloped her-a warm woody note with a hint of crisp rose-in the dim space. It lingered on her skin, impossible to shake off.

"Uncle Max, your jacket." She slid off the suit jacket and placed it neatly on his lap.

But Max just held her wrist, 'Feeling down?'

Of course, Brielle felt awful, like she had swallowed a fly. The nauseating sensation hovered in her chest, impossible to expel.

With the booth room door closed, isolating the pair inside, Andrew held Aubree's arm, "Acquaintance?"

Aubree's heart trembled. Even if they were strangers, he should have stopped immediately when he noticed someone nearby.

Andrew raised an eyebrow with a smirk, "You seemed more eager than me just now, Aubree. After all these years, why do you bother to act so innocent?" In some ways, Andrew and Aubree were alike-blunt, sparing no one's feelings.

Aubree raised her hand again, this time with more finesse, and the slap landed crisply.

“Snap!”

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Andrew’s head jerked to the side, his tongue touching his cheek. He scoffed and swallowed back the taste of blood, “Come to my villa tonight. I’ll fuck you good. If you

don’t show up, don’t come looking for me again

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With that, he turned on his heel and strode into the private room without a moment’s

hesitation.

Aubree stood still, her fingertips trembling slightly. A mix of affection and grievance ebbed and flowed within her, surging up and receding again, causing her an unbearable

discomfort.

She took out her phone and sent a message to Brielle, knowing she didn’t want to see her, and she left first.

After watching Andrew enter the private room, Brielle felt uneasy all over. Andrew acted as if he had completely forgotten the awkward moment just before, deftly snuffing out his cigarette in the ashtray, ignoring Brielle's presence as if she were invisible.

Women, in his opinion, were like monsters. You could treat them like dogs, beat them until your hand ached, but in the end, they would still love you. He had always been the golden boy, never giving much thought to the sort of affection that came running at a beckon.

To him, women could spend all day dreaming of love, but for men, it was all about those few peak seconds.

Andrew took out another cigarette and finally broached the topic of the evening. "Breaking into that foreign market is like gnawing on a tough bone. I've been circling for half a year to secure mining rights for three ore sites, and the rest are monopolized by Infinity Brilliance. They guard against me like I'm a wolf."

Max chuckled softly, leaning back in his chair and pushing a glass of juice towards Brielle, "Aren't you a wolf?"

Brielle considered leaving, but knowing Andrew's temper, she couldn't predict how he might react. Fortunately, with Aubree gone, she had time to cool down and put her thoughts in order.

Andrew clenched the cigarette between his teeth as if he was biting down on the jugular of an enemy,

"If I had been born a few years earlier, what would those bastards matter? If it weren't for their control over ninety percent of the global diamond mining resources, I wouldn't bother dealing with those savages who point guns at your head at the drop of a hat. This time, securing the mining rights for those three mines nearly cost me my life."

Brielle listened to their conversation, her thoughts slowly settling.

The Clements family was renowned in the jewelry business, with the two most famous brands in the region under their banner. But with scarce mineral resources at home, and South Africa being rich in them, decades ago, some shrewd investors had bought up a large portion of the South African mining rights.

The Clements had managed to procure a few mines, which laid the foundation for their

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fortune. However, with Andrew's generation, the opposing company had resorted to gun-to-the-head tactics, trying to force him to relinquish his mining rights.

Andrew's nature would never allow him to submit, but the current leader of Infinity Brilliance was as relentless as Max.

Max's gaze was calm, "Doesn't the director of Infinity Brilliance, Mr. Lynch have a fatal

weakness?"

The director and his wife were deeply in love, but while on al

e years s business trip, his wife gave birth to a daughter. Due to the old generation's monopoly in the diamond industry, they had made many enemies worldwide.

Their daughter went missing. A young lady, who should have been born to the finest resources, was now lost without a trace. Each year, their people would send someone to look for the daughter.

Andrew smirked, extinguishing another cigarette in the ashtray, "I know what you're getting at, but that child disappeared just after birth twenty years ago. Who knows where she could have been trafficked to by now."

"With Mrs. Lynch's level of concern for her daughter, you could negotiate."

The domestic turf belonged to the four great families. If the Clements family were willing to help find the child, a small business concession would surely be acceptable to Mrs. Lynch.

Andrew narrowed his eyes, nodding as he considered the strategy. His gaze shifted to Brielle, and his lips curved into a sly smile, “Little Canary, what gem do you desire? Consider it a gift upon our meeting.”

Brielle detested his tone. “There’s no need for Mr. Clements to go to any expense.” She spoke with an air of indifference.

Andrew’s eyes narrowed dangerously, his lips thinning like a blade.

Brielle believed that if Max weren’t present, this man would not hesitate to put a gun to her head. In his eyes, a human life was but a piece of pretentious paper.

After a while, Andrew rose to his feet, “Aubree’s waiting for me at the villa. I’ll be off then. Little Canary, we’ll meet again.”

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