

## Master 161

### Chapter 161

Lillian's face twisted with envy as she clutched the banister, her fingers tightening until her knuckles ached. Tonight, she was

supposed to be the star of the show, all eyes should have been on her, but the couple at the entrance was simply too dazzling,

their appearance making the grand hall seem all the brighter.

"Mr. Dorsey," someone called out respectfully, yet no one dared approach. Others followed suit with their greetings, anxious to be

noticed.

Max simply nodded in acknowledgment before lowering his gaze to speak with Brielle. A respectful distance formed around

them, as if by unspoken agreement no one would encroach. The crowd was itching with curiosity, eager to see what would

unfold next.

Spencer, upon seeing them together, was instantly reminded of the previous day when he visited the apartment and happened to

see them sharing an elevator down. He didn't want to dwell on it, not even now, as he gripped his wine glass, his anxiety

magnifying.

The murmurs continued around him, though hushed.

"Is that Brielle beside Mr. Dorsey?"

"Isn't Mr. Dorsey known for his aversion to germs? How come he's with that woman?"

"Can't deny it, Brielle's got a face that turns heads."

Brielle, usually light on makeup, had applied just a touch this evening, yet she effortlessly overshadowed the other women in the

room.

The Haywoods looked sour. They had arranged for a graceful, soothing melody to play as Lillian descended the stairs, but she

had barely reached the midpoint when Brielle stole the limelight. Was this deliberate?

Miranda's expression soured at the sight, and she noticed Lillian stalled mid-staircase, the music still playing, seemingly now a

backdrop for the couple at the door.

Unable to take it anymore, Lillian clumsily made her way down and approached Max.

"Max, did you run into

Bri on your way here? What a coincidence," she said; her words carefully crafted to suggest they had met by chance outside, but

this ruse hinged on Max playing along.

Max didn't even glance at her, continuing instead to ask Brielle, "Have you booked your flight for the business trip? Found the

company you were targeting?"

Who would have thought they'd be discussing work at such a gathering? It was both odd and yet not, familiar yet laced with

subtlety.

Brielle, pleased that Max ignored Lillian, allowed herself a small, satisfied smile. "I've got my eye on a company, but I'll need to

inspect their operations on-site. There's a border between us, so I can't be sure of their situation just yet."

The two chatted as if no one else was there, the atmosphere between them harmonious, causing those nearby to breathe a bit

more softly.

Lillian, gripping a glass of wine and tilting her chin up, felt her poised façade slipping without a response from Max. She was

flustered, feeling the heat of embarrassed glances.

Max had dismissed her, and it stung. Wasn't she attractive? Spencer and Cameron both fancied her, and Spencer had chosen

her over Brielle. Wasn't that proof enough of her allure?

The Haywoods were equally embarrassed by Lillian's bold approach, and Miranda quickly intervened with diplomatic grace.

"Max, thank you for attending the Haywood's gala tonight. And we appreciate the care that Bri has received at Dorsey

International."

Miranda, with decades more experience than Lillian, spoke with more finesse.

Max, with a lazy glance and an indifferent “Hmm,” left Miranda to retreat with Lillian to the sidelines.

Lillian felt like she might explode, biting her lip till it bled. This was not how she had imagined her first interaction with Max. Yet,

this rebuff only fueled her resolve. One day, she would be the only one in his eyes.

As the guests witnessed both mother and daughter falter, none dared to make the same mistake. Brielle, meanwhile, took a sip

from a wine glass passed to her by a waiter, her fingertips lightly tracing the rim. She had finished getting ready with Aubree’s

help when she saw Max waiting outside. The gentle moonlight illuminated his calm, sharp features through the window.

It was undeniable that she was moved by his presence. He actually went to attend the Haywood family event with her.

Aubree had pushed her into Max’s car with a flurry of advice and good wishes before leaving.

All the way to the gala, Brielle had a myriad of questions she wanted to ask, but she held back, not wanting to presume. With

downcast eyes, she let the quiet emotion swirl within.

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The crowd parted as Faith’s gaze landed on Max, her expression shifting noticeably. She made a beeline for Spencer, tugging

gently at the lapel of his suit. “Max is here, and if there’s any drama tonight, let the Haywoods handle it. No need for you to play

the hero,” she whispered, a hint of urgency in her voice.

Spencer remained silent, his eyes fixated on Brielle as she walked away, a growing redness rimming his eyes. “Mom, does the

engagement really have to end?” he croaked, his voice hoarse with emotion, his head hanging low.

Faith glared at him with resentment and poked his head with her finger. “Spencer, what’s gotten into you? You’re the one who

didn’t want Brielle, and you’ve been hounding me about calling off the engagement. And now, when it’s crunch time, you look like

you’re the one who can’t let go?” Her words hit a nerve, and Spencer’s pain surfaced. Indeed, Brielle seemed utterly unaffected.

To her, both he and the Haywoods appeared to be easily discardable.

“Mom, I...”

“Enough, you know she’s been fooling around with other men. Who knows how many times she’s been... you know. Don’t you

find that disgusting? Drop it already. Besides, she doesn’t have the status now: she’s not in your league. If she hadn’t had a bit of

talent, would Max even give her a second glance? Spencer, you need to start making a name for yourself. Now that your dad’s

been ousted, you can’t keep dwelling on this puppy love.”

Faith had only one son, her pride and joy, but she knew all too well that business acumen was not his forte.

Spencer didn’t take her advice to heart; instead, he seized on a particular phrase. “Uncle Max is only interested in her because

of her talent?”

“What else could it be? Why do you think your father was reluctant to end the engagement? Brielle’s business savvy is well

known, and Max sees potential in her. Have you ever met a woman with a sharper business mind than hers?”

Spencer shook his head, a glimmer of clarity returning to his eyes. Yet, as Faith continued, that clarity faded once more.

“Such a shame she’s illegitimate. Even if you truly cared for her, your grandfather would never approve. The people who marry

into the Dorsey family are all from distinguished backgrounds. Everett, who married Victoria, he’s a world-renowned pianist.

What’s Brielle in comparison?” This reassured Spencer. It wasn’t he who couldn’t measure up to Brielle. There was nothing to

regret. His gaze softened as he looked over at Lillian, determined to cherish her from now on. Lillian sensed his stare and

returned it with a bashful smile. At that moment, Spencer erased any lingering sentimentality, discarding it like trash. Why regret

throwing away something worthless?

The buzz in the hall intensified as a small stage at the front was illuminated by a spotlight. Miranda, the hostess, gracefully

ascended to the podium, barely able to contain her glee. "Ladies and gentlemen," she called out, instantly capturing everyone's attention.

"I'm overwhelmed with gratitude that you've all come to tonight's gathering, a celebration in honor of my daughter."

She beckoned with a smile toward Lillian below. "Lillian, come join me."

Lillian was uneasy, her peripheral vision constantly on Max. This was the closest she had ever been to him. In the past, if they

met, it was from a distance, but now, he was so near, she felt she could count his eyelashes.

Max seemed indifferent to the commotion, quietly sipping his drink in a corner. Even when applause broke out, he remained

stoic, not offering a glance, nor even standing.

Lillian's heart raced. Seeing Max not by Brielle's side was a relief. Maybe they had just bumped into each other at the door. As

for her being rebuffed earlier, it must be because Max was a loner, averse to women's company.

Previously, Lillian had felt miles away from Max, but now, as the Haywoods' daughter, she believed that with a slight tiptoe, he

might accept her.

She ascended the stage, feigning shyness as she lowered her head.

Miranda was proud of her daughter, speaking fondly with teary eyes. "Lillian's had her share of hardships. If only I had known

sooner she was my child, I would have cherished her to no end. It's amazing how some kids can be so manipulative from such a

young age. Thankfully, that's all behind us now. What goes around comes around, and Lillian, she's never forgotten her roots at

the orphanage. With the Haywood family's support and someone special in her life, things are looking up."

Without naming names, her words reminded everyone that it was Brielle who had caused trouble in the past.

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Lillian's eyes brimmed with tears as she nodded in agreement with Miranda's words. "Mom, don't say that. I never intended to

hide anything. I was just worried about hurting someone's feelings."

She dabbed her eyes theatrically, feigning deep emotion.

From her seat in the audience, Brielle couldn't help but snicker at the charade. Miranda and Lillian were both clearly trying to

sling mud her way. And Lillian had even crafted a perfect excuse for her little fling with Spencer. She claimed their secret

rendezvous was out of fear of breaking Brielle's heart.

How utterly shameless.

The crowd picked up on the insinuation and their gazes turned toward Brielle, filled with scorn and disdain.

"She's been living someone else's life for over a decade, and she doesn't seem the least bit remorseful."

"So, Lillian and Spencer are the real couple, and Brielle's just a homewrecker?"

"Can you believe she even leaked that video, trying to ruin them with public opinion? Her actions are unforgivable."

At this point, everyone remembered the video that had circulated in their social circles. If Spencer and Lillian were truly an

engaged couple, what they did in private was their business.

Brielle, the interloper, had stooped so low as to use such tactics against them. People felt uncomfortable sharing the same space

with her, some even shifting away from her proximity.

Despite their looks, Brielle's face remained calm, with a faint smile. Everyone expected her to show signs of heartache,

disappointment, or hysteria, but there was nothing. Brielle appeared so serene, as if the drama unfolding had nothing to do with

her, as if she were just a spectator. Yet, the subject of the onstage discussion was undoubtedly her.

Inexplicably, the crowd's attention subtly shifted to Max, who sat in a corner, lazily fiddling with his rosary. There was a striking

similarity in their demeanor.

Miranda and Lillian, who had been performing on the stage for so long, felt a bit awkward seeing Brielle being so indifferent. The

atmosphere in the venue also became subtly tense.

Finally, Miranda cut to the chase, “Bri, come up here. I have something to say to you.” Her tone softened, but her eyes held a veiled threat.

Still smiling, Brielle replied, “Just say what you have to say. I can hear you perfectly fine from here.” Her voice was cool and detached as if she were addressing a stranger.

Miranda was infuriated and embarrassed. After raising Brielle for so many years, her lack of gratitude was appalling.

In front of everyone, she felt humiliated, unsure of how to react. It was Lillian who stepped in. “Mom, Brielle’s upset. Let’s not

force her. This is my fault. We’ve got a house full of guests tonight. Let’s not discuss this now. We can talk privately later, okay?”

Lillian’s defense of the very person who had stolen her identity for years could only be seen as a sign of her kindness. The crowd

was moved, and their glances at Brielle were laced with irony.

One kind and gentle, the other malicious and selfish. There was no comparison.

Unable to contain himself any longer, Spencer stood up. “Brielle, stop acting so holier-than-thou. Don’t you think you owe Lillian

an apology?”

No one expected Spencer to be the one to confront her. Faith was beside herself with rage. Hadn’t she warned him? The

spotlight tonight was supposed to be on the Haywood family.

Her fists clenched in anger, but she dared not step forward rashly.

Spencer couldn’t stand the sight of Brielle acting as though she was above it all. Most troubling to him was how her demeanor

seemed to mirror Max’s, which set him on edge.

Even now, as he berated Brielle, as he resented her, the thought of breaking off their engagement made his eyes sting with pain.

What was happening to him? Why was he so conflicted?

“Apologize?” Brielle lifted her eyelids slightly, her gaze sweeping over him. “Apologize for what?”

Spencer took a deep breath, his teeth clenched with anger. “For willfully taking over her life. For usurping her parents. If it weren’t

for you, she wouldn't have suffered all these years. And you have the nerve to ask for what you should apologize?"

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No sooner had the words left his mouth than the people around began to echo in agreement, finding Brielle shameless for

maintaining such composure at a time like this.

There had been whispers that Brielle had been bullying Lillian in the Haywood household, putting on one face in public and

another behind closed doors. It seemed now that those rumors were not unfounded.

Brielle took a sip of her wine, her tone nonchalant. "When I was brought back to the Haywood family, I was only ten. Do you

really think a ten-year-old child could play the entire Haywood clan like puppets, even fooling hospitals and orphanages?

Doesn't that sound absurd to you? She makes an accusation, and you all believe it? If I really had such power, the Haywood

shares should be mine, shouldn't they? But do I have them?"

Brielle swirled the red wine in her glass, the liquid glistening against her pale fingertips. "The Haywoods made their own

mistakes, yet they want me to take the fall, to apologize. Why should I?"

The question 'why should I?' weighed heavily in the air, striking at the hearts of all who heard it. Indeed, Brielle had been only ten

years old. Could she truly have been so calculating as to deceive everyone?

Robert was a cunning old fox of the business world, and couldn't see through a child's trickery? The notion was laughable.

The once certain crowd began to murmur doubts among themselves. Their eyes shifted to Robert amidst the crowd, noticing his

dark expression, his lips tightly pursed, veins throbbing on his forehead.

Meanwhile, Miranda on the stage was clenching her palm so fiercely that her complexion turned pale, confronted with a Brielle

whose aura had never been so formidable. In the past, even if Brielle had been disagreeable, she was mostly docile.



Miranda was shaking with fury, struggling to contain her emotions, but a reassuring squeeze from Lillian brought her back to her

senses.

“Bri, my earlier words weren’t targeted at you. I’ve spoken with the director of the orphanage. There was manipulation behind the

scenes, and we’ve all been victims. I’m pained for you, but my heart aches even more for Lillian. She’s my flesh and blood, yet

she’s called me ‘Ms. Miranda’ for years.”

Miranda’s strategic retreat shifted the narrative. Her words made the crowd feel that Brielle was taking offense, especially since

Miranda hadn’t explicitly accused Brielle of any backdoor schemes.

Who would be so quick to defend themselves? Surely, someone who felt they had been hit where it hurt.

Brielle’s eagerness to clear her name only cast further doubt.

Miranda had practiced this scene countless times in preparation for tonight..

The crowd looked sympathetically at Lillian, recalling how Brielle had arrived at the soirée dressed to the nines. Was she trying to

overshadow Lillian at this pivotal moment of acknowledgment, intending to cause trouble?

The onlookers’ gazes were like knives, stripping Brielle of her dignity. The women, already envious of Brielle’s beauty, felt they’d

found their moment.

“She’s been tormenting Lillian, the true young lady of the Haywood family, all these years.”

“Tonight’s probably the last time we’ll see her. With her status, she won’t be welcome at such gatherings anymore.”

“Weren’t there photos of her with Kenzo? Since he hasn’t addressed them, he probably just wants to avoid getting entangled.

Give a woman like her an inch, and she’ll climb over you to reach the top.”

Lillian listened to the whispers below, a faint smirk formed on her lips. This was her goal for the evening, to use the event to cast

Brielle down into oblivion, never to rise again. Once the whispers had settled, she emerged as the peacemaker.

“Bri, don’t misunderstand mom. She and I agreed that even after acknowledging me, she would still treat you as her own. She

doesn't intend to cast you aside. Dad also mentioned he'd find you a good match, ensuring you marry with honor."

She spoke with such sincerity in her eyes. How benevolent the Haywoods appeared. Even after Brielle's earlier insolence, even

though she wasn't a true Haywood, they still accepted her. They were even concerned about her prospects after her

engagement to Spencer had been called off, going so far as to arrange a new match for her in advance.

Who wouldn't regard the Haywoods' actions as magnanimous? Certainly, if it were up to any of them, they wouldn't be so

considerate for a non-blood daughter. Wasn't lineage what big families valued most?

For Brielle to have been raised in such a family, it truly must have been her good fortune.

## Chapter 165

The room was abuzz with chatter, each remark sharp enough to skewer Brielle where she stood.

Meanwhile, Lillian, having delivered her barb, didn't miss a beat to gauge Max's reaction. Even if Max valued Brielle's skills,

would he continue to favor her knowing this side of her? A smirk curled on Lillian's lips, her heart brimming with smug

satisfaction.

"Bri, come up here, will you?"

Everyone expected Brielle to remain reticent, but she slowly set down her glass and made her way to the stage.

Even Lillian was taken aback, puzzled by what Brielle might be plotting, but in a heartbeat, her excitement surged. It was all the

better for Brielle to show her face; it would be a spectacle for the entire Beaconsfield social elite to witness Brielle's true, ugly

colors.

Miranda, standing nearby, was stunned too, but as she watched Brielle approach, her eyes reddened with the prospect of a

sentimental mother-daughter scene.

Brielle, however, simply took the microphone from Miranda's hand and turned to face the crowd.

"The kindness the Haywood family has shown me is something I will never forget," she began. her voice steady.

Her words sent a jolt through Miranda and Lillian. Was this surrender?

When Miranda received that ten million, a fire had been burning in her heart. Now, she finally felt a sense of triumph. She patted

Brielle on the shoulder, adopting the image of a nurturing mother. "Bri, it's good that you're grateful. Just apologize to Lillian, and

we can be a family

again."

Lillian's inner scoff was masked by a feigned reluctance. "No need to apologize, Bri hasn't done anything wrong. Like she said,

she was only ten at the time."

Her demeanor was graceful and magnanimous, a stark contrast to Brielle's earlier defensiveness. This only reinforced to the

onlookers the importance of one's lineage; after all one's genes dictated character and stature.

Brielle's lashes fluttered downward as she spoke, her tone nonchalant, "I indeed haven't done anything wrong, so I never

considered apologizing."

The room erupted in a collective gasp. No one expected Brielle to be so brazen, and their disdain deepened.

"Besides, I have already repaid the Haywood family's kindness. Miranda, didn't you accept the ten million I wired just yesterday?"

As she spoke, a screenshot of the transaction appeared on the large screen behind her. The

screen, initially set up for a touching moment for Lillian, showcasing her charity work at the orphanage, was now hijacked by

Brielle.

Damn her, when had that cunning woman set this up? Panic gripped Miranda. How could she explain the ten million without

raising suspicions?

Lillian chimed in, feigning shock, "Mom, Bri's really gone all out for you, hasn't she? To send your ten million like that, it's the first

time she's ever given you such a gift. Are you regretting taking me back now? I'm not as capable as Bri, nor do I have that kind

of money.”

Her tone was playful and slightly reproachful, transforming the transaction into a generous gift from a daughter to her mother.

Ten million was a fortune to ordinary folks, but in their circles, it was pocket change, gone with the purchase of a single car.

Lillian’s words were clever, and she emphasized that this was Brielle’s first gift, subtly accusing Brielle of being ungrateful.

Most importantly, Lillian explicitly mentioned that she didn’t have money. As for why she didn’t have money, the crowd couldn’t

help but connect it to her previous donations to the orphanage. It was said that she only kept enough for her living expenses

every month.

In contrast, Brielle, who could easily transfer ten million, hadn’t donated a dime to the orphanage that raised her, making her

seem utterly unthankful. And now, Brielle had the audacity to suggest that ten million was enough to settle her debt to the

Haywoods. Just how shameless was she?

The crowd had rarely seen such effrontery. Even the most easygoing among them couldn’t hide their disdain.

“Ten million to settle a debt of gratitude? Is she treating them like beggars?”

“To raise a daughter in a wealthy family, it would cost more than that just in tutors.”

“The Haywoods have indeed raised an ingrate.”

“How can she have the nerve to say that? Clearly, no matter where you come from, your true nature reveals itself in time.”

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At this juncture, it seemed to everyone that Brielle had lost spectacularly, like a court jester in the midst of his final, pitiful tumble.

Even from the audience, there were sympathetic glances. cast towards Robert, whose business associates had begun offering

their consolations.

And Spencer, he felt more than ever that his choice was right. Brielle, an enigma with no clear background, simply wasn’t worthy

of him.

The quietest person in the entire hall had to be Max. Even in the midst of this unfolding drama, he remained unshaken,

occasionally casting a slight, mysterious smile in Brielle's direction. No one could tell if he was mocking her or if it was something

else.

As for Miranda and Lillian, they exchanged looks that seemed to say they found Brielle utterly laughable. At this point, whipping

out a screenshot of a money transfer would only serve as evidence of her humiliation.

All her boasts of being a Director at Dorsey International now seemed rather hollow.

While everyone was still abuzz with gossip, they noticed the big screen change to display a spreadsheet. This spreadsheet

detailed various expenses with corresponding invoices and prices. The crowd's faces registered shock. Whose expenses were

these?

The hall fell silent, eyes riveted to the spreadsheet. Involuntarily, they turned to Brielle.

Her expression unchanged, she began to explain methodically, "This is the sum of money the Haywood family has spent on me

over the years, which amounts to less than two million. In my ten million, I have also included various interests and adjusted for

inflation. So, what exactly have they lost?"

The spreadsheet was meticulous, detailing down to the number of clothes the Haywoods had bought for her.

The necklace Miranda purchased for her, complete with the receipt.

The gifts Cameron brought her from abroad, with their prices listed.

The audience's expressions were a mix of emotions as Brielle continued to add details.

"Some might argue that the Haywood family has spent time and energy on me which surely counts for something. For this, I

have prepared another spreadsheet."

With that, the screen shifted to the next image. She spoke not as someone unraveling her past, but as if she were in the midst of

a business negotiation. Illustrating her points with examples, her logic was undeniable.

“This shows the time I spent at home during my middle school, high school, and college years. After graduating with top honors

from Beaconsfield, I tutored for three months before college, earning enough to cover my living expenses. So, what energy

exactly did the Haywood family invest in me? From a young age, they arranged tutors for Lillian. They even sent me to learn

taekwondo for Lillian’s personal safety. What do I owe her?”

The level of detail in the spreadsheet left little room for rebuttal.

“The Haywoods provide Lillian with luxury cars, designer clothes, jewelry worth millions. Have I ever said a word?”

Her face was serene as she recounted these disparities, showing no sign of feeling aggrieved. yet her words left a lump in the

listeners’ throats. If this was true, was she ever really treated as a daughter of the Haywood family? Why the stark difference?

The room fell into a brief silence, but there were always one or two who enjoyed stirring the pot. “Ms. Brielle makes it sound so

easy,” someone called out. “How can you possibly owe nothing. to the Haywood family? Without them, how could you be worthy

of an engagement with the Dorsey family heir? Over the years, you’ve leveraged the Dorseys to gain quite a bit. It seems a bit

flippant to dismiss that, doesn’t it?”

Upon hearing these words, Miranda finally snapped back to attention. Brielle’s recent maneuvering had left her a bit disoriented,

unsure of how to proceed. Fortunately, someone handed her an opening.

“Bri, I know you’re harboring some resentment,” she began, her eyes welling up with what seemed like emotion. Brielle’s

previous presentation had been so detailed that the audience was more curious about her next explanation than they were

empathetic with Miranda, leaving her looking awkward and out of place.

Even Brielle paid her no mind, instead raising her gaze to address the man who had spoken. “I exploited the Dorsey family for

resources? What resources? Connections? Then tell me, who here would call themselves my friend?"

Her self-deprecating, almost sardonic retort effectively silenced her critic.

Who was Brielle's friend, indeed? Most people just viewed her as a joke, let alone considering any social connections.

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Brielle glanced at the crowd, her lips curling into a sardonic smile. "As for business assets

The spreadsheet on the giant screen flipped to a new page, showcasing the mergers and acquisitions she had managed since

joining Dorsey International.

"In the past three years, the cases I've handled for Dorsey International have generated profits exceeding a billion. The Dorsey

family has also supported the Haywood family in business due to this. The Haywood family invested less than two million in me.

What have I given back to them?"

The room was filled with business people, who all knew this represented a remarkably lucrative investment. To say that Brielle

owed the Haywood family was, frankly, laughable.

Given these facts, why were the Haywoods playing the victim? The mood in the room shifted instantly to confusion,

bewilderment.

An investment of under two million, with a return of ten million in cash plus business support? It seemed like the Haywoods had

made a killing.

No one was born yesterday. A flicker of suspicion began to ignite in their minds. This evening's drama, it seemed, was not going

to be straightforward.

"In conclusion, I owe nothing to anyone in the Haywood family. The ten million has been transferred. From now on, I have no

affiliation with the Haywoods. As for Ms. Miranda's proposal to be my godmother, I'm sorry, but I'll have to decline that honor."

She spoke with clarity and confidence, handing the microphone back to a pale-faced Miranda, even managing a smile at the audience.

Silence swept over the crowd. Brielle's statement was final, severing all ties with the Haywood family. There was no going back

now. She had laid everything out, clear as day, without muddying the waters.

Miranda clenched her teeth, her hands itching to strangle Brielle. "How can you say such things?" She clutched her chest in

feigned agony, as if about to faint. "All these years, I've raised you as my own daughter, and now you want to walk away as if

none of it means anything. Brielle, you're cold-hearted."

At the right moment, Lillian began patting Miranda's back, her face a picture of soft sympathy. "Mom, don't upset yourself. Bri

probably isn't thinking straight. Realizing suddenly she's not truly a Haywood must be tough."

"Does she look upset to you?" Miranda shot back, putting on a show of heartache. "Enough, let's not make a spectacle in front of

the guests. I won't say another word."

Miranda was panicking inside, unable to find a point to counter, because Brielle had played her cards too well, too cleverly, and

the audience was beginning to waver.

"If the Haywood family really invested less than two million, it looks like they made a profit."

"You all believe her just like that? The Haywoods are a renowned family, and why would they be so stingy? I bet the spreadsheet

is doctored."

"If it was doctored, why didn't the Haywoods immediately refute it? Why do they just stand there, looking mortified?"

"I think both Brielle and the Haywoods are shady. It's just a dog-eat-dog situation."

Lillian noticed the crowd was no longer unanimously ridiculing Brielle, and she felt a twinge of panic. She bit her lip and looked

up at Max, who had been silent since he walked in. Any attempts at conversation were dismissed with a nonchalant glance from

him.



He seemed unattached to the drama, unfazed amid the storm. That was Max.

Lillian's irritation grew, wondering why he didn't intervene when Brielle was so clearly being cruel. Did he not see how selfish and

heartless Brielle's words were?

Her face paled, unable to comprehend how the atmosphere had changed so quickly. She had to stop the audience from

speculating further; she needed to find a way to mend the situation.

"Bri, you've already caused the orphanage dean so much stress he's in the hospital. Now, do you want to put Mom in there too?"

Lillian brought up the orphanage again, knowing it would inevitably lead to thoughts of charity donations. This was one aspect

Brielle couldn't just shake off.

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Brielle paused mid-stride, her lips curling into a cold sneer, "Oh, Lillian, you've got some nerve bringing up the orphanage. Who

landed the poor director in the hospital, huh? You think I don't know? The old man's still recovering, and here you are dragging

him into your little schemes, all to bring up the donation issue, right? Beating around the bush is second nature to you, isn't it?"

Lillian's face turned ashen, shrinking under Brielle's piercing gaze.

Standing on the floor, Brielle should have been the one looking up to Lillian on the stage, but inexplicably, Lillian felt as though it

was Brielle who occupied the moral high ground, because Brielle's gaze was filled with undisguised contempt.

"Bri, I wasn't trying to bring up the donations," Lillian said, playing the victim as she clutched. Miranda for support, her voice

quivering. "You're just being overly sensitive."

Now that the crowd had witnessed the forms, Lillian's act seemed too contrived. But one thing. didn't cancel out the other. Even if

the Haywoods had been cruel to Brielle, skimping on charity was her fault alone. Miranda was stingy, and that was a fact, as was

Brielle's ingratitude.

Before the murmurs could even start, Brielle's voice cut through. "Lillian, since you're so eloquent, why don't you save it for the police?"

Lillian thought she was hearing things. The police? What police?

As confusion spread through the room, timely chatter came from outside the door, and several officers entered, their uniforms

standing out starkly amongst the sea of elegant gowns and suits.

The officers showed their badges and made a beeline for Lillian. "Miss Lillian, we need you to come with us, please."

Lillian's pupils dilated in disbelief, her mind roaring with panic. Why would the police be here for her?

She quickly composed herself and forced a smile, "Officer, there must be some misunderstanding."

"There's no misunderstanding. We have all the evidence we need. The charity has filed a report in cooperation with Miss Brielle

regarding the Sunflower Children's Home donations. You've been making donations in Miss Brielle's name, and now you need to

come with us."

The charity had joined forces with Brielle to report Lillian? As the words sank in, those who had scorned Brielle's miserliness fell

silent. The evidence must have been overwhelming for the police to act.

Faces in the crowd reflected shock and anger. Those who had sided with Lillian against Brielle were now utterly speechless. It

turned out that Brielle, not Lillian, had been the benefactor all along. And Lillian, attempting to bask in this stolen glory, had just

tried to publicly shame

Brielle for not donating.

Lillian felt her world spinning. She wished for the ground to swallow her up. How could this happen? She had deliberately

brought up the donations to clear her name, and now Brielle had preempted her with hard evidence and perfect timing.

That bitch! She must have planned to ruin her.

Lillian's lips trembled, and she dared not meet anyone's eyes, feeling their stares like knives on her skin. She was in complete

disarray, her eyes reddening with humiliation, especially with Max witnessing her downfall.

Her lips clenched tight, tasting the bitterness of her blood. Her pride was in shreds. Tonight, she was the epitome of disgrace.

And there stood Robert, looking as if he had swallowed a bitter pill, wishing he could magically dismiss all the guests.

"Miss Lillian, please come with us," the officer said, snapping a pair of silver handcuffs around her wrists.

In that moment, Lillian shuddered and turned to Robert, her voice a desperate whisper, "Dad." Robert felt the sting of ultimate

embarrassment. But what could he say with everyone watching? Use the Haywood clout to intimidate the police? With Max

standing right there, any further outburst would only worsen the impression they'd made.

The Haywood family had lost all pretense of dignity that evening.

Lillian felt like she couldn't breathe, wishing she could disappear. This was supposed to be her night of triumph, her grand return

to the Haywood fold, and now it was all ruined. From now on, whenever people thought of Lillian, they would remember her

humiliation at this banquet.

She heard the sneers around her, and the tears flowed freely. She hated Brielle. Brielle had destroyed everything!

## Chapter 169

By the time things had reached this stage, nobody in the room was willing to speak up for Lillian. Even Spencer felt as though his

cheeks were on fire.

Had Lillian really broken the law? Was Brielle the one who had been making the donations all along? How could Lillian do such a

thing? The cracks in their once beautiful relationship were showing, but he didn't want to admit it.

At that moment, it seemed that Lillian finally remembered him, calling out through her tears, "Spencer!"

Her innocent demeanor, that wronged tone in her voice, made it seem as though she was the one who had been mistreated.

Spencer stood amidst the crowd, his mind thundering with confusion.

Brielle, witnessing their deep connection, couldn't help but let out a chuckle, "Spencer, I forgot. to mention earlier, consider our

engagement off. You love Lillian so much, and now that she's in trouble, you should be the first to step up, as her fiancé, and bail

her out, right?"

Lillian's eyes were bloodshot with hatred. That bitch!

Spencer, however, was frozen in place as if someone had struck his pressure point. He was at a loss, even looking up at Faith

for some kind of guidance.

What should he do in a situation like this?

In the crowd, Faith's expression was so dark it was almost comical. After tonight, Lillian would surely become the laughingstock

of their circle. Livid, Faith made a snap decision and stepped forward with a façade of kindness. "Bri, dear, the prior mess was

Spencer's fault. We had no idea Lillian was such a person."

Faith quickly weighed the pros and cons, deciding that distancing herself from the joke that was Lillian was the best course of

action.

Brielle raised an eyebrow, her gaze dripping with sarcasm, curious about what Faith was going to say.

Faith's forehead beaded with sweat as she grasped Spencer's hand, almost as if she were pushing him toward a decision. "Bri,

don't talk nonsense about calling off the engagement. Spencer does care for you. He's just temporarily confused, that's all. His

fling with Lillian was just a moment of folly. You two should work things out and not let others come between you."

Faith had endured so much for the sake of Ryan's reputation, which spoke volumes about her character. Now that Brielle had

garnered sympathy and admiration from the onlookers, there was no way Faith would let her son be associated with Lillian's

stain. Even if Faith disliked Brielle, she had to swallow her pride.

She glanced up at Max, who sat collected, a rosary draped over his wrist, seemingly indifferent to the proceedings as if they

were but a trivial play before him.

Faith withdrew her gaze. After all, Brielle had caught Max's eye, and the engagement, for the time being, could not be broken.

Brielle had never expected Faith, who despised her the most, to be so flexible. She found it amusing.

"Ms. Faith, it's a pity, but

I'm the one ending the engagement."

She looked at Spencer, void of any attachment, "Spencer loves Lillian. Surely he won't abandon his beloved in her time of need?

We can't let Mr. Dorsey think that his nephew is a man without conviction."

That last statement was a severe one. To be seen as lacking conviction in front of Max was tantamount to being completely cut

off from returning to Dorsey International.

Brielle's use of Max's name left Faith speechless.

Spencer, as if struck by lightning, retorted without hesitation, "I'm canceling our engagement. Lillian is my fiancée! Brielle, I never

cared for you." His voice was firm yet trembled slightly, as if he was desperately suppressing something.

Lillian couldn't have broken the law. It all had to be a misunderstanding. After all, she was so kind. It must be Brielle's doing!

Spencer almost hypnotized himself into believing this narrative, refusing to admit he had made a mistake, and was now

scrambling to vindicate Lillian. He began to despise Brielle even more.

Faith was livid. She had just offered not to break off the engagement, and Brielle, that upstart, had flatly refused? She felt utterly

humiliated. In her anger, she raised her hand in a threatening gesture. "You!"

But her slap was caught mid-air by someone else. Following the strong wrist, her eyes met a string of black beads.

No one had noticed Max approaching. His eyes calm and unfazed, "Have we had enough drama?"

With that one cool remark, Faith's fire was extinguished, leaving her flustered, "Max, Spencer is just young, and I was only..."

## Chapter 170

Max withdrew his hand, pulling out a handkerchief and silently wiping his fingertips.

Faith felt a jolt of humiliation but dared not offend him.

“He’s just two years younger than me.”

His casual remark felt like a barrage of slaps to both Faith and Spencer.

Indeed, how could they forget that Max was only two years older than Spencer?

Using himself to put down Spencer was an absolute crushing defeat. They were not even on the same level; there was no

comparison.

Spencer was unworthy of even being mentioned in the same breath as him.

Spencer cast his eyes down, his shoulders drooping in defeat.

Faith, her lips quivering, was now too scared to utter another word.

With Max stepping forward, the atmosphere in the room seemed to reach a breaking point..

A few officers stood still, watching Lillian’s ashen face. Eventually, one of them couldn’t hold back. “Miss Brielle, we will keep you

updated on the progress of the case, and we thank you for your trust in the police force.”

It was a mere formality, but it served to cut through the tense air.

Lillian was speechless, her reasoning burnt to cinders by rage upon hearing Faith’s words..

Faith wanted to give up on her, hoping Spencer would not engage with her, even wishing for Brielle to become her daughter-in-

law.

Lillian felt a lump in her chest. As she stared at Max, surrounded by admirers, determination. shined in her eyes.

Everyone looked down on her, laughing at her, but just wait. Once she climbed her way to Max, she’d serve up a harsh reality

check to those who dared to ridicule her.

They thought she couldn’t live without Spencer? Ha, she’d been wanting to kick that man to the curb!

Lillian bit her lip so hard it started to bleed.

She heard Brielle’s indifferent voice, “You don’t need to update me on the details. Just follow the procedures.”

It seemed as if she hadn't taken Lillian seriously at all, making the earlier scene where Lillian. went to great lengths during the

first half of the banquet look like a clownish act.

Brielle glanced around; everyone's expressions were subtle, and the place was in disarray.

The banquet had come to an end at this point.

Brielle chuckled softly, not forgetting to bid farewell to Miranda, "Ms. Miranda, I shall take my leave."

Miranda fainted from sheer anger, while Robert busied himself with ushering the guests out, watching Brielle leave triumphantly,

his resentful gaze as if it could pierce her spine.

After tonight, it wasn't just Lillian; the entire Haywood clan would become a laughingstock.

The guests whispered among themselves, and even as they walked out, they couldn't resist looking back to enjoy the Haywoods'

dismay.

How ridiculous, the belle of the ball taken away to the police station.

The Haywoods had nailed themselves to the pillar of shame.

Brielle left without hesitation, her mission for the evening accomplished.

First, she cut ties with the Haywood clan.

Second, she annulled her engagement to Spencer.

She was feeling good, slowing her pace to admire the floral walls arranged by the Haywoods.

If the Haywoods knew her thoughts, the fainted Miranda might just wake up again.

Brielle had just passed the last floral wall when she saw a man standing there.

It was Max.

He too had left the hall, and, by chance, their paths were the same.

Brielle found it amusing and quickened her pace to join him.

Before she could speak, Max commented, "You really stole the show tonight."

Brielle smiled, and she couldn't resist wrapping her arms around his neck, "Glad I didn't embarrass you, Mr. Dorsey."

Max looked down, his fingers gently pinching her chin.

He couldn't help but recall her verbal sparring in the hall. She was quite endearing.

The temperature on Brielle's cheeks began to rise as she felt that even the most vibrant flowers couldn't compare to the faint

smile in his eyes.

She never knew a man could be so bewitching.

She wanted to kiss him.

Brielle tiptoed, her lips about to touch his, when footsteps sounded behind her.

"Brielle, stop right there!"

It was Spencer, unexpectedly coming after her.

Brielle's heart raced, trying to pull away, b

ut Max wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling her close and sheltering her behind the floral wall.

"He's already your ex-fiancé. Are you still afraid of being seen?"

His tone was teasing, almost wicked.

Brielle's heart fluttered, and before she could react, his lips captured hers, nibbling precisely at her lip, his hand firmly on her

waist.

Brielle's mind exploded, the floral wall before her eyes turning into dazzling fireworks.

What on earth was Max thinking?

Her reason told her Spencer's footsteps were near, that this was the moment to push him away, but in reality, her hands slid across his abdomen, embracing his waist involuntarily.

She couldn't resist Max and the intoxicating ambiguity he offered, even if such ambiguity was toxic.

His kiss deepened, the heat of his palm nearly scorching her.

Spencer's footsteps were just inches away. Brielle even closed her eyes, thinking maybe they'd all gone mad tonight.