

Master 171

Chapter 171 g out, gently brushing her lips with his fingers.

Only he had seen this side of Brielle.

Only he.

He couldn't help but recall the words he once said to her—love was but an illusion under the influence of dopamine.

Yet his dopamine levels were insatiable, as if craving more.

Was that even reasonable?

He didn't understand, but clearly, he had no desire to stop.

He shrugged off his suit jacket and draped it over Brielle.

The moment the jacket obscured her vision, Spencer rounded the corner of the floral wall.

Fury was written all over Spencer's face. He still had many questions unanswered. He wanted to know if Brielle had deliberately

set up Lillian, and he had to make it clear to Brielle that he had no regrets whatsoever.

Even if Brielle won tonight, it wouldn't change the fact of her humble origins.

She was beneath him. Forever unworthy!

Spencer caught sight of the scene before him, and his angry mind was suddenly doused with cold water, bringing him back to his

senses.

He saw his Uncle Max pressing a woman against the wall, her figure mostly obscured by his jacket, only her slender legs visible.

Her face was hidden, and Max, who was the talk of everyone, was now biting her lip, even emitting faint sounds of pleasure.

Perhaps disturbed in his moment of enjoyment. Max looked up with a voice cold as ice. "Scram."

Spencer felt as if he'd been struck by lightning, retreating in disbelief, not daring to look again.. He hurried back the way he

came, his footsteps in disarray.

Uncle Max with a woman?

Uncle Max kissing a woman in public?

His mind was a whirlwind of confusion, not understanding the fear and panic welling up inside him, his back breaking out in

sweat.

Meanwhile, inside the floral enclosure, Brielle heard the footsteps recede and slowly opened

her eyes.

Their first night together, she had experienced his prowess.

That dominance, that thrilling heat that reached her very core, was like a wildfire sweeping across a prairie..

This kiss would likely be unforgettable for her entire life, melting into the taste of wine, blending with the enchanting glow of the

lights.

The playful smile in the corner of his eyes gripped her heart.

Suddenly scooped up in his arms, she hid under his suit jacket as he carried her path.

The car outside had been waiting, the privacy screen tastefully lowered.

away down the

Kissed senseless by him, Brielle's thoughts were scattered, even forgetting that Patrick was in the front, and this was happening

in a car.

She shamelessly felt that she would willingly die in this kiss.

The car stopped at the Premier Palace, and she remained nestled in his embrace.

Once in the master bedroom, she was set on the bed, and soon the room's temperature soared. Her toes curled from the

pleasure, and she couldn't help but want to cry out his name.

In the haze, his eyelids lifted slightly, revealing the full arc of his eyes, indifferent, yet filled with a sensual charm.

The contour of his jaw was sleek and elongated, and every bit of him seemed sculpted by divine hands.

She couldn't stop caring for him, b

ut what were they to each other?

She seemed to be just a little pet he kept in good humor.

Such piercing reality was unbearable.

Yet the fall was irresistible.

It wasn't until the early hours that it all came to an end.

Brielle lay on the familiar bed, inhaling his scent, but her heart felt hollow.

She reached out a finger, longing to trace his handsome, sleeping features. T

hen his phone rang, and seeing his brows furrow, she quickly closed her eyes, pretending to be deep in sleep.

She slowed her breathing, feeling him stir, his pleasing voice speaking. "Alivia, what's up?"

Like a bucket of ice water poured over her, Brielle buried her face in the soft duvet, feeling as if her heart was being pierced with

pain.

Chapter 172

Max slipped into his pajamas and wandered over to the floor-to-ceiling windows. "Dad's orders? When?"

Whatever came through on the other end rendered him silent for a moment. "You handle it."

After hanging up, he approached the bed and carefully tucked Brielle in, then turned and walked away.

Only when the bedroom door clicked shut did Brielle slowly open her eyes.

Footsteps echoed in the hallway, heading towards the study, it seemed.

She turned over, the name 'Alivia' stirring unrest within her.

A self-deprecating smile crept across Brielle's face. Was he about to meet with the Barnes girl? She gently patted her somewhat

stifled chest, realizing she had no right to be jealous. Therefore, she had to manage her emotions well.

She couldn't let him find out. She couldn't let anyone find out.

The next morning, she was up at six.

She had planned to say goodbye to Max in person, but Patrick informed her he had gone to the office overnight to deal with

paperwork.

A wave of disappointment crossed her eyes, but then she thought, maybe it was for the best.

The fluttering of her heart from last night lingered, and his business trip was the perfect chance

to calm down.

She freshened up back at her apartment, grabbed her laptop and all her documents, and set off. Since she's rushed for time, she

missed Aubree's text message.

Not until she was in the cab did she see Aubree's message.

[Bri, did you hear? Sophia's gone missing.]

Brielle frowned. Sophia missing?

[Are you sure? I thought she went to a banquet, right?]

No wonder the Rowlands didn't hassle her last night. It was because Sophia had vanished. How

could Sophia just disappear?

She hadn't heard even a whisper.

The Rowlands said she definitely went to the banquet. The cops questioned a bunch of people. Some saw her, but after she

went to talk to Lillian, she was gone.

Vanished after seeing Lillian? Could it be related to her?

Knowing Lillian as she did. Brielle doubted she would leave such an obvious clue.

And Lillian had no reason to do this. Something else must have happened last night. Maybe someone was fishing in troubled

waters.

Aubree sent another cautious message.

[Be safe. We don't know who's behind Sophia's disappearance or who they're really after. Keep yourself protected until things

clear up.]

Brielle had a similar hunch, but it was still unclear which side was involved.

As she was about to exit the cab, her phone buzzed with a new message.

—[You're next.]

Following the message was a photo.

In it, Sophia looked battered and collapsed on the ground, hands and feet bound, eyes covered with a thick black cloth, her body

marred with lash marks.

She had vanished only for a night, yet she looked half-dead.

This was a threatening message from a kidnapper.

Brielle frowned and didn't hesitate to contact last night's police and forwarded the number.

The response from the police was swift.

"Ms. Brielle, it's a burner phone, and the signal is intermittent, likely scrambling detection. This is professional work. Officers will

be dispatched for your protection."

Just as Brielle was about to inform them she was en route to a business trip, another buzz from the phone brought another

message from the same number.

A photo, of her, standing outside the airport, less than a hundred meters away.

Brielle's complexion turned grim, and she whispered to the police. "I'm being watched, right outside the airport. It's crowded here,

and they won't make a move yet. I hope your people can.

get here fast."

"Ms. Brielle, don't worry, we're on our way."

Her heart raced as she hung up, then she positioned herself in the most visible location, standing still.

Guns were banned in the country. No one could take her life from a hundred meters away.

And anyone approaching her, she would vigilantly watch their next move.

Her phone rang again, another new message.

—[Leaving the country will only get you killed faster.]

Chapter 173

Brielle couldn't fathom the kidnapper's rationale. First, they had their sights set on Sophia, and now her? Aside from a

complicated past, there was no connection between her and Sophia.

Until the cops showed up, Brielle's heart was in her throat.

The officers were polite. After all, they had just seen her the night before. “Ms. Brielle, please come with us to the station to give

a statement.”

She nodded, handing over her phone as evidence, knowing that her planned business trip would have to be put on hold. Safety

came first.

Riding in the back of the squad car, she arrived at the precinct only to see Miranda and Cameron there to bail out Lillian.

Their faces were storm clouds, especially when they caught sight of Brielle. It looked like they wanted to tear her limb from limb.

Miranda’s lips quivered with rage as she stormed over. “Brielle! Isn’t it enough that you’ve framed Lillian and had her thrown in

jail? You’re downright evil. Are you coming to the police station at a time like this to add insult to injury?”

Her finger was almost poking Brielle’s face, her cheeks flushed with anger.

“Ms. Miranda, you’re barking up the wrong tree. I couldn’t care less about Lillian’s case.” Brielle replied coolly, heading toward

the entrance of the building.

Miranda snorted. “Couldn’t care less? If you hadn’t meddled years ago, how would the Haywood family ever have acknowledged

you? It seems you’ve orchestrated this whole. charade, luring Lillian into a trap just to expose her on the day she was to be

recognized by the family. You’re downright sinister.”

Brielle felt she had nothing to say to the Haywoods and ignored Miranda, but then Cameron chimed in.

“Brielle, have you considered how Grandpa would react to this news?”

It was the second time Cameron had used Michael as leverage against her.

“Cameron, don’t you see the irony? I’m not a Haywood. You’re using your grandfather to threaten an outsider. What’s your

game?”

“It doesn’t matter what I think, as long as it works. The fiasco at last night’s banquet will soon reach Grandpa’s ears, and you

wouldn't want him to worry about Haywood affairs in his twilight years, would you? If you don't want to upset him, it's best you

keep quiet about Lillian."

His tone softened whenever he mentioned Lillian.

Brielle felt a chill. Knowing full well that Lillian was his sister, yet he was still so fixated.

A man like that was destined to be manipulated by Lillian.

As the three faced off at the entrance, the cops brought out Lillian, who looked as though she had been through hell and back.

Just one night in lockup had left her gaunt, her vitality seemingly drained.

The moment Miranda saw her daughter, her heart clenched, and she quickly supported Lillian.

"Lillian, are you alright?"

Lillian's lips were pale, and when her eyes met Brielle's, they were filled with venom.

Her chest felt like it was about to burst with fury, and she looked like she wanted to claw Brielle's face off. "What are you doing

here, Brielle? Here to gloat?"

The previous night's events had nearly broken her, and the overnight stay in jail had eroded what little sanity she had left.

"I'm telling you, don't get smug."

She didn't bother hiding her malice, "You haven't won. Just wait and see."

Brielle wasn't intimidated by the harsh words. Instead, it was Miranda who flinched, as if she no longer recognized her daughter.

In her mind, Lillian had always been gentle, always

considerate of others, even when hurt.

But then Lillian's eyes welled with tears, and she whimpered, "Mom, I just want to go home and rest."

She then turned to Cameron with a weak plea, "Cameron, can I ride back with you?"

Cameron nodded, and as he helped Lillian into the car, he didn't forget to admonish Brielle.

"Let's leave it at this. Mom and Dad will surely discuss this with you later. There's no need for you to come all this way to the

station just to rub salt in the wound. No matter what, Lillian is a daughter of the Haywood family, and the wealth she has, you

couldn't earn in a lifetime at Dorsey International. Brielle, you're studying finance, and you should know better than to fight

capital."

The implication was clear: the Haywood family had Lillian's back, but Brielle had no one.

Moved by his words, Lillian leaned into Cameron. "Cameron, thank you.

Brielle couldn't help but laugh, "A lifetime's salary at Dorsey International isn't enough? How do you know the Haywood family

won't go bankrupt?"

Chapter 174

"Brielle, you!"

Cameron was livid, but Lillian's hand landed gently on his arm. "Let it go, Cameron. She's just all talk."

In her heart, Lillian seethed with rage, but staying put would only serve as amusement for onlookers.

Cameron, too fed up to deal with Brielle any longer, slammed the car door shut.

Meanwhile, Miranda took off in a different vehicle.

Left standing on her own, Brielle felt a sudden peace around her ears. She followed the officer into the lobby.

The cop kept talking about the Haywood family's donation.

"Not only did they bail out Lillian, but to salvage her rep, they dropped a cool ten mil in her name. to the Sunflower Children's

Home. Ms. Brielle, please, take a seat."

The officer was no fool. He saw right through the Haywood bunch, "Getting away from that kind of family is a good thing."

In the departing car, Lillian deliberately snuggled up to Cameron, eager to gauge just how far her brother would go for her.

After last night's debacle, her fair-weather friends had all clammed up, and even Spencer hadn't shown up to pick her up.

It was Lillian's first bitter taste of defeat.

For years she'd worked to tarnish Brielle's name, and now it had all fallen apart.

She had to fight back.

Step one was to see what lengths the Haywood family would go to for her.

With reddened eyes, Lillian turned, her lips twitching in a semblance of hurt, "Cameron, it was Brielle who pushed me to make

that donation. She told me to put it in my name. I never expected her to pull a stunt like this. I was naive. Why would anyone be

nice to you for no reason? She must've known I was the real Haywood daughter and set this whole thing up."

Cameron couldn't stand to see her suffer. He had also lost some weight. They'd been close, almost too close once, but now they

were just siblings.

Gripping the steering wheel, he didn't meet her eyes. "The Haywoods will handle this mess. Next time, be smarter about who

you befriend."

It seemed he had forgiven her and believed her story.

Cameron's bias towards her was undeniable, and she knew how to play it.

With a bitter look in her eyes, Lillian grabbed his wrist, "I'm sorry, Cameron. I never meant to be the Haywood daughter. Don't be

mad at me. You'll meet a better woman one day."

Despite his efforts, Cameron's heart twinged at her words.

"Sure, I will. And you will too, Lillian.

"No, I won't. That video is out there, and with last night's mess, no one will want to marry me. Spencer didn't even come today.

He must be so disappointed."

Her eyes dropped, and she wiped a tear from the corner of her eye.

"The thing with Spencer, it happened because we drank too much. I panicked when I woke up. I don't really like him. The guy I

like, he'll never give me a second glance."

"What do you mean? Who do you like?"

Cameron was puzzled, but years of indulging Lillian's wishes meant he couldn't deny her anything.

Lillian had long coveted the idea of attaching herself to Max. Now was the perfect chance to make her feelings known.

Otherwise, if Cameron found out on his own, it would make for a messy situation.

"This mess made me see that Spencer doesn't really care about me. Being with him wouldn't make me happy. I've seen Max a

few times before. He's the kind of man worth committing to, better than Spencer. If I could be with him, I'd die happy. Could you

help me?"

Few women in Beaconsfield dared pursue Max; just one glance from him could freeze you with his icy demeanor.

Lillian liked Max? That was almost beyond belief.

With a rueful smile, Lillian added, "You think I'm not good enough for him, don't you? My reputation is ruined now."

"Of course not! You deserve the best, Lillian. But Max...

"If Max doesn't mind Brielle, why would he reject me? Between me and Brielle, who's better?"

"You are, of course!"

Cameron's response came without hesitation, a testament to his deep bias for Lillian.

With a slight curve of her lips, Lillian played her card, "If Brielle can get close to Max, why can't I? As long as you're willing to

help me, bro."

Cameron had been under Lillian's spell for over a decade, and breaking free wasn't something he could do overnight. After a few

minutes of hesitation, he nodded gravely.

"I'll help you, but don't do anything rash."

With that, Lillian achieved her aim, the corners of her mouth hinting at a dark satisfaction..

Chapter 175

Inside the police station, Brielle was diligently answering an officer's questions.

She had handed over Sophia's photo to the authorities, hoping they could glean some clues about her whereabouts from the

background scenery.

The police quickly got in touch with the Rowland family and forwarded them the photograph.

Since it was Brielle's lead, she wasn't excluded from the conversation with the Rowland family.

The one who answered the phone was Tessa. Upon hearing it was Brielle's photo, her first response was, "Why haven't you

arrested Brielle?"

The officer, caught off guard, glanced reflexively at Brielle and replied somewhat defensively. "Ms. Tessa, you might have

misunderstood. It was Miss Brielle who provided the photo, and she is the kidnapper's next target."

"Officer, you say Brielle is the next target, but what connection does she have with my cousin? If the kidnapper's motive is to

abduct wealthy young ladies, then Brielle certainly wouldn't be on their list. Besides, everyone knows there's bad blood between

Sophia and Brielle, and it was at last night's banquet that Sophia disappeared. Everyone is fully aware of how Brielle strutted

around at the banquet."

Tessa's tone was full of conviction, "Brielle is the most likely suspect for Sophia's abduction. If you don't arrest her, I'll take this to

court and have a subpoena delivered to her doorstep."

The officer was at a loss for words, unprepared for such a blunt accusation from the Rowland family.

Brielle took the phone from the officer, "Ms. Tessa, if the subpoena reaches me, I'll surely sign my name neatly. I hope you keep

your word."

Tessa hadn't expected Brielle to be there, let alone overhear her.

Feeling a touch of embarrassment, Tessa's voice chilled, "Do you know who you're speaking to?"

In the social circles of Beaconsfield, Tessa held considerable sway, which was why Tiffanie had advised Brielle not to cross her.

Tessa had a loyal hound in Andrew, ready to clear any obstacle at her whim.

Except for a few teenage years when health issues almost relegated her to the countryside. Tessa had always been at the center

of social circles, never before subjected to such mockery. Stunned by Brielle's retort, Tessa was momentarily speechless. By the

time she composed a reply, the line had gone dead.

It was like punching into a cushion—frustrating and unsatisfying.

Coughing in irritation and clenching her teeth, Tessa glared at her phone.

Sophia was right; Brielle was indeed infuriating.

After hanging up, Brielle looked up at the officer, “Sorry about that, the call dropped. I’ve finished giving my statement. Can I go

home now? The police will be keeping watch around my apartment, right?”

The officer nodded, “Don’t worry, our colleagues will be on the lookout for any suspicious individuals near your residence.”

Brielle sighed in relief, then remembered she should probably call Dorsey International to inform them. Instead of being on a

business trip, she found herself at the police station.

Until the kidnapping issue was resolved, her personal safety couldn’t be guaranteed. For now, she had to set aside the matter of

the business trip.

She decided to text Max, briefly explaining that an urgent matter had come up and her trip would be postponed.

There was no immediate reply from Max, but Brielle didn’t linger on it.

On the ride back to her apartment in the police car, her phone pinged with a news alert about Max.

-The Dorsey family in talks with the Barnes family over a significant matter? Speculations. arise about a potential marriage.

The headline was clear-cut, accompanied by photos of Max’s car at the airport and him. chatting with Jose Barnes.

As the premier family of Beaconsfield, the Dorseys were always under media scrutiny. especially when it came to the prospect of

a merger between two wealthy dynasties.

Beneath the article, comments were filled with blessings, sparked by Alivia’s social media post flaunting her rosary and a cryptic

poem hinting at affection for someone.

The comments from netizens were all full of blessings.

[How romantic! Is this what romance looks like between big shots?]

[They've known each other since childhood, true childhood sweethearts, and both graduated from top universities. They're a match made by fate.]

[I'm so jealous of Alivia. She can gaze upon Max up close.]

Chapter 176

Brielle scrolled through the comments and noticed someone had posted a screenshot of Alivia's latest post, featuring a black

rosary bracelet wrapped around her wrist, identical to the beads Max had been seen wearing in several paparazzi shots.

Everyone seemed to be green with envy, but all Brielle could taste was the bitter tang disappointment. of

No wonder he hadn't replied to her texts; he was at the airport, picking up the patriarch of the Barnes family.

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With a sigh, she closed her eyes just as the cop in the front seat said, "Ms. Brielle, we've reached your apartment."

Quickly regaining her composure, Brielle nodded and stepped out of the car, walking towards the building entrance in a daze,

while the officers who had accompanied her lurked nearby.

As soon as Brielle exited the elevator, her front door greeted her with a mess of cigarette butts, and there sat a man on her

doorstep, Spencer, reeking of booze and tobacco, a combination that turned her stomach.

His bloodshot eyes lifted to meet hers, and he staggered to his feet, slurring. "I checked out the charity, and indeed, it was your

donation. Burp."

After belching loudly, he peered at her through bleary eyes, "Lillian's gone off the deep end. I was all set to marry her, but my

mom's had second thoughts, wants me to have another go at convincing you. Brielle, is there any chance for us?"

Brielle couldn't believe his nerve, flinging her door open, "Maybe you should go get your head checked at the hospital first."

She tried to slam the door, but Spencer's hand shot out, bracing against it.

Without hesitation, Brielle pushed back—hard.

“Bang!”

She expected him to recoil, but he didn't, wincing as his hand visibly swelled.

A pang of regret hit her, and she pulled the door open, “What the hell do you want, Spencer? Our engagement is off. I'm not

playing house with you.”

Spencer's eyes were bloodshot, and he couldn't help but grab her hand. He had no idea what he was doing, thinking it was all a

dream. Even in his dreams, Brielle was so heartless.

Blind with frustration, he barged in, pinning her against the wall..

Brielle felt her insides jolt, and instinctively, her foot shot out into his stomach.

Spencer doubled over, his face turning a shade paler with pain.

The agony snapped him back to reality, and he looked around, realizing this was Brielle's room. He remembered coming to

Brielle's apartment, feeling upset, so he smoked a few extra cigarettes.

“Bri.”

He called out, staggering to his feet and lunging forward, collapsing both of them onto the couch.

Before Brielle could react, the sound of camera shutters filled the air from the doorway.

“Click—click!”

Caught in this compromising position, they were snapped in a series of shots.

Brielle shoved Spencer away, ready to chase the paparazzi hiding in the shadows, b

ut Spencer wrapped his arms around her waist from behind. “The stuff I said at the party, all nonsense. I'm sorry.”

Tears rimmed his eyes as he bit his lip. “I apologize.”

Shaking with fury, Brielle wondered who had sent the photographer. What was the angle? Did the gossip from the Haywood

family's party leak, and now the media was prying into high society secrets, tailing Spencer for some juicy scandal?

Teeth clenched, her heart pounding, she pointed to the door, "Get out."

Silent, Spencer felt humiliated. He had apologized, wasn't that enough?

"Brielle, 1--"

"I said leave. You better find that photographer and stop those photos from going viral. I refuse to be tabloid fodder with you."

Lips pressed into a thin line, Spencer's eyes danced with resentment.

Sharing the news with him was that shameful?

His cheek burned with both pain and embarrassment.

Dizzily, he staggered out, and at the building entrance, the photographer approached, handing over the camera with deference.

"Mr. Spencer, are these shots to your liking? Should I splash them across the front page?"

So, it was Spencer who had planned this.

A satisfied smile curled his lips as he reviewed the images capturing Brielle beneath him, artfully taken.

"Publish these," he instructed, his voice cold, "I will transfer the payment later. Send these photos to a few groups, and spin it as

an old flame rekindling."

Chapter 177

The reporter nodded with satisfaction, pulling out his smartphone to display his account.

A hefty sum of ten thousand dollars swiftly landed in his account. He dove into a few online forums and, true to his word, shared

the photos far and wide.

Meanwhile, Spencer sat numbly in his car, staring blankly at the palm of his hand where he could still feel the lingering warmth of

Brielle's touch.

Over the years, Spencer and Brielle hadn't been close. There were no hugs, no kisses, none of the usual couple's intimacies had

passed between them.

When he had pinned her down earlier, he was struck by the vividness of her expression.

But the thought of her showing that face to other men made Spencer's stomach turn.

Brielle's performance at the banquet embarrassed him greatly, and he was determined to retaliate. That was why he deliberately

orchestrated this scene.

Brielle's eagerness to sever ties only made Spencer more determined to keep her entangled in his life.

As for Lillian, a little sweet-talk would smooth things over.

His mother was right: Lillian's reputation was tarnished, and his grandfather wouldn't allow him to be entangled with a woman of

her standing. He just couldn't let her go.

If he could keep Lillian, why couldn't he do the same for Brielle?

With Brielle's history with men, what was one more to her? And after all these years without any real intimacy between them, he

felt owed.

He was sure Brielle would come crawling back to him in tears.

Back at her apartment, Brielle bolted her door with shaking hands, her head pounding with rage and distress.

She hadn't eaten much at the banquet last night and had missed breakfast this morning. Spencer's outburst left her stomach in

knots, and she rushed to the bathroom.

All she could bring up was bile, and cold sweat broke out across her forehead. She stumbled back to the couch, the room

spinning before her eyes.

She felt like she was paying for some past-life debt to Spencer.

Clutching her phone, she tried to dial for an ambulance, but her vision blurred, and her hands shook too much to see whom she

was calling. Overcome with pain, she passed out.

The Dorsey family home was bustling with excitement. Michael and Jose had returned from their vacation, and it was the perfect

occasion for a family dinner, a gathering of generations.

Max was pulled away from overtime at the office by a call from Michael.

14:11

With Jose staying for dinner, it was only proper for the younger family members, including Max. to join.

Other relatives rushed to the residence, even including Ryan, recently stripped of his position, who hoped to leave a good

impression on the family elder..

Max, finishing a work call, was about to step into the hall when his phone buzzed again.

Inside the house, the voices of the two old gentlemen conversing could be heard, along with the compliments from the younger

generation. He heard someone call his name and reflexively attempted to hang up the phone.

However, the screen flashed Brielle's name.

Pausing. Max stepped aside. "What's up?"

There was no response, just an intermittent breathing and a muffled groan of distress.

Without a second thought, Max headed out, the servant who had opened the door for him only catching a glimpse of his

retreating back and calling out, "Where are you off to, sir?"

But by then. Max was gone.

He

p got into the car and had someone locate Brielle's phone. When he found out she was at her apartment, he sighed in relief and

stepped on the gas.

Max rarely drove himself, but this time, he pushed the speed to the maximum. After reaching. the building, he saw the

neighboring lady again in the corridor.

Seeing him, her eyes lit up.

"Oh, it's you! Still caught up with Brielle, huh? Remember that kid I told you about? I've got a picture, she's a real cutie."

Chapter 178

She had wanted to approach him further, but Max's countenance was so ice-cold that it made. her shrink back, scurrying into

her own room.

“Brielle?”

Max tapped on the door and rang the doorbell several times.

Amidst a groggy haze, Brielle thought she heard her name being called.

A burning pain seared through her stomach as she slowly awoke, hearing the doorbell and Max’s voice, mistaking them for

auditory hallucinations.

Shouldn’t he have returned to the Dorsey family manor by now? And wouldn’t the Dorsey household be buzzing with activity

tonight?

Brielle frowned, feeling as though her blood was freezing over, unsure if it was due to the drop in temperature or the chill in her

heart.

“Brielle!”

The urgency in the man’s voice helped her realize that it wasn’t her imagination.

Struggling to her feet, she made her way to the door and opened it.

Max’s face tightened at the sight of her pale complexion and bloodstained lips. “Stomachache?”

She nodded, her eyelashes fluttering with drops of sweat rolling down.

Max scooped her up in his arms and carried her straight to the elevator.

Brielle rested against his chest, listening to his racing heartbeat, and slowly closed her eyes.

The elevator came to a halt at the ground floor. Max carried her out, placing her gently in the passenger seat and leaned over to

buckle her up.

Brielle leaned her head back, hand over her stomach, hoping the position might alleviate some of the pain.

After securing the seatbelt, Max moved to the driver’s side. “What caused the stomachache?”

Of course, Brielle did not want to admit it was Spencer who had upset her, and just thinking about the whole affair made her feel

irritable. She was also worried about those photographs. making their way around.

“I forgot to eat.”

“Is the salary I give you worth all this, Ms. Brielle?”

Max's sarcasm wasn't new to her. Brielle pursed her lips, her chest tight with anger and eyes brimming with tears, her hand at

her side clenched slowly.

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14:11

Max frowned. Seeing that they had already reached the hospital, he parked the car and considered carrying her inside.

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ut Brielle pushed him away, trudging up the nearby staircase with labored breaths.

Max stood rooted for a few seconds before following. "Are you angry?"

His voice carried a hint of confusion, as he reached out to her again.

"I can go by myself. I can't afford to waste Mr. Dorsey's precious time. I'll also take a few days off. The business trip will have to

be postponed."

As Max watched her retreating figure, he couldn't help but find her behavior slightly amusing.

The elevator was right there, but because it was too close to him, Brielle had chosen the stairs. her silhouette exuding steam in

her frustration.

Max stood in place for a moment before slowly following her. "Why take the stairs when there's an elevator?"

A few steps up, and Brielle already regretted her decision. Each rise of her foot sent sharp jabs of pain through her stomach, yet

turning back to the elevator now would be too humiliating.

Her hand gripped the railing, slick with sweat, her face turning even paler.

"Don't worry about me."

She attempted to ascend further, but Max swept her up in his arms and carried her up two flights of stairs.

Brielle's heart raced uncontrollably, but eventually, she succumbed to the exhaustion and fell silent.

While the doctor examined her, Max was standing by the window.

Brielle didn't look at him until the IV needle pierced her hand, causing her to flinch in pain.

The doctor wiped the sweat from his forehead, feeling the pressure of Max's gaze upon him.

"Mr. Dorsey, she should be fine after the IV. Ms. Brielle's constitution is rather weak. She should eat regularly and avoid spicy

food in the future."

Max looked up, his gaze settling on Brielle. "Did you hear that, Brielle?"

For some reason, Brielle felt a wave of mortification and looked down, as if she were a child being reprimanded by the

headmaster.

She gritted her teeth and muttered, "I know."

"You know, and yet you end up in the hospital?"

Brielle fell silent, her heart squeezed tight with indignation.

Chapter 179

The doctor, sensing the tension between the two, scurried out of the ward room, making sure to close the door behind him.

Max approached, his own mood darkening.

Only he knew the anxiety that came with receiving such a call, speeding through red lights all the way here.

He had never lost his composure like this before.

The moment Brielle opened the door, his heart had jumped into his throat. Only when he heard her voice did his tense muscles

start to unwind.

He tried to rationalize why he was feeling this way.

Then, he thought about dopamine.

At rest, dopamine fires at three to five times a second, but when excited, its firing rate can surge to twenty to thirty times a

second.

When the anticipated outcome doesn't materialize, dopamine firing can drop to zero. It's a lousy feeling, one that can provoke

irritation, J

ust like he was feeling now.

What was he expecting? For Brielle to be safe and sound, or was it something else?

He didn't know, but right now, looking at her, he felt a deep sense of tranquility.

Brielle, with her eyes red from anger, looked endearingly cute.

Whether it was her clear-headedness, her sensibility, or her slight temper, it all made his heart flutter.

What was this feeling?

He couldn't understand.

There was a knock on the door, and someone walked in, bringing with them the delicious aroma of food.

The person dressed in a chef's outfit placed the meal tray on the table, nodded respectfully to Max, and then exited the room.

Max lifted the lid, revealing a selection of delicate, light dishes, and a bowl of soup.

He picked up a spoon and stirred the soup, blowing on it gently.

Brielle tensed up instantly. She remembered back at Premier Palace, Max had seemed intent on taking care of her, but due to

her outspoken comment, it ended up being a servant who fed her.

Now, with no servants around, was Max going to feed her himself?

She held her breath, swallowed hard, her hands clenched into fists under the blanket, and a sheen of sweat formed on her back.

Max held the spoon to her lips, his movements stiff and inexperienced, "Eat.

His tone wasn't particularly tender, but it wasn't indifferent either.

Brielle opened her mouth, feeling as if the soup tasted sweet.

Max took a fork and carefully picked up some food, holding it under her lips.

Stunned by the gesture, Brielle opened her mouth and ate it as soon as she saw his impatience growing.

One spoonful of porridge, one bite of food, he arranged it all so smoothly.

The warmth filled Brielle's aching stomach, soothing the pain.

Neither of them spoke..

The atmosphere seemed to grow cozy, but this coziness was swiftly interrupted, as ephemeral as a few fleeting seconds.

Max's phone rang. He hit the speaker button and placed it aside, continuing to stir the soup. "Dad."

He called out, spooning more soup to Brielle.

Brielle, now sweating from nerves, didn't dare open her mouth, but also feared that Max might say something else, so she waved

her hand, indicating she was full.

The authoritative voice of Michael came through the phone, "Max, everyone was here today. why did you leave?"

"There was an urgent matter at work. Please apologize to Jose for me."

Michael glanced around at the seated family members, feeling a twinge of disappointment, "What urgent matter? I just called

Patrick, and you weren't at the office. Were you working overtime at Premier Palace?"

It was an accusation.

Chapter 180

Max set down his spoon and picked up a napkin from the table, gently wiping the corner of Brielle's mouth.

Brielle flinched away as if Michael was watching right beside them, her whole body tense with discomfort.

Her evasion only made Max's gaze grow more intense. He caught her chin in his hand, his words directed to Michael though he

wasn't there.

"Not at Premier Palace."

"Then where are you?"

Brielle's pupils contracted, a shiver running through her as she saw the displeasure spread across his face. She bit her lower lip,

a mixture of excitement, tension, and panic swirling in her chest.

Max took a few seconds to savor her expression, his eyes twinkling with amusement, "I'm at the hospital with..."

Before he could finish. Brielle's lips met his, sealing them shut.

Her action was almost reflexive, spurred by her frantic state.

Michael's voice echoed in his ear.

“What are you doing at the hospital? Are you not feeling well?”

Max, which hospital are you at? I’ll send someone to look after you.”

Brielle’s lips quivered against his, her eyelashes fluttering with anxiety.

Max found himself charmed, he gently bit her lip, savoring the moment.

Heat flooded Brielle’s cheeks, and she wanted to retreat but couldn’t, her hands tensed to the point where the IV in her arm

began to show traces of blood backflow.

Max finally let her go, then replied to Michael.

“No need, it’s a minor issue. I’ll be there soon.”

“That’s good to hear. You’re busy all year round, never taking care of yourself, nor settling down. When you give me a grandchild

to hold, I wouldn’t need to constantly remind you over the phone. Since Jose is here tonight, let’s discuss your and Alivia’s

situation in detail. Anyway, come back soon, dinner’s almost ready. Don’t keep us waiting.”

“Yeah.”

Max ended the call and turned to Brielle. “I’ll have someone come take care of you.”

The hospital room fell silent. As he stood to leave, his coat was tugged at.

Brielle looked up at him, her grip loosening only after a long moment, “No need, I’ll go home once the drip is done.”

“You’re staying for two days. It’s necessary.

Max looked at his crumpled coat, his tone softening. “Don’t want to stay?”

Brielle nodded. She indeed disliked hospitals, and the smell of disinfectant made her uneasy.

During her years with the Haywood family, each hospital stay meant waking up alone to white walls, a setting that triggered

anxiety.

Moreover, Max was headed to the Dorsey family estate to discuss his marriage to Alivia with the Barnes family.

How much longer could their relationship last?

She felt like a condemned prisoner awaiting execution.

"If you don't want to stay, then go to Premier Palace. I'll have Patrick pick you up."

"I want to go back to my apartment."

Brielle's eyes dropped.

Her stomach wasn't in pain, but her heart began to ache.

Her face grew paler, fragile in its beauty, as if it might shatter at a touch.

"Brielle, what are you really thinking about?"

Max stepped closer, bending down to look at her.

He was unbeatable in the business world but clueless about the intricacies of a woman's heart. Brielle felt weary, leaning back

against the bedpost. She closed her eyes and said, "Mr. Dorsey. should our relationship come to an end?"

Max stood by the bed, a sharp sting piercing his heart.

He frowned, a surge of inexplicable irritation welling up inside.

He had imagined a thousand scenarios of what she might say next.

Perhaps – Will you stay with me at the hospital?

Could you not discuss marriage plans with the Barnes family?

If she just looked up at him with teary eyes and asked, he would surely relent, b

ut he never expected her to say this.

Indeed, Brielle was always so clear-headed.

He was probably the only one not thinking clearly.

seeing her all pale and frail, Max couldn't bear to be angry, pretending indifference as he turned away.

"You want to end it?"

It took all her strength for Brielle to nod faintly, as if hearing the sound of her heart breaking.

A chill flashed across Max's eyes. At the door, he left only one sentence. "We'll see."

With that, he left without hesitation.

He walked stiffly to the elevator, kicking a trash can along the way.

It was hard to imagine such a normally reserved man showing such a childish side.

Max felt suffocated. Today the elevator seemed exceptionally stifling, as if he could hardly breathe.

Was it because the weather had turned gloomy?