

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

### **Chapter 21**

#### Chapter 21

The threat in his words sent a shiver down Brielle's spine. She was facing a man who had long held power, whose presence was so commanding it could make her tremble.

Instinctively, she leaned closer to Max, and when they were finally alone in the booth, she swallowed hard, her voice laced with anxiety, "Uncle Max, you'll talk him out of it, right?"

The marks on her neck were still visible under the dim lights, hinting at a possibility of sensuality.

Brielle wouldn't mind if something happened between them in this private booth. After all, the privacy here was impeccable, and she doubted any waiter would come in to interrupt.

She reached out, her hand seeking warmth, but all she found was the cold glass of her drink.

"Go back," he said, his gaze indifferent as he draped his suit jacket over her shoulders again, "Stay out of Andrew and Aubree's business."

The implication was clear-if she meddled and something happened, he might not intervene. Knowing Andrew, he was capable of anything.

Brielle pushed down a twinge of frustration and looked up at him, "Andrew is engaged to Tessa, and he and Aubree are technically siblings. What kind of relationship is that? If Andrew's influence on Aubree is inevitable, then Aubree's feelings for him are either hate or love. Clearly, it's the latter. I don't want my friend to get hurt."

She had imagined many responses from Max, but none as cold as his next words.

“Phenylacetic acid, dopamine-when people interact, they release a cocktail of hormones that create the illusion of love.”

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His emotionless analysis came off as if he were a deity, observing the world's entanglements as nothing more than fleeting distractions. Brielle was overcome with a chill. She knew Aubree all too well. Usually full of passion and allure, Aubree would only soften and pull in her sharp edges when she was around Andrew. If she wasn't in love with him, she wouldn't show such humility.

What Brielle hadn't anticipated was Max's own rationality-his complete disbelief in love's existence.

“If love is just an illusion, then why do people get married?”

She was desperate to find examples to counter his point, but Max remained unfazed. “It's oxytocin and vasopressin at work. Even our connection is simply a result of testosterone,” he explained.

Speechless, Brielle felt a cold draft sweep through her. In a sudden move, she grabbed his tie and pushed him down onto the couch. She didn't know why she did it, but when she.

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kissed him, she felt a little solace in her heart.

Biting down on his collarbone, she licked the beads of blood that surfaced, “Uncle Max, did you study economics and psychology?”

Max tilted his neck slightly, his hand cradling the back of her head, facilitating her nipping. “Economics and law. Psychology was a minor.

He had touched upon three disciplines that advocated absolute rationality.

“And now, what do you think is influencing us?” She deliberately tilted her head back, both hands hooked around his neck, with sultry eyes.

Max's fingers traced her lips gently. Her face was beautiful, with eyes shaped like petals, which were cold when not smiling, but disarmingly charming with a grin.

“Dopamine.” The initial passion all came from dopamine, but dopamine didn’t last long. From its perspective, possession was dull, and relationships built on dopamine were an exciting yet short-lived roller-coaster ride.

Watching the asceticism on his face waver slightly at her advance, something stirred in Brielle.

“Uncle Max, you don’t have a fiancée, do you?”

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## Chapter 22

### Chapter 22

She had no intention of becoming the other woman in anyone’s story.

Who Max held as his cherished memory was none of her business. Her aim was clear: she wanted to get back at a few members of the Dorsey family through Max. And she had to admit, getting tangled up with a guy like Max was no loss.

The Priest sometimes showed mercy to the mortal women, and the way he mingled with the mundane was truly thrilling. To outsiders, he personified frost, but in bed, he was a different man.

Brielle was worldly in her own ways, and after Max had laid out his theories, she found herself more drawn to him than ever. Knowledge was the highest form of allure, and every word he spoke seemed to entice her.

And in Max’s eyes, her gaze was just as inviting. What happened next came naturally.

When it ended, Brielle fell asleep in his arms. Both of their phones were buzzing with notifications, but they were ignored.

The marks on her neck hadn't faded before new ones were added.

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"Uncle Max," she said, her cheeks flushed, shedding her usual decisiveness and clarity, "The oxytocin and vasopressin you mentioned, they provide a long-lasting sense of happiness. Although dopamine is fleeting, it can draw people into a relationship filled with passionate commitment. That's the reason why people choose to get married."

She hadn't forgotten her earlier query, murmuring before she fell asleep, "I'm not like you. believe love isn't an illusion but an instinct. Some are born with it, while others will never

experience it."

Max looked down at her and couldn't resist leaving a faint kiss on her lips. "You might be right," he conceded.

When Brielle awoke, it was already noon the next day in her familiar apartment. Her phone was flooded with missed calls-from Lucinda, her colleagues, and one from Tanner.

Tanner had called just once, probably having heard about her resignation, so he was checking in as a formality.

Brielle remembered her unfinished business with Integral Elements Inc.-that wasn't something she could just walk away from.

She dialed Tanner's number.

"Ms. Brielle," Tanner's voice was unexpectedly warm. "Heard you left Dorsey International. Found a new gig yet?"

Without that sincere prospectus, Tanner wasn't keen on collaborating with Dorsey

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International. Brielle, however, was someone he wanted on his team.

Brielle found it amusing. “How did this morning’s negotiation go, Mr. Tanner

Tanner knew all the ins and outs of the business world and was aware she was setting trap. Even though she had included him in her schemes, he admired her for it and didn’t take offense, “Mr. Spencer and Ms. Lucinda still have much to learn, it seems.”

It looked like those two hadn’t had much success today. After all, Tanner was the sole architect behind Integral Elements Inc., a veteran of the business battlefield, not someone Spencer could easily handle.

“Mr. Tanner, the terms we discussed last time are still on the table. I’ll come to sign the contract myself, but I need to push the date back three days. Once I’ve secured the position of department head, I’ll contact you personally.”

“Ms. Brielle, you’re twenty-three this year. Aspiring to a director’s chair is a bit of a stretch, isn’t it?”

Brielle had joined Dorsey International right after graduation, amounting to only three years of work experience. Even at another company, she’d be considered a senior employee at best, let alone at the fiercely competitive Dorsey International.

How cutthroat was Dorsey International? On his first day, Max implemented a racehorse. mechanism for all departments and teams. Whether it was the staff or the products, everyone was put on the same starting line to compete, and Dorsey International would allocate resources according to the rankings.

This survival of the fittest theory kept everyone on their toes, and though those ousted by Dorsey International were hot commodities elsewhere, no one wanted to be the one who failed in such an elite gathering.

So for Brielle to aim for a director’s role at such a young age was almost a fantasy. Even if she was talented, the management wouldn’t agree.

Nothing was absolute, so Brielle didn’t talk too much for fear it would be off-putting. What always moved a man like Tanner was capability and sincerity.

“Mr. Tanner, I’ve read your early interviews. I wonder who influenced you five years ago when Integral Elements Inc. shifted from manufacturing components to establishing a tech talent agency, and started collaborating with several educational companies to create two large private schools aimed

at nurturing talent for Integral Elements Inc. It was an open innovation move, yet the company's market value has been dropping every year."

This was Tanner's sore point. When a company reached its peak, it sought innovation. Everyone agreed with the decision at the time, but it led to disaster, leaving the company in a position where it needed to be acquired.

"Ms. Brielle, anyone can find out what you mentioned with a little research. It just shows

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## Chapter 23

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"Developing new products called for fresh components, and back in the day, what you called innovation was siphoning off resources from other parts of Integral Elements Inc., causing the original production lines to operate below capacity. Plus, you went ahead and splurged on some fancy new production machinery, which sent costs skyrocketing and profits tumbling down. Open innovation turned into a pretty facade for haphazard experimentation. Quality parts, that's where Integral Elements Inc. really shines. You're on Dorsey International's radar because of that unwavering quality. But aiming for the untapped education market? You strayed from your main game five years ago.

Brielle's voice was steady, her fingers tapping lightly on her laptop, filled with all the data she'd compiled for Integral Elements Inc.

“Mr. Tanner, you should know that if someone opens a burger joint in a small town, the business model isn’t one-size-fits-all. Because if that person tries to set up shop in another town, there’s a good chance they’ll find another burger joint already flipping patties, and suddenly there’s nothing special about the original place. It’s the uniqueness that’s the real deal.”

“Mr. Tanner, the initial interview was very enlightening for me. The reporter asked you a question about the business boundaries of Integral Elements Inc. Do you recall that?”

It was the company’s first brush with the press. Tanner was a self-made man, riding high

at the time.

How had he responded? He said too many folks focused on boundaries, not the core.

“If you picture boundaries as gravity, every object, by virtue of its mass, creates gravity. affecting every other bit of matter. The difference is-the farther from the core, the less the pull. Or, if its own mass is small, the weaker its influence. Everything’s boundless, so I don’t believe in setting limits. As long as the core is solid, I’ll make it.”

Back then, he put such stock in a company’s core, but success can blind you. After many years, for the first time, someone reminded him so clearly that he had forgotten his original intentions.

A flicker of realization and amazement crossed Tanner’s eyes before he finally asked, “Ms. Brielle, when do you take the helm?”

She smiled. “If all goes well, next week.”

“Then here’s to a fruitful collaboration.”

After the call, Brielle let out a sigh of relief. She brewed herself a coffee, her phone chiming with a bank transfer notification. The funds had gone to charity, leaving her account just shy of twenty grand.

Material things never mattered much to her. Other than her modest apartment, she’d given

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everything to charity.

The head of Sunflower Children's Home had been like a father to her, having rescued her when she was on the brink of starvation. He'd paid out of pocket for her hospital bills, which led to a costly divorce.

Brielle always felt indebted, so most of her paycheck went to living expenses and the rest to the Sunflower Children's Home.

years, she hadn't

Her salary from Dorsey International was decent, but even after three years indulged in luxuries.

A reminder on her phone showed today was Miranda's birthday. Having lived with the Haywood family for over a decade, it was still necessary to buy gifts, but even if she spent the whole twenty grand, Miranda probably wouldn't bat an eyelash.

Brielle decided to get crafty. She changed clothes and headed out to the supermarket for baking supplies, planning to whip up a birthday cake herself.

Miranda had a sweet tooth but always fretted over calories, so Brielle picked low-calorie options for the cake.

Just as she finished the cake, her phone rang. It was Robert. "Bri, where you at? Lillian's getting hungry."

It seemed that Lillian would also be at the family dinner tonight.

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## Chapter 24

### Chapter 24

Lillian had always been a staple at every major family gathering, her presence as expected as the turkey on Thanksgiving.

Brielle suddenly lost her appetite for the outing. I'm swamped with work, Dad. I'll have someone drop off the cake."

Robert glanced at Spencer sitting across from him. Spencer was seated next to Lillian, and his complexion didn't look very good.

That morning's negotiation with Integral Elements Inc. had been a battlefield, with Tanner sparing no one's feelings, his sharp tongue rattling the upper echelons of management. If it hadn't been for the protective wing of Spencer's father, Max would have gotten wind of it by now.

And that-Tanner, he had the gall to dress down the whole M&A department like they were rookies. He was just small company's man. Where did his audacity even come from?

It all came back to Brielle.

Spencer was holding his rage, and with Brielle not answering his calls, he planned to take it out on her as soon as she showed up.

However, Brielle was a no-show, and now with Robert's remark, "Bri's caught up at work. She'll probably be late," the Haywood family seemed to be still in the dark about her resignation.

Sarcasm covered Spencer's face as he leaned back, the front legs of his chair already dangling in the air. "Working late? What job does she have to work late at? I've already fired her. She just doesn't want to come, does she?"

His words frosted the atmosphere.

First it was Lillian, her face shadowed by disappointment, instinctively leaning towards Cameron as if to distance herself from Spencer.

“Bri’s still mad at me. I’m sorry, Miranda, that your birthday has been soured by this.”

Miranda was trembling with indignation. Her own daughter made up excuses to skip her birthday! And with Spencer there, she felt utterly humiliated.

She bit back her anger, pulling out her phone and calling Brielle on the spot.

Without pleasantries, Miranda cut to the chase, “Spencer’s here, and why didn’t you tell us you’re not at Dorsey International anymore? What’s gotten into you lately, Bri? Are you trying to break our hearts?”

Parents never admitted to playing favorites, especially not when the favorite was an outsider.

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“I don’t care what you’re doing. Get over here now!” And with that, Miranda hung up before Brielle could even respond.

Looking at the cake she had made herself, Brielle had no choice but to grab it and leave her apartment.

Family ties held her there, a complete fallout was not an option unless the Haywoods crossed a line they hadn’t yet dared.

Back at the Haywood residence, Miranda was seething “Let’s start eating. We can’t wait for her.”

Lillian hesitated before retrieving a cake from the fridge. “Miranda, I made this myself, your favorite chestnut flavor.”

Miranda’s mood softened at the sight of Lillian, “Bless you, Lillian, always so thoughtful

Lillian offered a tight-lipped smile, glancing at Spencer and then at Cameron, whose usually brooding demeanor softened under her gaze.

The sound of a car came from outside the door. It was Brielle’s mid-range sedan.

She was quick to enter, holding the cake. Seeing the family gathered cheerfully at the table, she felt like an intruder.

“Dad, Mom, Cameron, she called out as if she hadn’t noticed Spencer and Lillian.

With a cake already on the table, she handed hers to the housekeeper. “Put this in the fridge, please.”

The per had been working for the Haywood family for over a decade, skilled at reading the room. As her grip loosened, the cake fell to the ground. The cake Brielle had spent hours on crumbled to pieces.

Brielle gave the housekeeper a nonchalant look.

The housekeeper’s eyes flashed contemptuously, “Miss, that cake must’ve cost a pretty penny, huh?”

Before Brielle could reply, Miranda launched into a tirade. “No matter the cost, does it have the sincerity of a homemade one? Lillian even chose my favorite flavor. You come home dragging your feet, and you even pretend not to see your sister and fiancé. I’m starting to wonder if you’ve been possessed.”

The old Brielle had been so compliant.

Then Miranda thought of that diary. It seemed to Miranda that Brielle had only been pretending all along, and now she didn’t even care to maintain the facade.

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## Chapter 25

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Bricite took a deep breath, the tension in the room palpable-like she'd crashed a private party. She felt like an unwelcome guest, her presence a hard pill to swallow for some.

She should leave, but she didn't. Instead, she picked a spot, sat down, and breezed, "Mom, happy birthday. Looks like we the Haywoods might just have double the reason to celebrate tonight."

Miranda's face was a mask of frost, her annoyance clear at the sight of her daughter. Belle's next words rooted her to the spot.

Cameron, isn't it time to make things official with Lillian? I saw you two hugging three years ago. Surely, you haven't let her slip away, have you?"

Cameron was taken aback. Brielle was the last person he expected to bring this up. After Lall, Lisa had made it clear that the idea of her best friend becoming her sister-in-law

msde Brielle queasy.

itice mood around the table shifted. Miranda's face lit up as she gaped in disbelief. Lillian was such a wonderful person, entirely deserving of her son. If they got married, Lillian would officially be part of the Haywood fold.

intCameron you and Lillian, are you really..."

avinands was over the moon, as if she wanted to drag the couple to the registry office right

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haunt anticipated their relationship being thrust into the spotli beeper many since Lillian hadn't given him a definitive answer yet. Brielle's A amed mer heardie perfect opportunity to make things official.

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lon clenched het hementnmmerally cursing Brielle for meddling.

Crosy tamtitch!

pping rod bombonbilet pohooned the weight on Brielle's chest. While the others lost their bette, here seemed now have proved. She lowered her head to cut into the steak and ikea sip of red wett/GentCranston congrats on the upcorning nuptials. You two are al Ich made in heaven,iven

meron had never seen isinils in couch a favorable light. His gaze softened as he looked Libian. "Lillian what do role thank think?"

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Lillian bit her lip as tears fell. To Cameron, they were tears of joy. To Spencer, they were tears of a woman cornered and in distress.

Brielle smirked, seeing right through the act. Classic. Always the damsel. Lillian never needed to step forward herself. She could resolve everything by hiding behind others. Her manipulation was top-notch; no wonder she had men wrapped around her finger.

"Lillian, if you don't fancy my brother, just cut him loose. What's with the tears? Are you overwhelmed or just playing the victim? Or, is it that you've got a better offer?"

Before the words had fully left her mouth, Spencer stood up, his patience at its end. "Enough, Brielle! Back off!"

Brielle took another delicate sip of her wine, all nonchalance. "Why so defensive? Cam's cool. What's got your gears grinding?"

This was Haywood territory, and any overt reaction from Spencer would be as good as a confession to the observant eyes around them. Spencer stiffened, itching to take a piece out of Brielle.

Brielle, eyes on Cameron, feigned wholehearted support, “Cameron, I’m totally on board with this future sister-in-law of mine. Go for it.

Cameron frowned, puzzled at Lillian’s silence.

Lillian knew she had to speak up or the night would end in disaster. Her lips trembled. “Cameron, I’m grateful for your care. Miranda, you’ve been wonderful to me, and Robert, you too. I consider you all family. This proposal is so sudden, I’m just not prepal

She trailed off, unable to articulate her true feelings. Her words were all nonser ambiguous and vague, yet they gave Cameron a glimmer of hope.

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