

## Master 261

### Chapter 261

Brielle's eyes narrowed, a flicker of panic passing through them. How on earth did Lillian find out about this? Was she followed

by Lillian last night? This was trouble, big trouble.

Noticing Brielle's momentary daze, Lillian let out a derisive snort. "So, what's this? Did I hit the nail on the head? Did you really

stash Spencer away somewhere? Just imagine if I spill the beans to the Dorseys. What do you think they'll do to you?"

"Do you have any proof?"

"Of course, I do." Lillian boasted. "I've got photos of you two from the moment you met until you went into that room. Spencer's

disappearance is all tied to you, sweetheart. Just you wait, I'm sending these pictures to Faith right now."

Lillian whipped out her smartphone, the malice in her eyes almost spilling over. Lady Luck was on her side; Brielle was somehow

embroiled in Spencer's abduction.

Already tapping away, Lillian was about to send the message when a sudden force hit and her phone flew out of her hands.

Looking up in disbelief, she met the gaze of a determined Brielle. "Brielle, you!" Her words were cut short as Brielle kicked the

phone into the lobby's ornamental fountain. With a little plop, the phone disappeared beneath the water's surface.

"Brielle!" Lillian's eyes blazed with fury as she stormed forward, her hand raised to strike. But the lobby's security, already on

alert thanks to the manager's signal, stepped in and held her back.

Lillian trembled with rage, "How dare you destroy my phone! Have you lost your mind?!"

Brielle seemed unfazed by the outburst and instead offered a smirk, "I suppose the driver who hit me was bribed by you, huh?"

I've got solid proof, so you might want to save some energy for your chat with the cops."

Lillian scoffed, "The driver was drunk. What's that got to do with me?"

“You transferred that million bucks from an account in your own name. Now tell me, how foolish can you be?”

Lillian froze, her complexion turning as pale as a ghost. That account had never been a problem over the years, to the point

where she had completely forgotten that it was registered under her real name. Damn it! How could she have overlooked that?

The lobby manager approached Brielle with a respectful demeanor, “Ms. Brielle, what seems to be the issue here?”

Brielle pointed at Lillian, “She’s implicated in a murder-for-hire plot. Could you please call the police and have her taken away?”

Nodding, the manager signaled the security to escort Lillian to the police station.

Lillian began to struggle violently. “Brielle, just you wait. I’ll tell the Dorseys everything. Ryan and Michael won’t let you off the

hook. And Max, even if he’s on your side now, if he finds out you kidnapped his nephew, guess who’ll be the first to turn against

you?”

Brielle frowned, tired of Lillian’s babbling.

Lillian was seething, her mind racing with hatred. It then dawned on her that this was a hotel under the Dorsey International

umbrella. Spencer was a face well-known to the staff here. Moreover, the news of Spencer’s abduction was the talk of the town.

A gleam of triumph flickered in her eyes as she turned to the manager with a sly grin, “You can contact Dorsey International’s

head office, can’t you? Brielle is involved in Spencer’s kidnapping. I have evidence on my phone. Retrieve it, and I can testify

that Brielle was with Spencer last night.”

The manager, who had recognized Lillian as the woman who had stayed in the room next to Brielle’s the previous night, gave her

a look of pity. The CEO was already aware of Brielle’s involvement and had even helped cover it up. This woman thinking of

reporting to the head office was living in a fantasy..

Lillian’s triumphant smile faltered as the manager interrupted her and instructed. “Take her away. To the police station.”

Disbelief washed over Lillian's face; she couldn't understand why her words weren't having the intended effect.

How could they not react? The news of Spencer's kidnapping was public, and she had evidence. As employees of Dorsey

International, how could they be so indifferent?

Desperation gripped Lillian as she began to struggle, her eyes burning with a fierce hatred, fixated on Brielle. She vowed to

herself that the moment she got in touch with the Dorseys. Brielle would be ruined.

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Lillian was manhandled into the police station, and by the time she was seated on the icy metal chair, every inch of her was

shivering with cold, her teeth chattering uncontrollably. Yet, inside, a flame of resentment threatened to engulf her whole being.

Upon hearing the cops call the Haywood family, she leapt from her chair, snatching the mobile phone from an officer's grasp.

Surprise flickered across the officer's face, clearly taken aback by her audacity.

As soon as Lillian saw the number on the screen, she knew exactly who was on the line. Scrambling to marshal her thoughts,

she was desperate to convey everything she knew. "Mom, the whole town's buzzing about Spencer's disappearance, right? Well,

I know where he is. Brielle's got him, she's kidnapped him. You gotta tell Faith, pronto!"

Miranda, on the other end of the line, couldn't believe her ears. Brielle, kidnapping Spencer? Why on earth would Brielle kidnap

Spencer?

"Mom, it's the truth, I swear. Last night, Spencer and Brielle checked into a hotel together, stayed the whole night. He hasn't

come out since. How could he possibly be missing unless Brielle's hiding him somewhere? I even sent pictures to Max, and you

know what? Max blocked me. I think he's blind as a bat, he must not realize his own nephew's been nabbed. You gotta- Her

voice choked off as if something had suddenly blocked her throat. That was right, she had sent so many photos to Max, and

initially, he hadn't blocked her, which meant he received the pictures. With Spencer's disappearance causing such a stir, the

Dorsey family had already filed a police report. Max must be in the loop. He knew this was connected to Brielle, clearer than

anyone else. Yet he remained silent, even went so far as to block her.

Back at the hotel, the manager hadn't misunderstood her; he knew the truth but feigned ignorance, all of them covering for

Brielle. All because between Spencer and Brielle, Max chose Brielle.

Lillian felt a dull ache in her chest, a rage so intense she wanted to carve Brielle into pieces.

How could Brielle be worthy of Max's attention? Could it be that Max had fallen for Brielle?

The thought ignited a destructive fury within her.

What she couldn't have, she would destroy. Never would she allow that wench Brielle to get her hands on it.

"Also, Mom, tell Faith that Brielle is Max's mistress, and they're an item. Max is deliberately overlooking the whole Spencer

kidnapping situation."

Miranda's head was reeling, convinced Lillian had lost her mind. "Lillian, didn't your dad say we shouldn't tell the Dorsey family

just yet? Otherwise--"

"Mom!"

Lillian roared with a mix of despair and anger. "Do you really think Brielle's gonna help us? If she secures Max's heart, she'll turn

on us in a heartbeat. We can't let her get any closer to Max."

Miranda felt utterly panicked, unable to decide. After all, it was Robert who always called the shots in the family. "Lillian, calm

down. I'll get you out of there first, then we can talk, okay?"

Lillian's seething subsided a notch. Of course, she couldn't stay cooped up in the station forever. Even if she were charged with

attempted murder, the Haywood family's wealth would bail her out. She sneered. Did Brielle think she could topple her that

easily? Dream on.

An officer had already wrestled the phone from Lillian and cuffed her hands, cautioning her against further outbursts.

Lillian sneered again. With the Haywood's influence, she'd be out in no time. Just wait and see.

Meanwhile, Brielle had finished dealing with the room card, somewhat surprised that the hotel manager had shown no reaction

to Lillian's outburst.

Frowning, she turned to the always-courteous manager. "About what Lillian just said--"

She probed, only to see the manager give a reassuring smile. "Ms. Brielle, don't worry about that. Mr. Dorsey will take care of

everything."

The manager was implying that Max would keep Spencer well hidden, ensuring the outside world remained oblivious to Brielle's

scheme, effectively protecting her.

However, as the principal involved, Brielle had no clue what Max was doing, so she assumed Max would handle Spencer's

disappearance. After all, Spencer was his nephew, and there was still that familial bond.

Her heart sank even further, convinced now more than ever that she could not let Max find out. "I understand, thank you."

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Weighed down by a heavy heart, she strode out of the grand hall and made her way back to the car, handing the room key over

to Tiffanie.

Catching the key, Tiffanie thumped her chest confidently and proclaimed, "Leave it to me.

Then, turning her gaze to Mason with a sudden softness in her voice, she cooed, "Mason, how about you spend the night with

me, huh?"

Mason furrowed his brows and shoved her face away. "Just focus on driving, will you?"

Tiffanie let out a chuckle, blew him a kiss, and swiveled the steering wheel.

Brielle settled into the back seat and, witnessing this exchange, felt a vein in her forehead might just pop. She wondered how far

their relationship had evolved and whether she should spill the beans about them.

When the car pulled up to Pearl Estate, Brielle bit her lip in hesitation. Mason caught the look on her face and raised an eyebrow,

“Got something on your mind?”

Tiffanie’s gaze followed Mason’s, and Brielle managed a strained smile. “It’s nothing. I’ll treat you to dinner for handling this,

okay?”

Tiffanie nodded and glanced at Aubree in the rearview mirror. “Aubree, you need a lift?”

Being from the same circles. Tiffanie was well-acquainted with Aubree, who had heard plenty about her as well. Aubree glanced

at Brielle’s leg, considering staying to keep her company. but Brielle shook her head, “Don’t worry. I’m fine on my own.”

So Aubree stayed put..

Π

As the evening approached, the streetlights along the sidewalk flickered on. Max lounged on the couch, gazing out the window at

the cityscape bathed in gentle, flickering light, like a trembling mirror.

The phone rang, and as he recognized the name flashing on the screen, he sighed, not having expected the call so soon. With a

respectful tone, he answered, “Father.

There was silence on the other end, just the sound of breathing that seemed to press against the screen, creating a tense

atmosphere. After a long pause, Michael finally let out a sigh. “Max, give me a reason.”

Michael had been a force in the underworld for many years. He had suspected the puppet master behind it all when he heard

Spencer had vanished, last seen near a hotel owned by the Dorsey family. To have someone disappear without a trace from the

surveillance of a Dorsey International hotel meant only one person could be behind it—Max, his most favored son.

Max was the one hiding Spencer, and he needed a reason.

Max tapped his fingers lightly on the couch, his voice steady. “Father, you once taught me that

the head of the Dorsey family doesn't need a reason to take down someone."

Michael had risen to power through ruthless actions and a cold heart. He had always seen potential in Max, who seemed to lack

the emotions common to most people.

That was similar to his younger self—such a person could lead the Dorsey family to new heights. Hence, he had left Max with

those words.

He needed a successor who was calm, cold-blooded, and detached. Max had done well, very well up to this point..

Michael's mood shifted from morose to almost jovial in an instant, even letting out a hearty laugh. Max, still nonchalant, just

fiddled with the phone, unaffected by the shift in emotion.

After a few seconds, Michael exhaled in contentment. "But the kid is your nephew, after all. If he's stepped out of line, a lesson or

two would be enough."

"Father, I am aware. I won't harm him."

"Good. I'll leave this matter to you, Max. I trust you. Don't disappoint me."

The last sentence was a warning.

Though Michael had stepped back from the seat of power years ago, his influence remained strong. Max pressed his lips

together in silence, ended the call, and rubbed his brow.

He could never let his father discover that it was for Brielle that he detained Spencer. In Michael's eyes, Max could confront

someone over power or even money, but never over a woman.

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Max fiddled with his phone, a ripple of emotion flickering in his eyes. With a few swipes, he found Brielle's number and called

her.

Brielle, leaning on her cane, had just reached the bottom of the stairs when her phone rang. Though she had switched phones,

her number remained unchanged, and she pressed the answer button.

"Where are you?" Max's voice was deep, a hint of gravity behind it. Brielle paused, almost instinctively lying. "Just resting at

home."

He sat on the couch, his eyelashes drooping slightly, a tight sensation crossing his heart. "Which home?"

"Pearl Estate. I've been here resting since I got back from Premier Palace."

"You haven't gone out?"

Brielle couldn't grasp why he was prying so much, so she simply went along. "Yeah."

With her cane, she entered the elevator and stopped at her apartment door. Taking out her keys, she unlocked the door.

A man sat on the spacious couch, the breeze from the window causing the curtains to flutter. accentuating his aloof demeanor.

The coolness from his presence seemed to permeate the entire space.

Brielle's steps faltered, and she instinctively took a few steps back. Once she saw who it was. warmth surged through her.

Max. How did he have the keys to this place?

She pursed her lips and silently switched on the lights.

Max twirled the phone in his hand, spinning it lightly on his fingertips.

Brielle felt a tingle in her scalp and stopped on the other side of the room, swallowing hard. "Mr. Dorsey."

Max didn't respond, his fingertips still casually twirling the phone.

Brielle's heart pounded, sensing her lie had been exposed. She quickly attempted to cover it up. "I just went out to grab some

groceries, got held up at the store."

Her hands were clearly empty.

"How long were you gone?"

"Half an hour."



She answered without hesitation and heard Max let out a soft chuckle. Just minutes ago, he lied to his father for her, and now

she was lying to him.

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Brielle couldn't meet his gaze, feeling as if the air in the room was thinning, almost unable to breathe.

"Brielle, last question for you, think carefully before you answer. Where were you this afternoon?"

It she didn't tell the truth, what was the point of all this? He needed her honesty.

Sweat pooled in Brielle's palms around the handle of her cane, her lips pressed tight, her heart racing. She had a feeling that if

she lied to Max now, they might never see each other again.

But should she mention Spencer?

She already knew from the hotel manager that Max would handle Spencer's disappearance. If he found out Spencer's location,

he would surely bring Spencer back. At that point, what leverage would she have to negotiate with Ryan? Without her bargaining

chip, Mark's life would be in danger.

She couldn't afford to gamble.

Brielle's eyelashes trembled, the excuses she had rehearsed a thousand times in her mind now felt utterly powerless. She

wished she could answer his questions openly, but the gap between

them was as vast as a chasm.

The orphan girl who was lucky enough to read a few more books, only glimpsed the fleeting dreams of affluence in

Beaconsfield. Yet that was far from enough to sit at an equal level with him. Life was a relay race, but she had naively treated it

like a sprint.

Max was always someone she had to stand on tiptoes and stretch her neck to reach. How could she naively believe he would

abandon his family for her?

In the face of reality, her affection was too insignificant. The real barrier wasn't external but her own insecurity when she felt

affection for someone.

However, at this moment. Brielle didn't understand why it was only in front of Max that her pride seemed meaningless.

She clenched her cane, feeling a dryness in her mouth like a fish gasping on a cutting board. Avoiding his gaze, she lowered her

lashes. "This afternoon, I went out to lunch with Aubree. I lied because I didn't want you to worry about my leg injury. I'm sorry."

Although she had been to a Dorsey International hotel, the manager had no need to report such a minor matter, unless Max

actively sought out her whereabouts, but with Spencer's situation at hand, he would not be distracted by tracking her

movements. So Brielle was sure Max didn't know she had been to the hotel.

She had thought that after her explanation, Max's demeanor would soften, but it didn't. The temperature in the room dropped

even more, and the air seemed even thinner. Her neck felt as if it was being squeezed by an invisible hand, her face turning red.

Max had risen to his feet, stepped in front of her, and tilted her chin up. Brielle was forced to look at him.

"Brielle, I must be crazy, to-

He paused, perhaps unsure of what he was about to say. Lie after lie, she managed to keep at straight face. What did she take

him for?

## Chapter 265

Max's gaze was piercing, holding her chin with an intensity that was both unsettling and mesmerizing. Slowly, he released his

grip.

Brielle rubbed her jaw where his fingers had left an imprint. It didn't hurt, but the sudden assertiveness in his touch had startled

her.

Max straightened up, his expression turning cold, as if the momentary loss of control was an illusion. "If you don't fancy staying

at Premier Palace, then nurse your wounds at home."

He took out a card and placed it on the clasp of her chest. The gesture was somewhat frivolous, as if intentionally insulting her.

"I said it was over last time, but I forgot to give you this—let's call it severance."

Brielle's face drained of color, her hand tightening at her side. "What do you mean?"

Max, however, no longer wished to say much. Instead, he walked calmly to the entrance hall.

Sometimes, one's shadow can do

more damage than words ever could.

Brielle surged to her feet, intent on following, but her injured leg buckled after a few steps, sending her stumbling to the floor.

"Max!"

The doorway was empty.

Gritting her teeth, Brielle hoisted herself up, grabbed a cane that had clattered to the floor, and hobbled to the door. There was

no one in the hallway: he must have gone downstairs.

In desperation, she rode the elevator down, frantically pressing the button for the ground floor. By the time she limped out of the

building, only the streetlights cast long shadows on the pavement. She approached the night guard, inquiring if a black car had

left in the last two minutes.

The guard shook his head. "No cars have left recently."

A flicker of disappointment crossed Brielle's eyes. Max's car was probably in the underground garage. Was it too late to catch

up? And even if she did, what would she say?

They were divided by a barrier that seemed insurmountable. Perhaps even without it, he'd never truly cross over.

Their relationship had been tainted from the start. His parting gift of a card was a fitting end to their illicit affair.

Brielle held the card tightly in her hand, walking aimlessly into the room with a dazed expression. Once in her room, she sat

down, feeling a headache coming on, and a vague ache around her heart. The couch still held the warmth of Max's presence.

She regretted the lie she had told. Yet given another chance, she still wouldn't confess to kidnapping Spencer. Her feelings for

Max weren't strong enough to warrant trust.

In that moment, Brielle envied children who grew up in loving homes, who knew what a healthy relationship looked like and had

a keen sense for love. They could easily find their way to the right path.

Brielle's upbringing had left her without a compass, uncertain of what was good, unsure who to trust. It took years of hitting walls

before she could recognize the right path. Spencer was one such wall; her acquaintance with Max too brief to judge its direction.

Her phone began to ring. She glanced at the caller ID, hesitating. The phone stopped, only to start ringing again shortly after.

Annoyed, Brielle was about to turn off the device when she noticed the call was from Tiffanie. "Hello, what's up?"

"Brielle, are you sure Spencer was in that room? My friend checked, but it's empty. We searched everywhere possible, and

there's no sign of Spencer."

Brielle's pupils dilated sharply. She had left Spencer in the bathroom—how could he not be there?

Could it be Lillian? No, Lillian was probably still detained at the police station, unable to interfere.

Who then?

"Tiffanie, have you checked the hotel surveillance?"

"Yeah, but footage from that period is missing. And Brielle, there's more. All surveillance related to you has been wiped. You

were here for a night, but there's no trace of you. Besides the hotel. staff, no one else can tamper with the footage, so it must be

an inside job. Whoever did it must have been following orders. You should ask Maxie about it."

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Brielle's heart skipped a beat. She didn't have the courage to admit that Max had just tossed a card at her and she felt too

embarrassed to approach him. "It probably has nothing to do v with him. This hotel is small fry compared to Dorsey

International's assets. He wouldn't get involved in the affairs of one of his hotels. It could have been someone else."

Tiffanie smirked slightly, leaning back in her chair with a casual air. "I checked with the hotel. Ryan has already swept through

with his team once. You know how shrewd that old fox Ryan is. If he had found any evidence of you and Spencer staying at the

hotel, he wouldn't be this calm. So, I'm guessing Ryan didn't find anything. Except for Maxie, I can't think of who else would do

this. Why don't you just ask him if he helped you move Spencer?"

Her words were like a pebble thrown into the already rippling lake of Brielle's heart, causing waves to crash. Brielle's breathing

became shaky, unable to pinpoint what was wrong with her body, feeling a heat wave all over.

She really couldn't think of anyone else. Who else from the Dorsey family would protect her? It certainly couldn't be Michael.

Brielle clenched her phone, listening to Tiffanie's voice on the other end. "Maxie may seem aloof, but he's actually pretty

thoughtful. And if he really did help you move Spencer, what does that mean? It means he cares about you. Look, some guys

are all talk and no action, but not Maxie. He just quietly gets things done. If I were you, I'd take care of Alivia and tie him down

tight."

Though Brielle knew Tiffanie was unreliable and this was all mere speculation, for some reason, a hint of sweetness inexplicably

emerged in Brielle's heart, and the bitterness from him tossing the card to her slowly dissipated.

Tiffanie was relentless on the other end. "Just go straight to Maxie. If it was him, then dive into a passionate romance. Being with

a guy like that, you're hitting the jackpot, Brielle. Even if

you broke up in the end, he'd never leave you high and dry."

Brielle grimaced. Even without romance, the money he had given her over time was more than what an ordinary person could

earn in several lifetimes. Max was really good to her, and perhaps it was because of this that his sudden decision to withdraw left

her feeling so forlorn.

After hanging up the phone, Brielle sat on the couch, lost in thought. Remembering all the things Max had done for her made her

heart race.

Maybe it was time to be brave?

She swallowed hard, scraping together every ounce of courage before dialing Max's number.

Max had returned to Premier Palace and saw the incoming call on his phone but didn't pick up.

Wesley noticed the caller ID and reminded him, "Sir, Ms. Brielle is calling."

Expecting Max to pick up after his prompt, Wesley was surprised to see no reaction on Max's face, as if nothing could stir his emotions.

Wesley, knowing better, hung up the phone and muted it to avoid disturbing the man at work.

Brielle called ten times in a row to no avail. She grew anxious, getting up with the help of her crutches, and called Patrick.

Patrick was still dealing with the Haywood family affairs. Seeing her call, he instinctively tensed but relaxed, remembering Max

wasn't around. "Ms. Brielle."

"Patrick, I want to ask about Spencer."

Patrick was taken aback. Every directive from Max typically went through him, so he was well aware that Max had arranged for

Spencer's transfer. "Ms. Brielle, I don't follow." Wasn't she aware of Spencer's situation?

Brielle took a deep breath, her palms sweaty with nervousness. "I heard Spencer was kidnapped?"

Patrick was puzzled. He thought for a moment, then asked uncertainly, "Ms. Brielle, did the car accident cause you to lose your

memory? But I heard you only injured your leg, not your head. Don't worry, I'll inform Mr. Dorsey and we'll get you the best

medical care."

Brielle, unusually silenced by the retort, it seemed like they indeed knew that she was somehow connected to Spencer's

kidnapping.

And what about the relocation?

She decided to lay her cards on the table. "I stashed Spencer in the bathroom, planning to have a friend help move him, but he

has disappeared."

Patrick exhaled in relief, glad that Ms. Brielle hadn't lost her memory.

"It was someone arranged by Mr. Dorsey, because Ryan was closing in on the hotel quickly. Mr. Dorsey had Spencer moved,

and all your surveillance traces were wiped clean, Ms. Brielle. Don't worry, Ryan won't be able to trace it back to you."

Receiving a concrete answer from him, Brielle didn't quite know how to react. So Max knew everything from the start, including

how many lies had she spun?

Even just now, he definitely knew she went to the hotel to move Spencer. Looking back, that conversation seemed like a joke.

Her defenses must have looked like clownish antics to him.

"Ms. Brielle, the Haywood family's major clients have been nearly poached clean. I expect the Haywoods will be reaching out to

you soon. Brace yourself for that."

Right now, Brielle couldn't care less about the Haywood family. Her mind was preoccupied with Max.

What to do? He must be angry. How could she earn his forgiveness?

Between her and Spencer, Max chose her without hesitation, only to be repaid with her deceit. Brielle's mind was like a roller

coaster plummeting downhill, leaving nothing but a blank slate and the echoes of her soul's cries.

She didn't even want to think about where Max might have moved Spencer. He must have taken him to a covert, secure place.

Ryan would certainly not find him; he didn't even know who had taken his son. After all, the Dorsey family had called the police

and despite the large turnout, they found nothing. In Ryan's eyes, this wasn't something a small fry like Brielle could pull off.

This cleared Brielle of suspicion while also ensuring Ryan wouldn't act rashly.

Brielle tasted bitterness, knowing all this was because Max had helped her. She just wanted to find Max.

"Where's Max going tonight?"

"He's probably at Premier Palace."

Patrick wasn't too sure since he hadn't returned yet. And with Brielle coming to him for an answer, who knew what trouble had

brewed between them. As an outsider, he didn't dare

meddle too much in their affairs.

Brielle hung up, grabbed her cane that rested beside her, and headed out the door. Unable to drive with her injured leg, she

hailed a cab to Premier Palace.

Forty minutes later, she was at the entrance of Premier Palace. As she entered the lobby, she found Wesley polishing antiques in

the hallway. His eyes flickered with surprise upon seeing her.

Brielle scanned the room but didn't spot Max.

"Wesley, where's Max?" She didn't call him Mr. Dorsey this time, but Max, signifying a closeness that surpassed the need for

formal titles.

"Mr. Dorsey left a few minutes ago. Must've had an appointment."

\*Any idea where he went?"

Wesley shook his head.

Left with no other choice, Brielle continued on her way out, leaning on her cane. Wesley, seeing her struggle, advised, "Ms.

Brielle, you should rest that leg. An infection would only make things worse."

Brielle would've loved to rest, but making amends with Max was her priority.

Wesley caught up to her, "I can have the driver take you, Ms. Brielle. Just tell him where you want to go."

Accepting the offer since cabs were inconvenient, she got in the car but hesitated before calling Kenzo.



Kenzo raised an eyebrow as he saw the caller ID and glanced at Andrew.

Andrew, sensing something, scoffed, "Brielle?"

Kenzo nodded, listening as Andrew teased, "She must have a good impression of you. Hooking up with Max wasn't enough, and

now she's after you?"

Kenzo couldn't help but laugh, answering the call, "Brielle, what's up?"

"Kenzo, do you know where Max is?"

Kenzo frowned and leisurely poured himself a drink. "No clue. He hasn't reached out tonight. What, did you two have a fight?"

Brielle couldn't quite define it as a fight, feeling awkward, "If you find out, could you give me a call?"

"Sure, will do."

A shadow of disappointment crossed Brielle's eyes. Even Kenzo was clueless, and Max himself wasn't picking up her calls.

Where could he be?

After aimlessly driving around for over an hour, she didn't want to inconvenience the driver. further, and directed him back to

Pearl Estate.

After thanking the driver, she limped back to her room. Turning on the light, her mind drifted to just a few hours ago, when Max

sat on the couch.

He must have been so disappointed.

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Brielle's eyes were rimmed with redness as she slumped into a seat, eventually leaning back on the sofa and drifting off to sleep.

When she awoke, it was already the next day, and her head throbbed with pain. Limping, she managed to make herself some

food and tried contacting Max again, only to be greeted by the mechanical voice on the other end.

She had been blocked.

Brielle felt like a needle had been jabbed into her heart. She forced a self-mocking smile. Was this what they called reaping what

you sow? It seemed Max really wanted to end things.

Deflated, Brielle put down her phone and stared blankly at the ceiling.

She spent the next three days at home in a daze, unable to muster the courage to reach out to him again.

On the morning of the third day, Aubree called, insisting that Brielle shouldn't wallow at home. After freshening up, Brielle hailed

a cab to the diner.

Aubree, upon seeing her, furrowed her brows with concern. "You've lost a ton of weight. Haven't you been eating these past few

days?"

Brielle managed a weak grin as she took a seat. "I did eat, but I didn't really have an appetite."

"I'll come stay with you for a while, to take care of you."

"No need, I can manage on my own."

Brielle feared that if the conversation with Aubree went on any longer, she wouldn't be able to keep herself from spilling

everything about Max.

He had decided to go back to his high and mighty world, and she had no right to drag him down from his pedestal. He was

meant to be untouchable, perched high above the rest.

Brielle never dared to expect more. After all, Max had never shown his feelings clearly. Perhaps he had felt a flicker of affection,

but it was too faint, easily discarded.

Constantly tiptoeing to reach another person was exhausting for anyone. Being left behind like this, oddly enough, felt like a

relief. Better to have never owned than to always be in fear of losing.

She had always been such a pessimist when it came to love.

The meals had just arrived when Brielle heard her name being called. Looking up, she was surprised to see Miranda. It felt like

an eternity since they had last met. These three days had felt like a long year.

Seeing Miranda's face, Brielle was momentarily stunned, as if suddenly dragged back into the real world.

Miranda had been too preoccupied with the Haywood family affairs to join the ladies for their afternoon teas, as they were busy

dealing with Lillian's mess, with the police refusing to budge.

Miranda couldn't avoid today's luncheon and was surprised to find Brielle there. Her chest felt like it was burning with fury as she

approached. "Brielle, is that really you? How dare you show your face around here!"

Brielle frowned, feeling as if fate was playing a cruel joke on her.

The other well-to-do ladies following Miranda had also heard of Brielle and began to gossip.

"Isn't this the daughter you raised? Why doesn't she even greet you when she sees you?"

"So heartless. You might as well have raised a pet."

These were the wives of CEOs who had dealings with the Haywood family, banding together to ostracize Brielle, the unwanted

upstart. In their eyes, Brielle was a pitiful woman, abandoned by her former fiancé.

Brielle couldn't believe she couldn't even have a peaceful meal with Aubree without being disturbed. She frowned and said,

"Miranda, is there something you need?"

Miranda's chest heaved with rage. How dare Brielle ask her if she needed something?

"Did you have something to do with Lillian's situation? Accusations of hiring a hitman, really? You're quite the storyteller, Brielle.

Anyway, you seem fine to me, so let's settle this privately. I'll give you some money, and you can drop the charges."

Brielle found it laughable, so much so that she actually laughed out loud. "Miranda, if you really are that free, maybe you should

spend more time teaching your own daughter how to be at decent human being."

That comment seemed to strike a nerve for Miranda, her eyes flashing with malice. "It's all your fault! If you hadn't interfered

back then, why would we have taken you in? And how would Lillian have ended up suffering out there? She missed out on a

good education because of you! You have a big responsibility for the way Lillian turned out!"

As Miranda finished speaking, the other high-society ladies chimed in with their consolations.

"Miranda, let it be. Why lower

yourself to argue with a country bumpkin? Genetics is important. you know."

“Exactly, like mother, like daughter. If the parents are bad seeds, the child will be too. reasoning with her.”

There’s no

They all began to tear Brielle down, from her hair to her toes, as if they couldn’t disparage her enough.

## Chapter 269

The most vociferous of the lot was Catherine from Kingston Enterprises. On a normal day, she was thick as thieves with Miranda

and seemed ready to jump into the fray herself to defend her friend’s honor.

Brielle couldn’t help but find the whole situation amusing. Under the tablecloth, her hand firmly gripped Aubree’s, signaling her

not to do anything rash. Knowing Aubree, she would have snapped back at the first biting word from the gaggle of women.

Miranda, bolstered by the support of the high society ladies, felt even more confident. She had been preoccupied with Lillian’s

legal troubles for the past couple of days, so seeing Brielle with nothing more than a cast on her leg while Lillian faced possible

jail time infuriated her even

more.

Brielle was clearly taking it!

Miranda was so focused on saving her daughter that she even disregarded the relationship Brielle had with Max. “Brielle, if you

don’t drop this, forget about ever having a peaceful life again.” Miranda threatened.

Brielle took a sip of her coffee, a picture of serene indifference. “Are you done barking? If so, please leave. I’m trying to dine

here.”

Miranda’s pupils shrank with rage, and, snatching up her coffee, she hurled it towards Brielle’s face. Catherine, not to be

outdone, aimed a kick at Brielle’s plastered leg.

Brielle could have dodged the flying coffee, but the sharp agony from the kick to her leg turned her face pale, leaving her unable

to focus on anything else. The scalding coffee splashed onto her collar, and she tumbled from the chair, the sharp pain drawing a

muffled groan from her lips.

Aubree, standing opposite to her, instantly stood up, exclaiming in panic, "Bri!" She didn't have time to glare at the other women:

she dashed to Brielle's side, noticing the shattered cast. The pain must be excruciating.

"I'm taking you to the hospital!"

Brielle's eyelashes fluttered, a premonition telling her the bone that had just healed was likely broken again. Her lips trembled

weakly, unable to even glance at Miranda and the others.

Aubree wasted no time, prioritizing the hospital over a confrontation. She helped Brielle to her feet, slinging her arm around her

neck and shot Miranda a furious look. "You just wait."

Miranda arched an eyebrow, dismissive. What could a Clements family's foster daughter do to her anyway?

A person's social circle spoke volumes about their class, and to Miranda, Brielle would always be relegated to friendships with

other foster daughters, never entering the inner circle of the elite.

The laughter of the wealthy matrons reinforced Miranda's confidence. She had no reason to fear Brielle.

Brielle, dizzy from pain and unable to put weight on her foot, finally spoke hoarsely after a moment.

"Aubree, I-cough, cough,

cough." Each breath was a struggle, and the coughing fit took over.

Aubree clenched her teeth in anger. "Those harpies. Once I get you to the hospital, I'll come back to settle the score."

Brielle leaned on her, the counterattack she had planned after Miranda's coffee assault interrupted by the unexpected kick.

Catherine of Kingston Enterprises, she noted that name.

Sweat beaded on Brielle's forehead, the scent of coffee lingering in her nostrils. Aubree supported Brielle into the car and drove

straight to the hospital.

Back at the restaurant, the matrons continued to gossip about Brielle. The conversation shifted. towards Spencer and Max. At

the mention of Max, a glint appeared in their eyes. Every mother with a daughter of marrying age dreamt of linking their child with

Max, but he had always been aloof, only showing interest in Alivia. Therefore, everyone in Beaconsfield considered Max and

Alivia the inevitable pair.

"I heard Max went abroad again to see Alivia. A friend of mine spotted him at the airport."

"Those two families are probably going to join forces by the end of the year. It'll be the talk of Beaconsfield."

"The Barnes girl sure is lucky, having caught Max's eye since she was young."

Miranda had been feeling a pang of regret, considering Brielle's current connection with Max. If Brielle whispered in his ear, the

Haywood family would surely face consequences. But as she heard them talk about Max's trip abroad, a smug look crossed her

face. It seemed Brielle couldn't hold onto him.

Max had left an injured Brielle behind to see Alivia overseas. The priorities were clear; the scales had tipped.

## Chapter 270

A shadow of darkness flitted across her eyes. If that was the case, why couldn't they get Lillian out?

As Miranda mulled over this, her cell phone rang. It was Robert calling. Robert sounded irritated, "Where are you? We've got the

full picture on Lillian's situation. The police are adamant—as long as Brielle doesn't crack, Lillian isn't going anywhere."

A chill ran through Miranda's gaze; it seemed she had been too lenient with Brielle earlier, and now she was still refusing to settle

things privately.

Robert's next words deflated her completely. "Stay away from Brielle for now. The Haywood family's clients have all been

poached by rival firms, and they're crucial to us. None of them are taking my calls. I suspect Max is behind this. If it's really him,

then the Haywood family is in jeopardy. He's taking it out for Brielle because of what Lillian did. Don't stir up more trouble.

Miranda's vision went dark, her heart pounding at the thought of her recent actions. "Honey, are you sure? I heard Max left the country. Why would he care about Brielle? Could there be some mistake?"

Robert took a deep breath, not wanting to explain too much. All these women ever thought about were their petty squabbles.

"Just steer clear of her. If Max really swiped the Haywood family's clients, he's likely got more up his sleeve."

Before he could finish, Cameron walked in, an aura of gloom about him. "Father, we've lost another bunch of clients. They've all

signed with our competitors. A dozen partners served us. termination notices all at once. I just got a call from the shareholders—

they're calling an emergency meeting. Things are looking grim."

Cameron slumped down, rubbing his hair in frustration. "I reached out to some close partners. They were evasive, hinting we'd

crossed someone. Even Mr. Connor from Apex Dynamics won't take my calls."

Anxiety creased Cameron's face. His phone rang, and he picked up urgently. The news from the other end was so shocking, his

phone clattered to the floor.

"What's going on?" Robert exclaimed, startled.

Cameron turned, his eyes devoid of life. "Mr. Connor got in touch. It's Max. He didn't say much. just that, then hung up. Dad,

we're done for."

Miranda, still on the line, heard every word. The mere mention of Max sent their minds crashing, unable to think.

When this business prodigy made a move, others stood little chance, especially with an apparent vendetta against the Haywood

family.

Miranda stood up, panic-stricken, her palms slick with sweat. Max was targeting the Haywood family because of Brielle? But she had just spilled coffee on Brielle. What now?

Catherine, seeing Miranda's distress after the call, hurriedly asked, "What's wrong?"

Before Miranda could answer, Catherine's own phone rang. It was her husband. With a smile, she excused herself from the other

ladies and answered.

Her husband's voice was urgent, becoming serious and grave by the end of the call. "Max has made a move against the

Haywood family. Keep it under wraps for now, and avoid the Haywoods. Max means business this time."

Confusion crossed Catherine's face. Why would Max target the Haywood family? Weren't Lillian and Spencer childhood

sweethearts?

"What's he got against the Haywood family?" Catherine asked, glancing at a frantic Miranda; this had to be serious. After all,

when Max made a move, what chance did the others have? The Haywood family must be down on their luck.

"I just had dinner with Mr. Connor from Apex Dynamics. It took some coaxing, but he admitted it's because of Brielle. Max has

taken a shine to her, and now she's in his heart. Lillian paid a driver to hit Brielle, sending her to the hospital with a broken leg.

Max is furious, defending his lady's honor. That Brielle must be something else."

Catherine felt a shiver down her spine, swallowing hard. Was it the Brielle she knew? "Which Brielle, honey? Are you sure you're

not joking? Isn't Brielle Spencer's ex-fiancée?!"