

Master 271

Chapter 271

"That's the one. Yeah, so I'm as puzzled as you are about why he'd go after someone else's cast-off wife. The truth is still up in

the air, but the Haywood's bad luck seems to be a done deal. You better steer clear of those tea parties with them."

In this circle, there truly were no real friends; it was all about what you could gain from each. other. Knowing full well the

Haywoods are on the brink of disaster, who would want to muddy the waters with them?

Catherine breathed a sigh of relief. As long as the reason wasn't confirmed, there was hope. If it turned out to be because of

Brielle, her recent outburst could spell doom for Kingston

Enterprises.

She comforted herself inwardly. Connor from Apex Dynamics was always a wild card, flirting all over town, creating chaos

wherever he went. If it weren't for his hefty bank account and solid backing, no one would give him the time of day. What truth

could come from the mouth of such a man?

Catherine felt a hundred percent assured. After putting down her phone and seeing Miranda approaching for a chat, she quickly

got to her feet. "I've got a family emergency, I must go."

But Miranda had already started speaking. "Catherine, darling, my husband has been trying to get hold of someone at Kingston

Enterprises, but no one's answering. Do you think you could..."

She was cut off mid-sentence. "Miranda, I really can't help you with this. My husband just called, asking me to stay away from

trouble. If we weren't such good friends, I wouldn't have breathed a word of this. Maybe you should look into why Max has

suddenly turned against

you."

Miranda's complexion turned ashen. Could it all be because of Brielle?

She couldn't sit still any longer and stood up quickly, needing to get to the bottom of this by asking at home.

Back home, Robert was planted on the couch, his face ghostly pale. He had made countless calls, either going unanswered or

being told they couldn't help. It was clear to see that there was an impending storm over the Haywood family.

A flicker of rage crossed Robert's eyes. "Cameron, go talk to Brielle personally. Ask her if she still cares about Julian's well-being

at all. If she lets Max continue like this, we'll spill the beans to your grandfather. Even in his care home, he won't rest easy. If

something happens to him, Brielle will live with the guilt for the rest of her life."

They had to act now or the Haywood family would be finished.

Cameron was already on his feet, ready to head out. Robert's voice followed him, "And lay off Brielle, will you? Have a word with

your mom too. I'm worried she'll stir up trouble over Lillian's issue."

Cameron nodded. What neither of them knew was that Miranda had already provoked Brielle just half an hour earlier.

The news that the Haywood family's clients were terminating their contracts hadn't spread outside their circle yet. If it leaked,

their stock would plummet overnight. And if it hit rock bottom, bankruptcy for the Haywood family was a real possibility.

Max didn't seem like he intended to stop until he had driven them into the ground. Since it was all for Brielle that Max was

targeting the Haywoods, only Brielle could untie this knot for them. They had to find her.

Meanwhile, Brielle had already been rushed to the hospital, sweating from the pain.

Aubree made sure she was settled, shocked by the sight of her newly cracked cast. "How much force did that woman use?"

The doctor crouched by Brielle's leg, removing the cast to examine the injury.

"A secondary fracture, more dangerous than the first. Ms. Brielle, for the sake of your leg, you should really stay in the hospital

for a while."

Brielle just grimaced, unable to utter a word.

After securing the leg again and ordering the administration of anti-inflammatory shots, the doctor left the room.

The intense pain had subsided, leaving Brielle feeling nothing but exhaustion. Aubree, standing by her side, was livid. "Bri, I'm

going to give Miranda a piece of my mind."

Brielle lifted her weary eyelids and slowly shook her head, her gaze resolute. "I'll handle it myself."

Aubree paused, her frown deepening. "You should rest. I'm going to grab something for you."

Once downstairs in the hospital, Aubree thought for a moment and dug out a number she had saved before. It was Max's

number; he had called her once because of Brielle.

Without hesitation, she dialed it.

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"Hello?" Max's voice, raspy with exhaustion, filtered through the phone as he rubbed the bridge of his nose, sitting in his car.

"Who's this?"

It seemed he hadn't saved Aubree's number after their last call. Aubree's nose twitched with irritation.

"Mr. Dorsey, it's Aubree."

Max's eyelashes fluttered slightly. He'd just picked up a group of executives from overseas at the airport and had meetings lined

up every day. His schedule was packed, and he hadn't planned on getting involved with Brielle again.

But now. Brielle's friend was on the line.

His fingers tugged at the tie around his neck, as if loosening it would make breathing easier, would soothe the restlessness

within him. "What's up?" He managed to keep his tone controlled, not too eager.

Aubree snorted sarcastically as she sat down on a nearby chair. "I thought you were different from Andrew, Mr. Dorsey. Guess I

was wrong."

"Aubree, cut to the chase. Don't beat around the bush."

"Bri's in the hospital."

Max straightened up instantly. Brielle had just left the hospital. How could she be....

But then he remembered the lies she had told and the bubbling emotions in his eyes cooled. "So?"

The casualness in his voice made Aubree pause, then she laughed bitterly. She wondered why she was even calling Max. If he

could be friends with someone like Andrew, what kind of man could Max be? Brielle had been blinded by illusions before.

Men are all the same.

“Never mind, I won’t bother you, Mr. Dorsey. I’ll take care of Bri.”

Max stared at the disconnected call, his lashes drooping after a long while before asking Patrick in the front seat. “Find out what

happened to Brielle.”

As soon as the car pulled up to Premier Palace, Patrick had the information. “Sir, Ms. Brielle suffered a secondary fracture in her

leg due to external force. The doctor has ordered her to be hospitalized.”

“What kind of external force?”

“Miranda from the Haywood family and Catherine from Kingston Enterprises had a

confrontation with Ms. Brielle. She was kicked in the leg and had coffee spilled on her head before being taken to the hospital by

Aubree.”

Patrick’s response was calm, but the temperature in the living room seemed to plummet, the air turning into icy shards.

Max played with the black beads on his wrist, his eyes frosting over.

After Patrick finished his report, he tried to make himself as inconspicuous as possible, waiting for further instructions.

Max looked up and chuckled coldly. “Kingston Enterprises is in the bidding list, aren’t they? Kick them out.”

Kingston Enterprises had made it to the final list after a tough competition, only to be easily usurped by the runner-up due to this

incident.

Max’s eyes were full of coldness. The Haywood family was troubling Brielle again, “Speed things up with the Haywood family.

And as for the one in jail, don't let her out."

The one in jail was Lillian. Without Max's intervention, the Haywood family would have settled Lillian's matter with money long

ago.

"Understood, I'm on it."

After Patrick responded, he paused, then added. "Sir, there's another force targeting the Haywood family. They've been

entrenched in Beaconsfield for years, with quite deep roots. This new player is causing them to fall faster, but we can't find out

who it is yet."

Another force?

Max's brow furrowed. The Haywood family had been successful for years, even connected to the Dorsey family. Who would

target them in the shadows, especially at this crucial moment?

Max glanced at his rosary, flicking it with his finger. "Find out who it is."

Patrick nodded, respectfully asking. "Should we take action?"

"No need. A fox always shows its tail."

After Patrick left, Max's finger lingered on the rosary, the chill seeping through his skin, unable to extinguish the spark rising

within him.

He found himself eager to contact Brielle and find out how she was doing. He picked up his phone, hesitated for a few minutes,

then slowly put it down again. He had never been so torn.

Her leg should be okay, right? A secondary fracture must hurt, but she'd be fine with proper hospital care.

If he'd decided to end things, he shouldn't leave any loose ends. He was a businessman, through and through. He should know

this was an unprofitable investment.

Max closed his eyes again, yet despite his thoughts, he still arranged for the hospital to watch over Brielle, to ensure no more

accidents.

Actions betray the heart, and he didn't understand this was something called affection.

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In the depths of a subterranean pool in Beaconsfield, a man emerged from the water, droplets cascading from his chin, tracing

the muscled contours of his chest, before reaching the enigmatic zone at his waist.

His broad shoulders tapered to a narrow waist, the sculpted lines of his abdomen alluring in their definition.

A butler, immaculate in white gloves, hurried over, bowing respectfully, extending a plush towel to the man. Taking the towel, the

man began to dry his hair with a swift motion.

Someone had been waiting for him, and upon his emergence, quickly stood up, "King, things with the Haywood family are

wrapping up fast. Max's crew isn't pulling punches, and with our involvement, they won't last much longer."

The man called King chuckled but remained silent.

The report continued, "But Miss Brielle's been hospitalized. The Haywood family are really bold, stirring trouble at a time like this.

Should we keep our hands in the game?"

Wrapping the towel around his waist, King strode forward, "How bad is she hurt? Who's behind it?"

"It's serious, and it's tied to the Haywood family and Kingston Enterprises."

King eased into a seat, accepting a glass of red wine from the butler, his eyes narrowing thoughtfully.

"Max will act. Whether it's

the Haywood family or Kingston Enterprises, he won't stand idly by."

"But Miss Brielle might..."

King took a sip of wine, his gaze drifting to the brightly lit distance, his eyes shimmering with a hidden dance of light and shadow.

"Falling for him?"

Believing in someone was an ordeal, let alone sharing one's happiness and grief with another. This was even more challenging

when that person was Max. Max was undoubtedly more composed and ruthless than the average person. Even if he could love,

it wouldn't come so quickly.

"She's not one to fall easily, and as for Max, he's even less likely. So we wait." He swirled the wine in his glass, a sly smile

creeping across his lips, "When the time comes, we'll just have to make things a tad more challenging for Max."

The last flowers he sent weren't to her liking. It's time to try something different.

His fingers twirled the stem of the glass, a sharp glint flitting across his eyes, then vanishing as quickly as it came, replaced by

an expanding grin, "I think I know just what she'll fancy."

Those nearby, witnessing his smile, felt a shiver run down their spine.

King claimed he fancied Brielle, yet he wasn't rushing to cast his net. Instead, he watched with a detached air as storms brewed

within Beaconsfield.

What was he waiting for? No one knew.

Rising from his chair, King set his wine glass aside, donned an impeccable suit, and accepted a mask from the butler before

heading to the underground casino. This was his realm, a hub for the affluent youth who came and went in droves.

Upon seeing his masked visage, the crowd parted, greeting him with reverence. His thinly veiled smile was warm, but his eyes

were cold as ice.

The young elites' favorite gambling den was a place of heaven or hell with just a thought, all at the whim of the noble young man

surrounded by the crowd.

King approached the grandest gambling table and sat down, beckoning with a few casual flicks of his fingers.

The butler nodded, whispering something into his ear, and King raised an eyebrow, his lips curling into a mischievous smirk.

"Perfect, let him lose his chips. Consider it a little favor for Bri."

Perhaps even Brielle herself was unaware of such a character lurking within Beaconsfield.

Between Max and King, the Haywood family was like fish on a chopping block, ready for the taking.

However, when cornered, people often resorted to extremes, and the Haywood clan was already of questionable character.

Brielle awoke suddenly in the middle of the night to thunder and lightning. She sighed in relief, about to wipe the sweat from her

brow when she sensed a presence close by. Straining her eyes, she saw nothing but the shadows of the man at her bedside,

cast by the lamplight. filtering through the window.

Her pupils dilated, and tears flooded her eyes

The room was thick with a familiar scent, seeping into her pores, soothing her unease. It was Max, visiting her in the dead of

night. She quickly shut her eyes, pretending to still be asleep.

Max sat at the bedside, occupied with pouring water, not noticing the brief moment when she opened her eyes midway. He

couldn't resist coming to see her, intending only a brief glance.

Noticing her parched lips, he dipped a cotton swab in water and gently moistened her lips. She must be feverish, with so much

sweat on her brow.

Max took a wet wipe and dabbed at her forehead, then carefully wiped down her neck. He rarely cared for others, and his

movements were unpracticed.

Brielle sniffed, holding back tears. Her heart felt as if it had been punched, contracting violently. aching intensely.

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Brielle couldn't shake the feeling that she was trapped in a dream. Her mind wandered back to her college days.

That year, she had the fortune to accompany her professor on a trip to the desert, where she met the nomadic tribes that roamed

the sands. At night, they would tether their camels, and come morning, they'd release them. Yet, the camels never strayed too

far, forever remembering the night spent tied beneath the tree. It was much like the pain Brielle had endured, firmly anchoring

her to the present.

The little girl who begged for survival, the girl who hid in a corner crying after being struck by a stranger, the girl who yearned for

a home, and the girl who discovered the affair between Spencer and Lillian...

She thought she had come out of it all, but when facing Max, she realized she had never really escaped.

No matter how confident she presented herself, deep down she was acutely aware that she and Max, a man favored by fortune,

were worlds apart.

In moments free of worry, her past poverty merely meant the difference between having a simple bread roll and a steak for

dinner, never detracting from her happiness. But once her heart fluttered for someone, she deeply felt the inferiority that poverty

wrought. That inferiority

was exclusive to her time with him.

And Max? He could never truly comprehend it.

Max finished wiping her neck, then grabbed her hand, drying each fingertip meticulously. After attending to her left hand, he

moved on to the right. While wiping, his fingers lingered on her lips, gently pressing down.

A sudden urge to confess washed over him.

He had kept a close watch on Spencer, making sure the man stayed alive. Whatever Brielle intended to negotiate with Spencer

for Ryan's sake, he had decided not to interfere, always waiting for her to approach him. But Brielle seemed to have no such

plans. Her heart was as hard as stone.

His hands clenched slightly in irritation, but then he worried he might actually hurt her and eased the pressure.

Now, at three in the morning, he finished his task and stepped out of the hospital room. The places he had touched felt cool;

Brielle slowly opened her eyes. She sat up, caressing her cheek, then turned her head in stunned silence towards the door.

Perhaps too shocked to fully wake, words escaped her.

Once he left, reality hit her. She hastily threw off the covers to get out of bed. There were so many things she wanted to say,

even if just a word or two. But with a re-injured leg, the pain

was too much, not to mention a slight infection had caused a fever overnight, sapping her strength.

She grabbed a nearby crutch, managed a single step, and stumbled to the floor. With sheer determination, she tossed the crutch

aside and dragged her leg behind her, enduring the pain as she followed.

As she neared the corner, she caught sight of Max by the elevator, her eyes lighting up with hope. Just as she was about to

speak, Max's phone rang. He seemed exhausted, rubbing his temples before answering. "Alivia, you're coming back to the

country? When?"

The name 'Alivia' hit Brielle like a heavy nail, pinning her in place. It was like a cup of poison, silencing her throat. She couldn't

speak, couldn't move forward.

Attraction is strange. You can't help but draw closer, mustering the courage to explore, yet when they show the slightest frown,

you retreat to where you started.

Brielle did just that, her newfound courage shattered.

Alivia was returning home, and to everyone in the Dorsey family, and even to those in Beaconsfield, Alivia and Max were a

match made in heaven.

And what was she in comparison?

Max's kindness stemmed from good manners. Had it not been for their past encounter, he would have protected any woman just

the same.

The bitterness spreading from her chest nearly drowned her. Brielle stopped listening, painfully made her way back to the

hospital room, leaning against the wall for support.

She had almost fooled herself into thinking he cared, but how could she forget about Alivia? He had even said he'd never

considered marrying her.

Even if she managed to stop him now, he was bound to leave eventually. Rather than live in constant fear of loss, it was better

not to start anything at all.

In that respect, she and Max were alike. Two overly rational people, aspiring to be together. destined to face trials and

tribulations.

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Back in her hospital room, Brielle slipped back into a restless slumber, oblivious to the chaos that was unravelling within the

Haywood household.

Since the afternoon, their remaining partners had followed suit in terminating contracts, and the news was getting harder to

contain by the minute. The Haywood residence was ablaze with lights: sleep was the last thing on anyone's mind.

Robert ran his fingers through his hair in sheer panic. Decorum was the least of his worries now. As dawn broke, the media

would be like sharks to blood, and the Haywood stock would plummet.

Those in the know were aware of who was targeting them, and no one dared to invest at such a crucial time. The Haywoods

were on the brink of ruin, and everyone could feel it. Not even a gasp for air seemed possible.

With his chest trembling in anxiety, Robert turned to Cameron. "Have you gotten in touch with Brielle? We're running out of time.

Send more people to find her. She must beg Max for mercy." Miranda, sitting between the two men, wore an even grimmer

expression. Recalling the day's events, her lips tightened. "Brielle should be in the hospital."

Robert looked at her, surprised. "How do you know?"

Twisting her hands nervously, Miranda recounted the day's events. As she finished, Robert's anger erupted, and he struck her

across the face.

Miranda's head jerked to the side. She touched her cheek in disbelief, the twisted anger on Robert's face silencing her.

"I've said it before, don't provoke her in the short term! She has Max backing her now, and you still went to start trouble. You'd

better find a way to calm Brielle down. Cameron, go with your mother, and while you're at it, visit your grandfather. This matter

must be resolved before noon tomorrow."

Cameron looked equally disturbed. Lillian was still in custody, and now this disaster had befallen the Haywoods. "Dad, Lillian,

she..."

Disgust flickered in Robert's eyes.

"Without that good-for-nothing, would the Haywoods have come to this? If only she never appeared. Brielle would still be our

daughter, connected to Max, and we'd have everything. Instead, we welcomed back a black sheep, what a curse!"

"Dad, how can you say that? Lillian has Haywood blood, and Brielle, no matter how capable, is just some bastard that popped

out of nowhere."

"Bastard? That 'bastard' has Max on her side, who dares call her that now? Lillian was so eager to go against her, but she never

measures her own capabilities. This mess is her doing. Max.

clearly doesn't want to let her go. What can we do? Her imprisonment is already a certainty."

Robert rubbed his temples, feeling an unbearable irritation.

The last time Lillian drugged Max, he didn't pursue it, but she was foolish enough to provoke him again and again.

What a moron!

Miranda, struck by Robert's words, sat sobbing, her face in her hands. "How can we let Lillian go to jail? She's my flesh and

blood. If she goes to jail, wouldn't her life be ruined? Brielle already owes Lillian. Would she really ruin her life? That wicked

woman!"

In Miranda's eyes, everything was Brielle's fault. Even though it was Lillian who attempted murder, Brielle was unharmed, wasn't

she? So why hold on to it?

Robert, feeling a vein pulse angrily on his forehead, couldn't contain his wrath and slapped her again. "With that brain of yours,

no wonder Lillian turned out this way! You even threw coffee at Brielle. Do you want to speed up our downfall?"

Miranda was stupefied, unable to utter a word, just sitting and crying.

Cameron watched the scene unfold with bitter irony. "Dad, I'll find Brielle as soon as I can. For Grandpa's sake, she won't press

charges. This is Lillian's fault, but she turned out this way because of the hardships she faced. Don't say these things in front of

her. I'll get her out."

Robert exhaled deeply and fell silent.

Meanwhile, in the police station, Lillian curled up against the wall, as if to disappear into it. She spent every moment cursing

Brielle. If she got out, she'd find another chance to kill her.

Right, she'd also spread the word about Brielle and Max, so the rest of the Dorsey family would. turn against Brielle.

Ever since her last call with Miranda, the police

had cut off any contact with her family. She felt like she was marooned on an island, completely isolated from the world.

It was all because of that bitch Brielle.

Max had pushed her to this edge for Brielle.

Damn it all.

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Lillian felt like her chest was on fire, itching to bolt out the door right then and there. She caught the faintest sound outside her

room and perked up her ears, then slowly rose to her feet.

The hallway was dimly lit, casting a gloomy pallor as someone entered. Because of the backlight, she couldn't see the face

clearly, but she felt a murderous aura emanating from the person in front. She recoiled in fear, her voice rising for a scream.

However, her mouth was swiftly covered, and in the dead of night, a dagger glinted coldly as it swiftly severed three of her

fingers.

Lillian, sweating in agony, forgot to scream, and simply passed out from the pain. The man collected her fingers carefully, placing

them in a box he had prepared.

As Lillian lost consciousness, her mind was a whirl of terror and rage. Who could it be? Who would commit such violence in a

police station.

Was it Max? Was it Brielle, sending Max's man to assassinate her? Those snakes! She'd make them pay once she got out!

The next morning, as Brielle awoke, she found herself still in the hospital.

Aubree had prepared a nourishing soup for her, placing it in her hands as she came to. "Eat up. I got up at the crack of dawn to

make this."

Brielle managed a pale smile, looking even more wan. Seeing Brielle like this, Aubree felt a twinge of pity, especially recalling

that phone call she made to Max, and began to comfort her.

"Bri, you were dreaming."

Brielle blinked in confusion, hoping she hadn't said anything strange, but Aubree's expression made her uncertain.

Aubree's lips were pressed tight, and after a long sigh, she said, "Seems like you know what you dreamed about."

Brielle's grip on the bedsheets tightened. Of course, she knew. She dreamed of Max, holding Alivia as they walked into a grand

hall. She dreamed Max looked at her with scorn, telling her not to flatter herself with delusions.

She cried throughout the dream, even asking that question. "Did you ever care for me at all?"

"Never."

What he said was more devastating than any bombshell, shredding her dream—self to pieces.

She's awake now, and all that remained was embarrassment. How could she have such a dream, and Aubree had caught her

red-handed.

She opened her mouth to defend herself, only to hear Aubree say, "You were crying and calling out Max's name."

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Aubree didn't allow her any room to retreat, forcefully exposing her hidden thoughts. Brielle felt every pore on her body sweating,

her palms clammy. "Aubree, it was just a nightmare." She offered a feeble defense.

Aubree snorted, particularly irritated thinking of Max's dismissive attitude on the phone. "A nightmare? What, did you dream Max

ran off with another woman?"

The accusation hit home. Brielle's grip on the blanket tightened, her teeth biting into her lip.

Aubree exhaled a sigh, not wanting to be harsh. Max hadn't even shown his hand yet, and Brielle was already losing her heart.

She couldn't outplay Max, who, at sixteen, was already a Wall Street shark capable of maneuvering her like a pawn.

Max was far more formidable than Andrew.

Aubree's face was stern. "Bri, I only now realize half your pain is from your leg, the other half is Max. But there's no future there.

Once you're better, just focus on work. Keep busy, like you told me, and you'll forget him."

Brielle's hand stiffened, her lips pressed. There was no point in hiding any longer. "Max gave me a card. If it was about the

money, maybe I wouldn't have to work for the rest of my life."

Aubree heard the bitterness in her voice, placing her hands on Brielle's shoulders. "Then go travel. It's just a man, and you'll

forget about him soon enough."

Her words lacked conviction; after all, with the way Andrew treated her, she was still head over heels for him.

Brielle's, lashes dropped, her eyes warming, "Aubree, what really is "love"?"

The question echoed one Max had asked Kenzo. What was love?

She'd been engaged once, and now she was asking this, it seemed she'd never understood what it meant to love.

Aubree paused, reflecting. "Didn't you love Spencer once?"

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"I don't know, I just felt that since he was my fiancé, the one I was supposed to spend my life with, I should be good to him."

They had known each other for years. But did she really love Spencer?

The emotions she felt back then were nothing compared to what she felt last night. Just seeing Max, just smelling his scent,

made her eyes burn and her nose tingle.

Maybe because she'd never really cared for someone before, she needed to know if what she felt for Max was real.

Aubree sat by the hospital bed, silently setting out some snacks, and after a while, in a hoarse voice said, "Love is superficial, so

much so that a drink can drown it, a good sleep can end it. Not understanding it is no big deal

"Is that so?"

Brielle asked only that, then began to sip her soup in silence.

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The knock on the hospital room door made her furrow her brow, and both she and Aubree turned toward the entrant. Their

expressions soured instantly upon recognizing the newcomers. It was Cameron and Miranda. What kind of drama were these

two brewing now?

Miranda, catching sight of Brielle's pale and weakened state, could barely suppress the urge to hex her with every vile curse she

knew. Why hadn't that damn driver finished the job? Brielle alive was nothing but a calamity.

Brielle's face turned icy. "What brings you here?"

Cameron closed the door behind him, his face etched with fatigue. Tracking down Brielle had been no small feat. "Brielle, do you

have any idea what Max is up to? He's targeting the Haywoods. Every single client has been poached, and partners are cutting

ties left and right. In a matter of days, the Haywoods will be bankrupt."

"And what's that to me?" Brielle's tone was indifferent as she aimed to continue with her oatmeal, the very picture of unconcern.

Fuming. Miranda advanced, ready to send Brielle's bowl flying.

A sharp look crossed Brielle's eyes as she met Miranda's gaze, "Try it, I dare you."

Miranda recoiled, fear flickering in her eyes, but remembering their mission, she clenched her teeth. "If you hadn't shamelessly

thrown yourself at Max, why would he have targeted us? He's after us because of you. You need to fix this mess."

"Need to?" Brielle couldn't help but chuckle at the entitlement in Miranda's voice, leisurely continuing her meal.

"Unless I'm mistaken, you're here to beg, right? Is that how you ask for favors?"

Miranda shook with anger, her face a kaleidoscope of fury. Before she could act on her impulse to spill the bowl, Brielle

preempted her, flipping the soup right onto Miranda's head.

Dumbstruck, Miranda felt the thick soup slide down her cheeks.

"That's for the coffee you threw, Miranda," Brielle said, accepting a napkin from Aubree and meticulously wiping her fingers.

With her face smeared in soup, Miranda's lips turned an ugly shade of blue.

Cameron, who had been silent, stopped any further outburst and stared coldly at Brielle. He knew well before coming that Brielle

would not be inclined to help the Haywoods. It was time for his trump card. "Brielle, what about Grandpa if the family goes

under? His health is already failing. He needs constant care at the sanatorium. If he hears about the bankruptcy, how long do

you think he'll last? The Haywood clan might have turned their backs on you, but Grandpa has always been there for you with an

open heart. Do you want to be responsible for his demise, and live with that guilt forever?"

Brielle's lashes quivered, her grip on the blanket tightening unconsciously. Grandpa Julian had indeed always been her

champion, the only one opposing the idea of bringing Lillian from the orphanage into the Haywood home, claiming it wasn't fair to

Brielle. But at the time, Brielle, considering the bond with Lillian, had convinced Julian, and thus Lillian came to stay.

Since then. Julian had always been by her side, spoiling her with little gifts until he had that fall, which led to years of slumber

and subsequently, a life confined to the sanatorium, his health deteriorating day by day. Scarcely any of the Haywoods visited

him, leaving him in his solitude. Brielle hadn't set foot in the sanatorium since learning about Lillian's affair with Spencer – Julian

adored Spencer, believing he would bring her happiness. And she was particularly bad at lying to such a loving elder, so

avoidance had been her tactic.

Now, however, the Haywoods were using Grandpa Julian to strong-arm her once again.

Cameron, seeing a shift in her, pressed on. "Grandpa doesn't have many years left. He's been comfortable in the sanatorium. Do

you really want to disrupt his peace, burden him with the family's troubles?"

A wave of nausea hit Brielle, revolted by their attitude. Julian was their kin as well, yet it seemed she was the only one who cared

for him now.

Brielle knew that if she stayed silent, the Haywoods, true to form, would waste no time involving Julian. Her grip on the blanket

grew fierce, the veins on her hands standing out as a testament to her rising anger.

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Cameron thought he had the upper hand, his face relaxing into a smug grin. "Brielle, Lillian's still holed up at the police station

because of you. Julian would never stand to see a Haywood in trouble, least of all his own granddaughter. You need to make a

call, drop the charges over her buying off that driver, and then we can all be merry."

Brielle leaned back, trying to keep her expression steady. The more you panic now, the more they'll walk all over you. "Only you

Haywoods are merry, not me," she said coolly. "Julian is your kin, and you are now using him to threaten me? You really have no

shame.

Cameron narrowed his eyes, his voice laced with mockery. "And you have some? The former fiancée of Spencer, now cozying

up with his uncle, Max. If the Dorseys got wind of this, what do you think they'd do to you, Brielle? Let's compromise. You get

Max to back off and drop the lawsuit against Lillian, we keep quiet, and everyone's at peace. Sounds good, doesn't it?"

A shadow crossed Brielle's eyes. She had faced the Haywoods' shamelessness before, but this was revolting.

She had brokered several major deals for the Haywoods, deals she could now leverage to hasten their demise. But that would

only make them more desperate, putting Julian in greater danger.

She needed to establish her own company, fast. She couldn't let them exploit her weaknesses again...

As the standoff continued, a knock on the hospital room door announced the arrival of the doctor. The doctor handed Brielle a

neatly wrapped box, his voice tinged with envy. "Ms. Brielle, someone just dropped this off for you. I think you'll be very pleased

with it."

A gift? Brielle paused, thinking of Max. Was it from him?

She couldn't care less about the Haywoods now, her fingers trembling as she opened the box. Her pupils dilated in shock, and

reflexively, she tried to close it. But the box slipped, its lid flung open, and several fingers tumbled out.

Treated to look like macabre art, the fingers were bloodless, yet they still sent chills down the spine.

Brielle's face remained stoic, but Aubree, standing nearby, gagged and retched into a waste bin. A small note fluttered out of the

box, which Cameron, pale as a ghost, picked up. It read—Lillian's fingers, Bri, do you like them?

Cameron's face twisted in horror, his hand trembling.

Miranda snatched the note, fainted away after reading it.

Cameron, staring at the composed Brielle, thought of her earlier attempt to hide the box. Grinding his teeth, he wished he could

tear her in two. "Brielle! What is this?! You wicked

woman, Lillian's already in trouble because of you, and now you have her fingers chopped off! You witch!"

Cameron's eyes were bloodshot, his mind devoid of reason as he lunged forward, grabbing Brielle's collar.

"Do you think just because you have Max on your side, I wouldn't touch you?"

Brielle felt nauseous but kept her face cold. "Lillian has crossed many people; how am I supposed to know who did this?"

Cameron, fueled by rage, clenched his fist, ready to tear her collar.

"You bi-

"Slap!"

Before finishing the scolding, Brielle had already slapped him across the face. The crisp sound echoed in the hospital room.

Cameron froze, his grip loosening.

Brielle glanced at the fingers on the floor, her brows furrowed. "Get out. The Haywoods aren't welcome here."

Pushed back, Cameron stumbled, his eyes blazing with hatred as he comprehended the situation.

Chapter 279

The hatred was like lava, scalding Brielle's heart until it trembled. She feared Cameron might take another drastic measure, but

he merely gazed at her with profound intensity, barely clinging to his sanity.

"Lillian's lost three fingers, Brielle. If you want Grandpa to live out his days in peace, you'll tell Max to back off. Lillian should be

out of the station by now. Three fingers should suffice to quench your grudge, right? If I don't get your call by six tonight, I'll pay

Grandpa a visit.

With that, he followed the doctor who had entered, helping Miranda as they left.

The moment the hospital door shut, Aubree retched again, her face deathly pale. "Were those really Lillian's fingers?"

Brielle leaned back against her pillow, her voice calm. "Yeah."

This was Aubree's first brush with such a scene, her stomach churning with acid, feeling as if her very teeth were souring. "Bri,

Max couldn't have done this, could he?"

"No, it wasn't him."

Maybe Max had another side to him, but he'd never present such a gruesome gift.

Then who? Who harbored such deep resentment towards Lillian? Her head throbbed with the effort of thinking, but no clear

leads emerged.

Aubree packed away the food she'd brought, tossing it into the trash can. "Could it be someone. else from the Dorsey family

trying to scare you?"

Brielle considered William and Ryan, but such an act served them no benefit. Besides, Ryan was still searching for Spencer and

couldn't afford to be distracted by other matters.

"I don't know."

Brielle's head ached, the shock of those severed fingers still lingering in her mind. And now. with Cameron's threat, should she

really contact Max and ask him to stop?

As Cameron had said, Julian was a Haywood through and through. The downfall of the Haywood family would surely affect him.

Julian didn't have many days left.

Brielle was torn, feeling as though something was drilling into her head.

Sensing Brielle's exhaustion, Aubree stood up. "Bri, don't take this the wrong way, but while Julian's been good to you, you've

been just as good to him as well. He's the Haywood's responsibility, not yours. They have no right to use him to manipulate you.

Think about all the hurt they've inflicted on you. Can you really let it go just like that? If Max really took action for you, and you tell

him to stop, what does that make him? Weigh it out. I'll come and check on you later."

To survive in the cutthroat circles of Beaconsfield, you had to let go of some things—like.

emotions, like humanity. The more you discarded, the higher you rose. Those who couldn't let go ended up achieving nothing.

If she continued to be shackled by the Haywoods' demands, she would indeed accomplish nothing.

However, Brielle's mind conjured Julian's face, kind and benevolent, one of the most significant figures in her life, along with

Mark.

But now, both had become leverage against her.

She glanced down at her legs and smiled faintly.

Downstairs, Miranda had woken up after being pinched at the vital point. The image of those three fingers haunted her vision,

making her bolt upright. "Lillian, my poor girl. I must go to your grandfather!"

Cameron looked pale, his heart aching unbearably.

The pain Lillian must be feeling without her fingers... Were there other injuries besides her fingers? Who would have the

audacity to bypass the police and take matters into their own hands?

Miranda clutched Cameron's arm with a desperate tone. "If we don't act now, we might lose Lillian. We can't wait any longer. Go

to the station, and check on Lillian. I'll go see your grandfather and have him plead with Brielle in person. I refuse to believe that

Julian kneeling before Brielle won't move her to meet our demands."

A dark look crossed Cameron's eyes. Though it felt somewhat unfair to Grandpa, that old man had been secluded in a care

facility for years, his ties with the family fading. Like Brielle, he was becoming a peripheral figure of the Haywoods.

"Alright, I'll go to the station."

He was truly worried about Lillian and needed to see her right away.

Miranda's eyes flashed with malice as she hurriedly left the hospital. Those three fingers, like a curse, were etched deeply into

her mind.

Mother and daughter shared a bond; she could almost feel Lillian's agony.

Chapter 280

The mere thought of it sent a surge of anger boiling up inside Miranda, threatening to scorch away her sanity.

She parked her car outside the nursing home, but the sight of the deserted entrance knotted her brow in confusion.

What in the world had happened? The Haywood family had placed Julian in this care facility years ago, yet now it looked as if the place had been abandoned.

Weeds had claimed the front walk, and the building bore the unmistakable signs of neglect. Panic fluttered in Miranda's chest.

She hastily dialed a few numbers, seeking answers.

It took ten minutes to discover that the nursing home had relocated three years prior.

Three years—Miranda hadn't been back since. She was out of the loop.

Hastily, she got back in her car and drove to the new address. Upon arrival, she saw a nurse wheeling an elderly gentleman out into the sun.

Julian, with his snowy hair and wrinkled, kindly face, was a picture of amiable old age. The nurse was chatting with him, and

Julian chuckled, pointing at a robust tree in the courtyard. "Ah, that one was planted by Bri. She's such a devoted girl," he said.

His voice had barely faded when he heard footsteps approaching, sparking a glimmer of hope. Turning, he saw a stranger—not

Bri.

Julian!?

Miranda's voice cut through the air as she rushed over and grabbed his arm. "There's trouble with Lillian. We need you to come back."

Julian's thoughts were muddled. It took him a while to recognize his daughter-in-law. Hadn't it been three years since he last

saw her?

The nurse, observing Miranda's forceful grip, quickly intervened. "Ma'am, the gentleman is frail and his bones are brittle. Please

be gentle with him."

But Miranda was beyond listening. Her eyes seethed with resentment. "Julian, it's me. Miranda. Brielle is ruining the Haywood

family. That curse, you must talk to her yourself."

A sparkle of clarity crossed Julian's eyes. It had been two months since Bri had visited. Was something amiss? Were she and

Spencer still okay?

His memory was failing him. He couldn't remember phone numbers, and his cell phone was lost. All he could do was wait for Bri

to come by. Perhaps she was too caught up in work.

He felt a pang of loneliness, his gaze returning to the trees in the courtyard. The one right at the edge was the one he and Bri

had planted together. It had grown lush and verdant.

"What's happened to Bri?" he asked slowly, catching his breath between words, his eyes full of hope as he looked at Miranda.

Miranda was seething, unable to fathom why this old fool cherished Brielle so much. "It's a long story, but for now, come with me.

You wanted to see Brielle, didn't you? I'll take you to her."

Julian nodded, signaling the nurse to help him back inside. But Miranda pushed the nurse aside. "Why go back to the room?

We're leaving now!"

"Miranda, I've knitted Bri a scarf and a pair of gloves. Winter is coming, and she'll need them to keep warm."

Miranda clenched her teeth in frustration. "She doesn't care for your knitted gifts anymore. She's climbed the social ladder,

doesn't even acknowledge us. She's even threatened to bankrupt the Haywood family. Lillian is stuck at the police station

because of her, your son is worried sick, and it's all Brielle's fault."

Julian was dragged forward, struggling for breath. "Miranda, slow down, there's no rush."

The nurse followed, trying to intervene. "Please, ma'am, don't treat him like this."

Miranda snapped back, "Our family is in crisis, and he needs to come with me. This is private family business, and it's no place

for an outsider."

Though the nurse disagreed, she was powerless to stop it.

Julian was hustled into the car, gasping for air. "Miranda, please... slow down."