

## Master 291

### Chapter 291

Max's smile was like a chill wind that swept through the room, leaving a frost in its wake.

Lillian's chatter came to a shuddering halt as a cold dread seeped into every pore of her being. Her body felt like it had turned to

ice, and she stared with wide, terrified eyes at the man before her. The untouchable air that once surrounded him had vanished.

It was replaced by an aura of darkness that sent shivers down the spine.

Lillian collapsed to the floor, instinctively recoiling from the fear that gripped her. He was truly terrifying.

Tears streamed down her cheeks as she crawled backward. Her body involuntarily arched until suddenly, she felt the void behind

her and began to plummet.

The sensation was eerily familiar—it was the same weightlessness she had felt before when she'd leaped from the building.

With tear-rimmed eyes, she fixed her gaze on Max, who remained stoic above her. Why couldn't he spare a sliver of kindness

for her?

But Max just looked down, his eyes as still as a calm sea. The noise around them was overwhelming, a cacophony of sounds

that merged into one. He couldn't let tonight's events become known; he couldn't afford to have anyone become his weakness.

Even if... Even if that person was Brielle.

Max blinked as his attention was drawn to the voices coming from the rooftop.

"Max!"

"Mr. Dorsey!"

The first voice was Andrew, and the second was Patrick.

Max's brow furrowed. Andrew was the last person he wanted to encounter now. Unlike the cool-headed Kenzo, Andrew was

impulsive and reckless. If he knew that Brielle had nearly brought harm to Max, he'd eliminate her without a second thought.

Besides Michael, Andrew was a person who would never allow any weaknesses on himself.

The door to the rooftop was kicked open, and many people rushed over, led by Andrew and Patrick. Patrick looked anxious, his

pupils contracting sharply. Andrew, on the other hand, looked stern, his eyes full of sharpness and coldness. He was not a fool,

Max appearing near the apartment where Brielle used to live was definitely not a coincidence. Perhaps someone was using

Brielle to lure him into this trap.

To Andrew, Max was an adversary, a benchmark. In his eyes, Max was perfection personified, a statue of impeccability. But now,

it was as if the statue had begun to crack. The proud Priest suddenly seemed to be yearning for the mortal world—a terrifying

prospect.

Andrew's heart was boiling with murderous intent, and he was resolved to find an opportunity to do away with Brielle..

Patrick, on the other hand, rushed over anxiously. "Boss, are you alright?"

Max shook his head, his demeanor still regal. He walked past Andrew, pausing to deliver warning. "Don't touch her." They both

knew who 'she' was.

Andrew was already seething, and Max's words were like a bomb about to detonate inside him. However, he managed to

suppress the rage and even forced a twisted smile. "Max, who are you talking about?"

It was unlike Andrew to be so unnervingly calm. Max's lips tightened, and his expression was cold. "Brielle."

Whether he wanted to kept the distance bewteen them, Brielle must not be hurt because of him. Andrew's eyes twitched

violently. Even now, Brielle was all that Max could think about. "Did someone use her to get to you tonight?"

"Yes." Max was candid; there was no need for pretense among friends.

Andrew sneered, "Don't worry. I won't touch her."

Patrick, standing to the side, was equally nervous, fearing a clash between the two. Fortunately. Andrew still clung to his wits.

Max said nothing more and led the way out.

Patrick hurried after him, glancing back at Andrew, who stood under the fiery glow of the night sky. His eyes were dark and

resolute, as if he had made a decision. Danger seemed to emanate from him.

Patrick averted his gaze. He was always astonished by Mr. Clements' restraint around the boss.

Andrew was fire, but he always managed to contain himself in Max's presence. As Max became entangled with Brielle, Andrew

had started out amused. When he sensed Max's seriousness, his amusement turned to mockery, and now, to dread and

loathing.

A loathing for Brielle.

## Chapter 292

Beneath the towering structure, fire trucks were lined up in a long procession, their bright lights piercing the night. Rumors

swirled that many hadn't made it out; the cries and wails of despair continued unabated as the building became a veritable

inferno. It was all because of one woman's jealousy.

The area was swarming with reporters, adding to the chaos.

Max got into the car, his breath visible in the cool night air. Patrick wanted to press for details about the night's events, but he

turned at the sound of Max's voice.

"How's Brielle doing?" Max asked as his brows knitted with concern. "I want to see the Haywood family bankrupt in tomorrow's

headlines," he said, as if resolving a difficult decision. This would pave the way for her, and then they would be square.

He looked down, his eyelashes casting a shadow on his cheeks. "Don't tell her," he added quietly.

Patrick's grip on the steering wheel tightened as he hastily dialed the hospital to check in. After getting the update, he glanced in

the rearview mirror. "Ms. Brielle took her medication and is resting. All's quiet on that front."

"Good," Max responded. His tone sounded detached as the city lights flickered across his face. What he was thinking remained a

mystery, but his silence was palpable.

Patrick was worried but didn't dare probe further.

Meanwhile, in the hospital ward, Brielle was writhing in the grip of a high fever, sapped of all strength. When she awoke with a

start the next day, she overheard nurses changing dressings. and gossiping about the fire from the night before.

"Three people perished in the blaze. Looks like arson. Some folks have just got evil in their hearts."

"Did they catch who did it?"

"No, but the cameras caught a woman. Her motives are unclear; the fire wasn't at her place but seemed aimed at the owner of

that apartment."

The nurses were engrossed in their conversation.

Brielle felt a sour sting in her eyes; she was disinterested in the fire. When one's spirit was so low, dreams of all sorts came

visiting.

In recent days, she had dreamt of Max. Last night, she had dreamt of Julian waking with swollen eyes from crying. Gasping for

air, she felt drowsy and disoriented.

The nurses brought her a meal, which she didn't touch.

Mustering her strength, she asked about Julian's remains.

"Ms. Brielle, Julian's body was claimed early this morning, probably by his kin," one nurse informed her.

Brielle's heart skipped a beat, and her lips pressed tightly together. Julian was gone, and while it was protocol to have his body

rest in the morgue before cremation arrangements by the family, why would the Haywood family take his body? What were they

planning?

She slumped back onto the bed, eyes welling up again.

Reflecting on the Haywoods' attitude towards Julian, her disdain was unstoppable. Were they expecting her to reach out? She

was curious to see what game they were playing.

As she reached for her phone to contact Robert, she realized it wasn't in its usual spot. After searching around the pillow, she

found it still missing. She addressed the nurses. "Have you seen my phone? I left it right here before I slept."

"No, haven't seen it. There was someone here on constant watch last night. Maybe think about whether you placed it somewhere else."

But Brielle was certain of where she'd left her phone. If someone had been on watch, how could it vanish into thin air? Definitely, someone had been in her room.

She glanced at the corridor's surveillance camera. "Could you check last night's footage? I need to know if anyone came to see me."

Could it have been Max? But why would Max take her phone? A nagging unease settled in her heart, a feeling of having barely escaped the reaper's grasp.

The on-call doctor entered, recalling a woman who had appeared somewhat surreptitious in the ward. "Someone did come by

last night. It was odd; she gave off a sneaky vibe. I asked the attending physician, and they said she was your sister, but she

didn't speak, just stood there. and then left."

Brielle's heart pounded faster, the unease growing. "Okay, can you help me access the footage? I want to see who she was."

The nurse quickly contacted the security staff.

As Brielle waited in her room, the footage was swiftly brought to her. The sight of a woman, wrapped tightly in disguise, entering

Brielle's room, made her furrow her brow in anger. There was something familiar about this woman's figure.

The footage was from the corridor's cameras; there were no cameras in Brielle's room, so she could only see the woman

entering and leaving her room.

The sight of the woman's bandaged hand caught her eye. Brielle's pupils shrank in recognition—Lillian.

Wasn't Lillian supposed to be at the police station? How did she end up in Brielle's room?

Brielle touched her neck, feeling a surge of relief at having survived. Had it not been for the nurses, the delirious and feverish

Brielle might not have been so fortunate.

Her phone must have been taken by Lillian. But why? What would Lillian want with her phone?

## Chapter 293

Taking someone's belongings without permission that was called theft.

—

Brielle was about to borrow the nurse's phone to call the cops when the hospital intercom crackled to life, broadcasting a news

update that caught her attention.

-At ten this morning, the Haywood family declared bankruptcy. They're buried under a debt of nearly ten billion.

A crowd had gathered outside the Haywood Corporation's headquarters, with assembly line workers en masse filing for labor

disputes.

The reporter's voice, cold and detached, narrated Robert's downfall on the screen. "Unable to repay debts and being sued by

business partners, he's currently at the police station awaiting mediation. All his assets were frozen."

A top-ranking business in Beaconsfield, had been brought so low in mere days – it was a sobering spectacle.

Brielle watched the news quietly, half-believing she was hallucinating. She knew the Haywood family was in hot water, but she

hadn't expected things to unravel so quickly.

With her phone stolen, at least she wouldn't be bothered by any more nuisance calls from the Haywood family. A faint smile

ghosted her lips, but then her thoughts turned to Lillian's actions the previous night, and her brow furrowed in concern.

What was Lillian up to? Or what had she done using Brielle's phone?

A sense of unease gnawed at Brielle, and she immediately suspected a scheme at play. Brielle feared that the target was likely

someone who cared deeply for her.

She borrowed the nurse's phone and immediately dialed Aubree. But when Aubree picked up, everything seemed normal, so

Brielle asked her to sort out a new SIM card and bring over a replacement phone. "Aubree, I owe you one."

"Bri, stop it with the formalities. I'll be right over."

Aubree had just woken up, exhausted from a tumultuous night with Andrew, who had kept her up until the early hours, leaving

her utterly drained. Her voice was hoarse, and her body was a map of bruises as she mustered the strength to get out of bed.

Beside her, Andrew was still asleep and his arms were wrapped around her waist like iron bands. Glancing at his face, Aubree

paused for a moment. Andrew was undeniably handsome. and despite the disappointments, whenever they ended up entangled

again, her heart would helplessly flutter with attraction as she felt the sweat roll off his face and onto her.

She moved slightly and replied to Brielle. "What does that witch Lillian want with your phone? Did you call the cops? Alright, I'll

be over soon to talk more."

Her movements woke Andrew, who frowned and let her go.

As Aubree began to dress, her legs nearly gave out the moment they touched the floor. She looked up at Andrew through gritted

teeth and, unable to hold back, hurled a pillow at him.

Andrew caught the pillow with reflexive agility, looking up at her. "What's got you riled up so early?"

Aubree pointed to the marks on her neck, her face stern. "How am I supposed to go out looking like this?"

Andrew was unrepentantly willful in her presence, frowning. "Then don't go. I'm not finished with you yet."

Aubree stiffened, ignoring him and continuing to dress.

"Who are yo

you meeting?" Andrew sat up in bed with the sheets modestly covering his lower half. He was bathed in sunlight that

accentuated his sculpted physique.

"Bri. Her phone got snatched. I'm going to sort her out with a new SIM and bring her a new phone."

A sharp glint quickly passed through Andrew's eyes, and his lips curled with a cold smirk. So Brielle's phone had been stolen,

huh? Did that mean last night's fire was orchestrated by someone who used Brielle's phone to send a message to Max?

What a calamity.

"Is that so? I have a spare phone here that nobody's using." His tone sounded casual as he pulled a phone from the nightstand

drawer and tossed it to Aubree.

Aubree stood there, eyeing him with confusion. "You don't seem to like Bri much, so what's with the sudden generosity?"

## Chapter 294

Andrew arched an eyebrow and pulled her back in a swift motion. "Let's skip the part where you buy a phone, and we do this

again. I'll finish quickly, okay?"

Even with Aubree's thick skin, she couldn't help but feel her cheeks flush and her heart race.

Unbeknownst to her, a shadow of

darkness flickered through Andrew's eyes as she wrapped her arms around his neck.

Andrew had stamina like no other. When he said he'd be quick, Aubree really believed he was trying his best. Normally, he

wouldn't stop until a solid two hours went by, but this time it was all over in forty minutes.

Just last night, he had gone from midnight to dawn, and now, here they were, done so soon.

Aubree checked the phone. It was brand new, which didn't raise any suspicions. As she was about to leave, she heard Andrew

say, "Don't tell her it's from me. I don't want her getting too cocky."

Aubree chuckled at the thought. "Sure thing. Your Highness," she said, finding his petty jealousy somewhat amusing.

If only Aubree had looked back, she would've seen the smirk on Andrew's face, full of mockery. as if he was anticipating some



juicy drama to unfold.

After activating Brielle's new SIM card, Aubree hurried off to the hospital to see Brielle. As she neared the hospital, she glanced

at her phone and only then learned about last night's fire. It had happened right where Brielle's apartment was located.

Aubree's brows furrowed. Was the fire intended to hurt Bri?

Once in the hospital room, she asked the question that had been nagging at her. "Bri, why would Lillian steal your phone? What's

she up to?"

She handed over the new phone with a sneer. "The Haywoods may have taken a hit, but surely Lillian isn't so broke that she

can't afford a new phone."

Brielle took the new phone, shaking her head. She had no clue what Lillian's endgame was.

Aubree thought for a moment and then asked, "I heard about the fire last night at your apartment. Seems like a strange

coincidence. Do you think Lillian might have arranged a meeting with someone there? If the person that went there died, it would

hurt you a lot. Doesn't it sound like something Lillian would do?"

Brielle looked up sharply. "If you hadn't answered your phone, I might have thought it was you."

A hint of amusement flashed in Aubree's eyes. "Turns out it wasn't me. But if not me, could it possibly have been Max?"

Brielle's face paled at the mention of his name. Could it actually be Max?

Aubree noticed her concern and sighed. "I'm just messing with you. Don't take it so seriously."

What Aubree didn't expect was for Brielle to call Max without a moment's hesitation. Aubree's eyes narrowed, but she didn't

speak up to stop Brielle.

Brielle's eyes lit up hearing the phone ring. She thought she was still on his blocked list. Memories of Max quietly moving

Spencer for Brielle's sake, visiting her in the hospital in the middle of the night despite their breakup, and dealing with the

Haywood family made Brielle's eyes well up with tears.

If something had really happened to him....

Her fingers trembled, and she felt as though an invisible hand was choking her, making it hard to breathe.

The phone rang a few times, but nobody picked up. Anxiety grew within her. Why wouldn't Max answer? Could he be in trouble?

She recalled Patrick's words—over the years, countless people had wanted to take Max down. He was always on guard; how

could he just fall into trouble so easily?

Brielle looked down, but then remembered how she'd slipped vitamins into the porridge she made for him. He didn't seem to be

on guard then. Her heart ached with longing for the call to be answered.

One minute passed, then two, and finally, a mechanical female voice came on the line. The call went unanswered.

With a fever already burning within her, Brielle's vision started to fade in and out, and the world around her seemed to shake

violently.

## Chapter 295

Inside the Premier Palace, the sound of Patrick's phone ringing cut through the quiet intensity of the room. He glanced at the

screen, saw the name flashing, and promptly notified Max. "Sir, you have a call from Ms. Brielle."

Patrick was expecting Max to pick up immediately, but he was met with a surprise. Max continued to sift through the corporate

documents as if deaf to the world.

The phone continued its persistent melody.

Patrick was perplexed. What was going on with the boss? Just last night, Max had someone stationed at the hospital to protect

Ms. Brielle from the desperate Haywood clan, who might threaten her.

All signs pointed to Max caring for Ms. Brielle. Yet now, his reaction was non-existent.

Though Max didn't say, Patrick surmised that the scheme that unfolded last night must have involved Brielle. They had since

locked down all information from reaching the outside world. No one would know Max had been there.

As for Lillian, the instigator, her fate was uncertain after falling from the high wall. Perhaps she had already been consumed by

the flames.

Patrick had personally overseen the information blackout, confident he knew Max's mind inside

out.

Patrick assumed that Max's actions were to shield Brielle. Even so, he was not a deity; oversights occurred. If something

happened to Brielle, what then?

Andrew's face flashed in Patrick's mind, and he frowned. He couldn't help but feel that Mr. Clements wasn't too fond of Ms.

Brielle. He hoped Mr. Clements wouldn't take any drastic steps.

With a sigh, Patrick noticed Max's phone finally quieting down, while Max himself remained in a state of cool detachment.

Soon after, Patrick's phone rang. He glanced at the caller ID and promptly informed Max. "Sir, Ms. Brielle is calling me now."

Max finally reacted, lifting his gaze slightly. "Mmm, tell her to focus on her recovery. Dorsey International needs her."

It that needed her, not Max. Brielle was a smart woman; she would

as Dorso Int

understand.

Patrick grew more puzzled. Had they fought again? But judging by Max's demeanor, this seemed particularly serious.

He answered the call. "Ms. Brielle."

"Patrick, where's Max?"

"The boss isn't feeling well and can't come to the phone right now. Perhaps you could try again tomorrow, Ms. Brielle."

"What's wrong with him?"

Brielle's voice was laced with urgency, but remembering Aubree was nearby, she restrained herself. "Has he seen a doctor?"

Patrick paused briefly before delivering the premeditated response.

"Mr. Dorsey has been running on empty since his trip overseas. The doctor has seen him and prescribed rest. So he'll be

stepping back from company matters for a few days."

He emphasized 'company,' unwilling to be too explicit. But Brielle misunderstood. Max was a workaholic, who wouldn't leave the

office as long as he could hold a mouse. He wouldn't drop work unless it was serious.

He didn't even take her call. Was he unconscious?

Brielle was worried sick and felt the phone call wasn't enough to express her concern. She considered visiting Premier Palace. "I

understand. Tell him to rest well."

Patrick, unaware of Brielle's turmoil, felt a twinge of frustration hearing her not press further. Max had exposed himself to danger

for Ms. Brielle's sake. He almost got hurt in the process. and she was none the wiser – such an unbalanced affair.

Yet, that was just Max's way. He never boasted about his actions. Maybe he did not understand why he felt compelled to be

there for Ms. Brielle.

even

Max didn't understand affection, but he knew the craving that spread from deep within his throat—a desire to treat Ms. Brielle

well. This was more controlled, more profound than mere liking.

A fleeting romantic gesture was merely a momentary dazzle, but enduring affection was true tenderness.

Still, what Max was doing now was beyond Patrick's grasp.

## Chapter 296

After hanging up the phone, Brielle stared blankly at her mobile device. Max hadn't answered her call. Could it be that Lillian had

used her phone to set up a meeting with Max?

Brielle was beside herself with worry, itching to leap out of bed.

Aubree steadied her, a puzzled frown creasing her brow. "If Max lacked even the most basic vigilance, he'd have been taken out

a long time ago. A mere Lillian couldn't possibly outmaneuver him. You should be more concerned about yourself right now."

Brielle's lips trembled as she slowly lay back down. "But he really didn't answer, and Patrick mentioned he was feeling unwell."

Aubree would never believe that Lillian could get one over on Max. In her mind, Lillian was nothing but a venomous little daisy,

whose dark tactics couldn't hold a candle to Max's capabilities.

"Aubree, could you please check with Andrew for me? Ask him where Max is?"

Brielle had thought about calling Kenzo again, but after several attempts already, she was worried about annoying him. Besides,

Kenzo was Alivia's brother.

Aubree sighed as her hand massaged her temples. "Bri, don't say I didn't warn you. Falling for Max is a thousand times more

embarrassing than my thing for Andrew."

Brielle hung her head, fully aware of the truth in those words. When she first got to know Max, she thought she was clear—

headed enough not to cross certain lines. She was in it for the thrill convinced that their relationship was purely transactional.

But once feelings got involved, it was a one-sided affair. Max wouldn't join her on her stage. and if her affections were ever to be

discovered, he might even recoil in disgust.

Brielle felt a headache coming on. Why had she never felt this conflicted with Spencer? When Spencer had wronged her, all she

wanted was to bite back with venomous fangs. But if Max ever trampled on her heart, she doubted she would even have the

courage to retaliate.

Seeing Brielle's pallor, Aubree finally caved and pulled out her phone. "I'll call Andrew right now."

"Thank you." After Brielle murmured her thanks, she rested quietly against the headboard.

Aubree quickly dialed and hit the call button. "It's me."

Andrew had already settled into the living room, with his legs crossed atop the coffee table, and a subtle smugness in his gaze.

"What's up?"

"Do you know where Max is?" Aubree was straightforward and didn't beat around the bush.

Andrew knew Aubree had visited Brielle, so this question was likely asked on Brielle's behalf.

Thinking of Max's demeanor the previous night. Andrew's eyes chilled over, and his lips curved into a cold smirk. "Max, huh? Word is Alivia's coming back. He's probably buried in work, trying to clear his schedule to spend

time with her. Even when I called him out for drinks, he was too busy. He must be working himself sick. Aubree, when did you

start worrying about Max's whereabouts?"

Aubree had put Andrew on speaker, so every word was crystal clear to Brielle.

Worried about Brielle's feelings, Aubree quickly ended the call. "Bri, do you want something to eat?"

Brielle's face was expressionless, but inside, she felt as if she'd been pierced with a thousand thorns. She mustered her

strength, not letting any sorrow show, and shook her head gently. "Not hungry."

If it wasn't Max, what was Lillian's game plan last night? Lillian was cornered and wouldn't waste time on meaningless acts.

"I've always said men are no good, and Max has obviously chosen Alivia over you."

Aubree's words were hard to bear, but sometimes, the harsh truth was the best medicine. Without this honesty, Brielle would've

only sunk deeper.

"Bri, you've seen the bracelet on Max's wrist, right? It matches the one Alivia wears. He's never taken it off all these years, which

tells you everything about her place in his heart."

## Chapter 297

Brielle's head throbbed with a relentless pain, but she prided herself on being a game player. someone who could take a loss as

easily as a win.

Knowing she harbored a little crush on Max, Brielle wasn't about to hide her feelings in front of her friends. Her affection was her

own, independent of how Max felt. Max was genuinely kind to her, but who he liked was his business.

Brielle breathed a sigh of relief and rasped, "Glad he's okay."

Aubree, seeing Brielle like this, felt a mix of frustration and sympathy. But then she thought about her own situation and realized

she wasn't one to give advice, so she just sighed. "I'll go grab you something from the hospital cafeteria."

Brielle wasn't hungry, but her mind was a jumbled mess, and she worried that under Aubree's watchful eye, her true emotions

would spill. So, she nodded in agreement.

Once Aubree left, Brielle glanced at her leg, wondering when it would heal. Max wasn't answering her calls, and she needed to

figure out what he was up to. But incessantly reaching out would only give away her feelings; it was better to interact at work.

Her leg needed to heal quickly.

After some thought, when Aubree returned, she convinced Aubree to go home. Once Aubree was gone, Brielle discharged

herself and planned to recuperate at her place.

The doctor saw Brielle was alone and tried to persuade her to stay. "Ms. Brielle, your leg can't afford another injury. It would be

best if you stayed in the hospital for a week."

"No need. I'll take good care of it at home."

With no other choice, the doctor processed her discharge.

Brielle took a cab back to Pearl Estate, and upon settling on the sofa, she couldn't resist dialing Patrick's number. She wanted to

confront Max about whether he was serious about Alivia.

Patrick picked up, but his excuses were the same, claiming Max was unwell.

"Patrick, can he take a call right now? I just want to hear his voice," she pleaded, hoping it would ease her mind.

Patrick glanced at the man engrossed in his emails. His lips were pressed tight. "I'm terribly sorry, Ms. Brielle, he is unavailable right now."

Disappointment flooded Brielle's heart. Was he really busy, or did he just not want to talk to her? Had he decided to end things,

and was that why he was being so cold?

"Patrick, I need to know where Spencer is being held. Ryan has taken Mark as a hostage, and I need to exchange him for

Spencer; otherwise, I fear for Mark's safety."

In truth, as long as she had Spencer, Ryan wouldn't dare make a move, but at the moment, this

was the only excuse she had.

Patrick's eyes flickered with complexity. He needed Max's input, so he replied, "Ms. Brielle, I'll try discussing it with Mr. Dorsey

and get back to you once he has made a decision."

With no other option, Brielle hung up.

Patrick pocketed his phone and looked at Max. "Sir, Ms. Brielle called, Should we hand Spencer over to her?"

Max looked up from the sea of paperwork, his tone detached. "If she wants him, let her have him."

Patrick couldn't help but remind him of the stakes. "Ryan's got a lot of pull, and Ms. Brielle can't handle him alone. Once Spencer

is with her, Ryan is bound to catch on. He might go after her. not to mention he's taken Mark hostage. If this isn't handled right,

Mark might..." He was cut off before he could finish.

"It's her job to save Mark. If someone gets hurt, it's her own lack of ability to blame."

That was the stance to take, and from now on, they would be nothing more than a boss and at subordinate. That suited him just

fine.

Patrick clamped his lips shut, noting the stark change in Max's demeanor. Patrick called to reach out to Brielle, while silently

counting down.

Three.



Two.

One.

As expected, Max spoke up, lifting his gaze slightly. "Go. Ensure her safety."

## Chapter 298

Patrick's mouth twitched, and a hint of mirth danced in his eyes.

What was

was this? The lady doth protest too much, methinks?

Max furrowed his brow, clearly with more on his mind. After a long pause, Max managed to get the words out. "Don't tell her I

was at the apartment."

Patrick nodded as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Seeing Max had nothing more to add, Patrick went ahead and

reconnected with Brielle.

Her phone lit up with his number, and a subtle spark of joy flickered in her eyes. "Patrick.

"Ms. Brielle, I'll take you to see Spencer, but have you figured out how you're going to make the swap with Ryan?"

Brielle hadn't expected Max to let go so easily. She thought he'd have more questions. "I've got it sorted. I'll reach out to Ryan

anonymously and set up the exchange."

"But Ryan won't let this go easily. He's poured a lot into finding Spencer, and even Michael's in the loop now. He's going to dig

until he finds who's behind this."

Brielle understood Patrick's hint. She might not be able to handle this alone; perhaps she should seek Max's help. But since Max

had managed to hide Spencer for days without Ryan finding a shred of evidence, any suspicion towards Brielle had already

dissolved. In Ryan's eyes, Brielle lacked the means to hide someone for so long.

"I'm aware. I'll be careful."

She didn't voice her intention to seek Max's aid, leaving Patrick at a loss for words. In some ways, their temperaments were

similar. Max had gone off the rails, and Brielle wasn't one to make the first move. The two of them at odds put Patrick, their go-

between, in a tough spot.

Patrick was about to say more when Wesley's voice came from behind. "Sir, would you care for a coffee?" Patrick stiffened

instinctively and almost immediately ended the call.

Brielle, staring at the disconnected call, had heard Wesley's voice, Wesley was asking Max. meaning Max was available to talk.

Why wouldn't he talk to her?

Brielle's gaze dropped, and her lips were pressed tightly together. She tried his number again. tentatively. "Sorry, the number you

have dialed is currently unavailable."

Hearing the familiar automated voice, she chuckled ruefully and sighed. It was right to keep her feelings hidden. As long as Max

was safe, that was enough.

As for the rest, as Andrew had said, Alivia was returning. If Max wanted to cut ties with Briella completely, what could she do?

They were never from the same world to begin with.

For now, she needed to focus on the hostage exchange with Ryan.

With her call to Patrick cut short, she had no choice but to wait for him to reach out. True to form, Patrick called in the evening. "Ms. Brielle, I'm outside Pearl Estate."

Brielle grabbed her cane and hobbled downstairs, making her way out. Her heart thumped unreasonably as she approached the

familiar car. Pushing down her emotions, she drew closer.

The car door swung open, revealing only Patrick inside. "I'll take you to where Spencer is being held. I'll help with the exchange."

Brielle sat in the backseat, pondering before she couldn't help but ask, "Did Max send you to help me?"

Patrick paused, then honesty prevailed, "No, the boss hasn't thought that far ahead."

The atmosphere in the car turned quiet. Brielle said nothing more, and Patrick kept his mouth shut.

Patrick suspected this might hurt Brielle, but even he couldn't fathom the boss' current stance. The truth was the best he could

offer. "Ms. Brielle, once you're on your feet, maybe you should ask the boss directly if you've got questions."

That was as far as Patrick dared to go.

Brielle just nodded faintly, her gaze returning to the window. She seemed indifferent, yet her fingertips trembled slightly on her

knee. She wasn't foolish; she could read between Patrick's lines.

Max was keeping his distance deliberately, and Patrick didn't want to spell it out and embarrass her. Her lips twitched into a faint

smile. Same as always, she could take a hint.

If Max was initiating the end, it meant he didn't care for her. And those who didn't care for her didn't get her care in return.

While her feelings were still budding, it was best to let them fade slowly.

The two of them traveled in silence.

## Chapter 299

Spencer was held captive in a suburban villa. His movements were restricted, but otherwise, he was well-fed and well-rested

these past few days.

The room had only one pitiful window, high up on the wall, practically useless except for letting in some sunlight and a bit of fresh

air.

Spencer sighed and looked up just as he heard the sound of a car engine from outside. Someone was coming.

Sure enough, footsteps soon approached his door. A man entered, efficiently binding Spencer from head to toe and blindfolding

him with a thick black cloth.

Spencer had kicked up a fuss on the first day, cursing Brielle. He was convinced that she was behind this whole mess. But the

men watching over him were not your average bodyguards and were built like tanks, with the keen edge of retired soldiers.

Knowing Brielle for years, Spencer was aware of her limitations. She couldn't possibly have the connections to hire these kinds

of people.

So, it was Brielle who had initially nabbed him, but had someone bribed the hotel manager to buy him off her hands later on?

Anger and a sense of betrayal churned within Spencer. He had wanted to tarnish Brielle's reputation, not take her life. And yet,

she had treated him with such cold-hearted betrayal.

Spencer had lived a charmed life and was raised in luxury. Every minor disgrace he suffered recently was tied to Brielle's

machinations. Now, he felt unbearably wronged and vowed to settle the score with Brielle if he made it out alive.

Blindfolded, he could see nothing, relying on his captors to guide him forward.

Brielle and Patrick arrived at the villa just as Spencer was being led out. He couldn't see his surroundings, but he sensed

someone's gaze and instinctively turned. "Who's there?"

Brielle remained silent, her eyes signaling Patrick, curious about his next move. Patrick leaned in, whispering so only the two of

them could hear. "I've informed Ryan. The exchange will happen nearby. He should be on his way. Once Mark is secured, Ms.

Brielle, take your men and leave. Better get Mark out of Beaconsfield; otherwise, Ryan will keep using him as leverage against

you."

Brielle nodded, sharing the same thoughts. She dreaded Mark suffering the same fate as her grandfather. Remembering Julian,

Brielle felt her eyes well up with tears, which she fought back fiercely.

Before she could dwell on it further, Spencer's voice broke through. "Let me go! Who the hell are you guys?"

Seeing Spencer's face, unscathed by his ordeal, Brielle thought he seemed to have been living comfortably. She lowered her

lashes, refusing to look at him any longer.

Meanwhile, Ryan had indeed received the message. After deploying so many resources and not finding Spencer, his temper was

explosive and aggravated further by Faith's constant weeping at home.

Who were these kidnappers, and why would they exchange Spencer for an old man? Was there more to Mark than met the eye?

Despite racking his brain, Ryan couldn't figure it out. Now that they had initiated contact, he was eager to seize the opportunity to

retrieve his son. He had Mark brought over, and they set off immediately.

Faith had wanted to accompany them, but one look at Ryan's disdainful expression was enough to make her shrink back. She

stayed behind in the villa.

Ryan was seething with venomous thoughts, contemplating using this chance to eliminate the threat once and for all. However,

any unexpected incidents could put Spencer's life at risk. With lips pressed tight, he restrained from harshly interrogating Mark,

fearing Spencer might suffer in return. So, Mark was treated the same as Spencer – confined but otherwise unharmed.

Upon reaching the agreed location, Ryan was furious to find the hideout so close to the city center. It was under his very nose

the whole time.

Swallowing his pride, Ryan ordered Mark to be taken down. Who was pulling the strings behind this group of kidnappers?

Despite his reluctance, Ryan had no choice but to proceed with the exchange.

## Chapter 300

Brielle and Patrick stood on the second floor, overseeing the commotion as Spencer was escorted out by a group of burly men.

The atmosphere was tense, with neither side showing any courtesy or restraint.

Ryan scrutinized the men carefully, noting their disposition. It was clear they were more than just ordinary bodyguards, but

beyond that, he couldn't tell. Frowning at the uncertainty of his adversaries, Ryan wasn't about to make any rash moves.

As Spencer was led closer to Ryan, a look of relief washed over his face, and he couldn't help but ask, "Spencer, are you

alright?"

Hearing his father's voice, Spencer became frantic, struggling against his captors. "Dad! Dad! Save me!"

Seeing a gun pressed against Spencer's head, Ryan's own heart raced, and he was even more cautious. "Spencer, calm down.

Just hang on. I'll get you out of here soon."

After speaking, Ryan signaled to his crew to bring Mark over, and pushed him forward. The other side reciprocated by releasing

Spencer.

Both parties had exchanged their hostages without a hitch, but just as tension peaked, gunfire erupted.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

"Bang! Bang!"

It was unclear who had fired the shots, but Ryan's group was thrown into disarray. their guns blazing in all directions.

Brielle's face turned dark as she watched from the second floor. This wasn't the work of Ryan or Max's people; a third party had

joined the fray!

"Patrick, call everyone to retreat. There's a third party involved, and we don't know what they're after," she ordered.

Patrick nodded and relayed the retreat order through the walkie-talkie, and everyone in the villa began to pull back.

With her cane in hand, Brielle descended the stairs and sighed in relief once she saw that Mark was only unconscious. Outside,

the gunfire persisted, and Ryan's men were now engaged in a fierce battle with this third party.

Patrick's expression turned grim. The meeting location had been chosen at the last minute, and there was no way their side

leaked information. With Ryan fighting for his son's life, he wouldn't have staged this, especially as he was still in combat. So,

who was behind this third-party intervention?

"Ms. Brielle, there's a tunnel on the innermost side. This villa is just a shell; let's get out of here." Patrick informed her.

Brielle nodded and followed them out. Their retreat was swift, and thanks to the tunnel, there were no casualties. They had

successfully rescued Mark.

However, Ryan's situation was dire. The third party shot indiscriminately, and many of Ryan's bodyguards lay dead. Ryan pulled

Spencer back to the car, tore the blindfold from his eyes, and cut the ropes binding his hands and feet with a knife.

Spencer heard the chaotic gunfire around them, his heart skipped a beat, and his face was drained of color. Frustrated, Ryan

slapped the dashboard. "Let's get out of here! Move!"

Ryan had brought a considerable number of people, thinking it would prevent any tricks the kidnappers might play. Now, they

were his lifeline.

His car sped away, half-expecting to meet resistance on the road. However, the third party didn't give chase; they continued

their assault on the villa. Their target wasn't Ryan or his group; it was the kidnappers..

Ryan's eyes were filled with a ruthless glint, but he didn't dare to look back at the ongoing battle.

As for Spencer, realizing the motives of the third party unsettled him. He had been kidnapped by Brielle, and although he hadn't

seen the people watching over him, he knew they were somehow connected to her. If there was even a one percent chance

Brielle was still in the villa, she would be in grave danger now.

The thought pricked his heart, and he heard Ryan's question.

"Do you know who kidnapped you? At first, I thought it was Brielle since she was the one who arranged to meet you the day you

disappeared. We couldn't find any trace of you or her at the hotel. Was it really her?"

Instinctively. Spencer was about to confirm it was Brielle, but catching the venom in Ryan's eyes, he realized that if his father

knew the truth, Brielle wouldn't stand a chance. mOddly enough, Spencer didn't want her to die—not now, not ever, even if her

actions had brought him. shame.

"Dad, how could it be Brielle? What kind of power does she have? Who could she possibly rely on? The Haywood family?"