

## Master 321

### Chapter 321

Brielle tapped into the news feed. Her eyes landed on a photograph of Max and Alivia. There was Alivia, all smiles, beaming up

at Max. Since he was shot from behind, his expression remained a mystery to the onlookers.

But the vibe of the picture? It screamed 'head over heels – a tale as old as time.

A bitter taste seeped into Brielle's smile as she exhaled a heavy sigh, and switched her phone into airplane mode. She settled

back, letting the evening sky captivate her attention. The heavens were painted with strokes of crimson, reflecting off the river in

a dazzling dance of

color.

After taking a few sips of water and nibbling on some snacks, she pulled out her phone to capture the sunset's beauty in a few

snapshots, before continuing on her journey.

Meanwhile, outside the gates of Pearl Estate, Aubree was nursing a cigarette between her fingers. She'd been buzzing the

intercom for minutes, but Brielle hadn't answered.

The news had reached her last night – a slip of the tongue from Andrew, a deliberate leak. Alivia couldn't stand Brielle, so she

asked Max to take her out on Brielle's birthday as a twisted form of revenge.

Aubree had pondered over the perfect birthday gift for Brielle days in advance, and even conspired with Andrew to secure a fine

diamond from Infinity Brilliance.

Hearing Andrew's words last night had sent Aubree into a fury. What was Max playing at? The dislike was one thing, but toying

with someone's emotions was cruel.

Brielle, ever so committed in matters of the heart, was ready to face any storm for love. Still, her sincerity seemed to be the

punchline of a joke to others.

When Aubree called Brielle last night, she couldn't bring herself to break the harsh truth. She hinted, but Brielle, lost in hopeful

anticipation for her day with Max, missed the undertones.

Aubree had harbored a sliver of hope herself – hope that Max wasn't like Andrew, a cad who'd warm Tessa's bed while courting

her. But the news of Max picking up Alivia was out- scoundrels indeed flocked together.

Aubree imagined Brielle nursing a broken heart somewhere, enduring a lonely birthday. The thought twisted her insides with

discomfort.

She dialed Andrew. His voice came through, drowsy and indifferent. "What's up?"

"You're just like Max, a jerk."

Andrew was silent for a beat before his leg dropped off the coffee table. "Look, Aubree, what's gotten into you? If you're mad at

Max, fine, but why lash out at me?"

"You're a bunch of scumbags."

"Weren't you quite happy under one of those 'scumbags' last night?"

He chuckled, squinting mischievously. "Are you done with your rant? Think about what you want for dinner."

"Check where Bri is for me. Her phone's unreachable, and I'm worried."

"A grown woman gone missing? Please. And it's not like this is some kind of a breakup. She knew what she was getting into with

Max."

Andrew was used to Aubree's verbal lashings, and shrugged it off. At most, he'd 'punish' her later in bed.

"Aubree. Mom called today; she wants us over for dinner. Are you coming?"

Aubree was surprised, and her lashes fluttered. "I'll see. She doesn't really want to see me. She's just checking if I've got a

boyfriend so I won't be a bother to you."

The Clements had their suspicions. Their mother was more astute, and sensed something amiss between Aubree and Andrew.

She probed now and then. Frustrated, Aubree had moved out.

Her tone softened. "Just find out where Bri is."

"No."

That damn man!

Aubree's scalp tingled with anger. "If you don't, I'll go to Tessa and tell her we've been sleeping together for years."

The line went dead.

After a minute, her phone buzzed with a message. [Brielle was spotted on her way to the Radiant Light Church.]

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Aubree let out a sigh of relief; it seemed Brielle had ventured out on her own. A walk to clear her head was probably for the best,

instead of staying put and being bombarded with constant updates about Max and Alivia's escapades.

Meanwhile, Brielle was still in the car; her phone was on airplane mode, which meant no more incoming messages. She decided

to spend the night in a hotel in the city she had reached.

After booking a room, she parked her car and headed inside.

This was a neighboring city to Beaconsfield, and the hotel, nestled in a small county town, wasn't exactly top-notch. In the dead

of night, a sudden pounding at the door jolted her awake. \*Bang! Bang! Bang!"

"Boom!"

A cacophony of sounds twisted her brows in an instant as she sat up in bed.

The noises continued outside, peppered with the cursing of men in a local dialect Brielle couldn't understand. She pushed a table

against the door for added security.

The hotel lacked any means to contact the front desk, and even if she called the cops, by the time they arrived, it might be too

late for whoever was in trouble. One table wasn't enough, so she barricaded the door further with chairs.

The pounding lasted until after eleven, and she glanced at her phone. Her birthday was nearly over.

No cake, no well-wishes.

Her lips twisted into a wry smile, consoled by the thought that at least she had witnessed a beautiful sunset.

Once the noise ceased, she curled up in bed and drifted back to sleep. At the crack of dawn, she rose, eager to reach Radiant

Light Church in time to possibly catch the sunrise.

After a two-hour drive around the scenic mountain roads, she parked her car beneath the Radiant Light Church. The sun was

just peeking out from the sea of clouds, a fiery orb. Her gloom lifted entirely, and she couldn't resist stepping closer to breathe in

the fresh air of nature. The sun, like a giant golden coin, began to radiate beams of light.

Watching the sunrise, Brielle felt the insignificance of humanity in the vast scheme of the universe. Her brief chapter with Max, in

the grand timeline, was minuscule, so there was nothing to fret over.

She dropped some coins into the donation box and prayed. Then she took out Julian's urn and entrusted it to the church's

reverend, hoping for spiritual guidance.

After completing these rituals, she remembered Aubree's instructions and pulled out a few wooden plaques. After pondering, she wrote down Aubree's wish:

May Aubree and Andrew be lied together for life.

Upon hanging the plaque on a tree, she considered her next move and wrote—Wishing for Mark's health and longevity.

With the third plaque in her hands, she was at a loss; she had no wishes of her own. After much thought and ensuring no one

was watching, she wrote down—Hoping Max might give liking me a try. The idea of Max with Alivia made her feel like a lowly

interloper. She quickly erased it and rewrote—Wishing myself a happy birthday.

Feeling relieved, she hung the plaque up.

The scenery at the Radiant Light Church was stunning. It was surrounded by mountains, yet no one was there to share it with

her.

Just as she thought this, a voice called out from behind. "Brielle?"

She stiffened, thinking she'd misheard, and spun around. "Kenzo?"

Kenzo was dressed casually, looking somewhat surprised. "What are you doing here?"

Brielle couldn't admit the real reason for her visit, so she bit her lip awkwardly. "Just felt like paying respects, I've been through a

lot lately, and I feel like my luck's been down."

Kenzo chuckled, eyeing the tree with the hanging plaques. "What did you wish for?"

Brielle was glad she had changed the last plaque because when Kenzo saw the first one she'd written, he laughed softly. "Did

Aubree ask you to write that?"

Brielle blushed slightly, nodding. "She made sure to tell me before I came."

The plaques were right there, hard to ignore.

Brielle had never felt so wise. If Kenzo had seen her original third wish, the embarrassment would have been unbearable. Just

the thought made her cringe. It was such a cheesy line, and it came from her hand.

Indeed, being in love could make one do silly things.

"Is today your birthday?"

Kenzo's voice was always gentle, his gaze warm.

Brielle felt a touch embarrassed, "Um."

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"I didn't know, so I didn't prepare a gift or anything in advance, but here, this is for you." He handed her a tiny jewelry box,

probably containing a necklace or something similar.

Brielle tried to decline quickly. "No need, really, thank you."

Kenzo chuckled and placed it in her hands anyway. "I was planning to give it to my sister, but got held up and couldn't go back.

Running into you must be fate, so take it."

To push further would be impolite, so Brielle accepted it with gratitude. "Thank you."

Hanging out with Kenzo wasn't awkward, but Brielle was still curious. What was Kenzo doing here? It seemed too much of a

coincidence.

Perhaps her confusion was too apparent, as Kenzo offered a light-hearted smile. "A family member has been feeling under the

weather, and a buddy mentioned this place is quite miraculous. Since I happened to be out of town, it was convenient to come

by."

That explained it.

"You're so thoughtful. I'm sure your family will bounce back in no time."

As they chatted, they continued walking inside, just as a priest came out to invite them for a meal.

Brielle had just taken a seat at the table when Kenzo's phone rang. Without stepping away, he answered the call. "Alivia?"

Brielle's hand paused mid-motion, and then she quickly pretended to be engrossed in her food.

Kenzo laughed softly. "Dining with Max? How is it? I can't make it back now; I'll probably return tomorrow. Ran into an old friend

and decided to stay another night, yeah."

Brielle was worried Kenzo might've mentioned her by name. It wasn't guilt she felt but rather a desire not to draw further

attention from Alivia. Noah's reaction the other day had made it clear he was acting under Alivia's influence. That meant Brielle

had already caught Alivia's eye. And since her involvement with Max had ended, there was no reason for Brielle to remain a

target of Alivia's spite.

Fortunately, Kenzo didn't bring her up during the call. Brielle let out a sigh of relief and quietly continued with her meal, but she

couldn't help but notice that the rice seemed to have taken on a bitter taste.

From the snippets of Kenzo's conversation, Brielle deduced that Alivia was with the Dorsey family and that they were likely

dining together, which was why Max hadn't been able to join her at the Radiant Light Church.

"Let's talk about the engagement when I get back. It all depends on how you and Max feel,

Alivia. What's meant to be will always find a way."

Kenzo spoke with calm assurance. Even just hearing him talk, made Brielle feel envious of Alivia for having such a brother.

With his distinguished family background, impressive education, and good looks—just as Tiffanie Harkins had said—Alivia truly was a golden girl.

After hanging up, Kenzo noticed Brielle had only nibbled at her food and slid a plate of greens her way. “If you fancy a burger or

steak, there’s a place on the next hill over. The blossoms there last longer than anywhere else. Maybe we’ll see a whole hillside

of wildflowers. I plan to snap a few shots. Care to join?”

A photography trip?

Kenzo, being a screenwriter, was always hunting for inspiration. Brielle’s eyes lit up with envy, and all traces of her earlier

despondency were gone. “Is it really that beautiful?”

Kenzo feigned contemplation before breaking into a grin. “Well, I find it beautiful. I’ve been there before. It’s not a tourist spot,

untouched by developers. The hotel there is owned by a friend. It’s exclusive and doesn’t open to the public.”

“I’d love to go. Thanks.”

Brielle’s spirits lifted, and her eyes sparkled with anticipation.

Kenzo’s gaze flickered, then shifted away. “Finish up, and we’ll head out.”

Brielle nodded, forced a few more bites, and declared she was full.

They took Kenzo’s car, and Brielle had brought the ceramic urn. She volunteered an explanation, “This contains my

grandfather’s ashes. I thought, since the place is so beautiful, it’d be nice for him to see it too.”

“You’re thoughtful. Let’s go.”

She got into his car, and they set off toward the other hill.

After a three-hour drive, they arrived just as the evening was setting in, with the moon shining unusually bright over the hills.

The hotel Kenzo mentioned was more like a boutique lodge, beautifully secluded. Yet the owner was nowhere to be found, and

the place felt like a hidden paradise, only known to those led

there by someone in the know.

“Kenzo, where’s your friend?”

Kenzo glanced around and chuckled ruefully. “Looks like we picked the wrong time. He must be out. No worries, they never lock

up here. There’s no one around for miles.”

Brielle couldn’t shake a shiver of fear. What kind of person runs a hotel in such a remote mountain?

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She swallowed hard, grateful that the power supply here was ample, and cast a lovely glow from the well-arranged lights.

Brielle took a step forward and opened the refrigerator. As expected, it was stocked with various kinds of fresh meats. However,

her culinary skills were limited at best. Just as she was about to search for some rice to make a simple porridge, she saw Kenzo

pulling out a piece of meat. “How about a stew? Or maybe you’d prefer a different flavor?”

Brielle was taken aback. Kenzo, with his otherworldly demeanor, knew how to cook. “Stew sounds great. Thank you.”

Kenzo nodded towards the couch not too far away. “Take a seat. It’ll be ready in an hour.”

Brielle, shamefully salivating, managed an “Okay.” However, she didn’t sit down. Instead, she wandered out to the adjacent

balcony, lost in the tranquility of the secluded valley.

The night was far from pitch black in the mountains; it was lively instead. The moon here shone brighter than in Beaconsfield,

and the distant sounds of insects filled the air. She closed her eyes, letting the mountain breeze caress her face and the scent of

flowers wafting from below.

This was indeed a beautiful place.

Pulling out her phone, she snapped a picture of the moonlit scene, intending to send it to Aubree as a sign of her safety, but

even after disabling airplane mode, there was no signal.

Puzzled, she walked back inside.

“Kenzo, do you have a signal on your phone?”

Kenzo, having donned gloves, was meticulously arranging the washed meat and vegetables. Upon hearing her, he pointed to his

phone on the coffee table. “See for yourself.”

Brielle picked up his phone—no signal there either. How were they supposed to contact the outside world?

She paced around the lobby, noting the absence of any entertainment facilities. Surely, there was Wi-Fi. If not, she’d be off the

grid for the duration of their stay.

“Kenzo, is there no Wi-Fi here? When you came here before, were you also unable to connect with the outside world?”

Kenzo paused his preparation, and his brow furrowed in confusion. “No internet?”

He pondered, “Could someone have installed a signal jammer around here?”

He chuckled ruefully. “If you’re scared, we can head back after dinner.”

Brielle felt a bit embarrassed; it wasn’t fear, just the modern dread of being without a network. Besides, Kenzo was here to take

photographs, and with the pitch-black night, he’d have to wait for the sun to rise. If they left now, his trip would have been for

nothing.

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“No worries, it’s just inconvenient without the internet.”

She sat down, unaware that the atmosphere back at the Dorsey family estate was incredibly tense.

Everyone had gathered at home, quietly waiting for the doctor to finish examining Michael. Just the other day, in the early hours,

Michael had suffered a stroke and collapsed.

Max, who was supposed to leave with Brielle, heard about the incident an hour before their departure and rushed back

overnight. Thankfully, Michael was rescued in time and was out of danger, but his condition was precarious, and he was

preoccupied with Max's future.

In the grand hall, the doctor sat respectfully, wiping the sweat from his brow. "Michael is out of danger now, but he must avoid

stress going forward. It seems to be a complication from his youth. He needs plenty of rest."

Max sat in the most conspicuous spot, his expression grim.

Meanwhile, Michael, with Victoria's assistance, was making his way downstairs. Clearing his throat, he looked down at his family

gathered below. Except for the third son, who never cared for Beaconsfield, everyone was there.

"Ahem, Max, Alivia came back yesterday, and you had lunch with her today. How do you feel?"

It was Michael who had instructed Max to pick up Alivia. At that time, Michael had made this demand right after being

resuscitated.

The doctor advised indulging Michael's whims, so Max had no choice but to head for the airport. His gaze fell as he remembered

the meal with the Barnes family earlier that day: his patience was obviously wearing thin.

"No particular feelings."

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The atmosphere in the room turned rather eerie as he spoke.

In the Dorsey household, Michael's authority was unchallenged, towering above everyone. else's. So when trouble knocked on

his door, the whole family gathered, fearing the worst.

The only person who might have had a fighting chance at keeping Max in check was Michael himself.

Without Michael, the rest of the Dorseys were like dolls in Max's presence. Even William felt a twinge of worry with the sudden

turn of events.

Now that Michael was just beginning to recover, Max's words were startlingly blunt.

Victoria, who was helping Michael to the sofa in the living room, shot Max a glare. "Max, Dad's just getting better. Tone it down a bit, will you?"

As Michael settled on the couch, he waved off their concern with the ease of long habit. "This old body of mine has seen better days. What worries me most, Max, is not being around to see you settled." He might as well have come right out and told Max to marry Alivia.

"Father, I've made it perfectly clear to Alivia years ago. Our families have been friends for generations, but that's all she and I can be," Max stated.

Michael gave him a quiet look, followed by a cough. "Didn't you say that if you didn't find someone you liked, you'd marry Alivia?"

So, have you found that someone now?"

The question hung in the air like a soft-spoken challenge. If Max said yes, Brielle would find herself in the crosshairs of the

Dorsey family's considerable influence, no matter where she hid. No one knew for sure what cards Michael still held.

"No, but I'm not looking to marry just yet."

A flicker of satisfaction graced Michael's eyes as he smiled faintly. Just as he was about to speak again, the living room door

swung open, and in came Spencer, looking haggard and worn.

Michael's brow furrowed at the sight of him; what had the boy been up to lately? He appeared significantly thinner than the last

time he was brought home after that kidnapping fiasco..

Caught off guard by the crowd, Spencer paused before greeting his grandfather. Then, with heavy dark circles under his eyes,

he took a seat opposite Max. His eyes, bloodshot and weary, were unable to stop darting back to Max.

Spencer had been tirelessly searching for any evidence of a liaison between Brielle and his uncle, Max. But every lead and every

piece of surveillance footage he pursued had vanished without a trace. The more elusive the evidence, the deeper his suspicions grew.

Just last night, he'd approached the Hatfield family, hoping they would release the footage from the night of the party, but they had politely refused, citing the privacy of their guests.

Frustration gnawed at Spencer as he clenched his fists until they seemed to draw blood.

He had intended to look for clues at Brielle's old apartment, but after the fire, all the tenants had moved out. Several had died in

the blaze, and the building had become a ghost town.

Unwilling to give up, Spencer had been doggedly questioning former residents, even showing them a picture of Max to see if

anyone recognized him, but to no avail.

He couldn't quite pin down why he was so determined to press on. Perhaps he was driven by a terrifying intuition—an intuition

that made him want to tear everything apart.

If Brielle and Max were involved, where had Brielle been on those nights when Max had just returned to the country? Was she

with some gigolo, as she claimed, or with Max?

Spencer could not contemplate the thought, for just the speculation alone threatened to unravel him.

Something tumultuous churned within him. With a tight-lipped sneer, he lifted his gaze to meet Michael's and spoke with feigned

sincerity. "Grandfather, there's something I need to talk to you about. Given your ill health, why don't we have a celebration to lift

the spirits? Uncle Max may not be eager to marry just yet, but I am, and I've got someone in mind. I was foolish before, but I've

seen clearly through my recent trials. I must marry her and no other."

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Michael arched an eyebrow with a hint of interest. "Oh? You've finally taken the initiative, Spencer. Who's the girl?"

Spencer glanced at Max, but Max was unfazed, casually sipping the coffee a servant had handed him. Spencer felt a tightness in

his chest, as if he was being dismissed. "You know her. it's Brielle. I wronged her in the past, but I've turned over a new leaf, and

I'm ready to make things work with her."

The mention of Brielle made Michael's expression darken. He had heard that name more than once, and the thought of both his

son and grandson entangled with such a woman made the last shred of fondness he had for her vanish into thin air.

Women like her were trouble, and trouble, as far as he was concerned, didn't deserve to thrive.

"Spencer, you were once engaged to her, and that engagement was broken off. Now you're talking about getting back together

with her. If word gets out, people will laugh at how lightly you treat marriage. Besides, Brielle has caused quite a stir in

Beaconsfield; her reputation is in tatters. How can you expect a woman like her to step through the Dorsey family threshold?"

Back in the day, Victoria managed to secure Everett by her side with her theatrics and threats, and that was an exception

Michael had reluctantly made—after all, Everett was a world-renowned pianist.

But Brielle? What was she? She wasn't world-renowned, and her modest fame stemmed from nothing more than scandals

involving the Haywood family.

Michael had little respect for Everett back then, and even less for Brielle now. "Let's drop this matter."

"Grandfather, but I—"

Seeing Michael's face turn sour, Faith, who sat among the others, quickly spoke up. "Spencer, your grandfather's right. Brielle

doesn't even know who her parents are. She's definitely not Dorsey material. If you're so eager to marry, I can find you a suitable

young lady from one of the other distinguished families in Beaconsfield."

As soon as she finished, Max took a leisurely sip of his coffee. "Spencer's intentions commendable. In that case, I'll leave this

task to you, Faith.”

are

This move effectively blocked any chance of Spencer and Brielle reuniting.

Was a man like Spencer, known for his frivolous pursuits, worthy of Brielle? Max’s face was impassive, and his fingers tightened

imperceptibly. It was better to nip this in the bud.

Spencer’s face soured as he realized why Max had been so composed earlier; he had foreseen Michael’s disapproval. If Michael

had seen something in Brielle, he would never have allowed the engagement to be broken off in the first place. No prestigious

family in Beaconsfield had ever re-engaged after calling off an engagement—it would indeed become the talk of the town.

Spencer felt his blood boil. To him, Max was an insurmountable peak, and his frost was untouched even by the blazing sun.

Spencer’s eyelashes drooped, but even then, he would not allow Max to be with Brielle. This dusty gem was his discovery: why

should he lose his right to possess it?

Resentment flashed in his eyes, but he said nothing more. His mind was already hatching. plans.

Michael sighed, glancing at the darkening sky. “It’s getting late. You’ve all been here a while: go on home.”

The guests slowly rose to leave. Max was the last to go. Just as he turned the corner, he heard footsteps and Spencer’s voice.

“Uncle Max.”

Max’s face showed a flicker of impatience, but Spencer was still family, so he composed himself. What is it?”

“I’d like to return to work at Dorsey International, in my old department. With Brielle as the director and the manager position still

vacant, I could learn a lot from her.

Max locked down. “Submit a job application to the department head. I won’t be handling the manager position. You should be

familiar with the new hiring policies from the recent department restructuring.”

And, of course, the department head was none other than Brielle.

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Spencer felt the last vestige of color drain from his face. He was a Dorsey, through and through, and yet here he was, having to

get Brielle's permission to even step foot into Dorsey Enterprises. Why the hell should he?

But the man laying down the law was Max. Even with a heart full of reluctance, Spencer didn't dare act out in front of Max.

Spencer's fists tightened slowly, and his knuckles were whitening, before he finally let go. "I get it. I'll play by the rules," he

muttered.

Max gave Spencer a cursory nod, his indifference as cutting as a blade, before he turned on his heel and left.

As soon as he was gone, Faith emerged from behind a nearby column. Her voice was laden with concern as she clutched

Spencer's sleeve. "What's gotten into you? You used to be all about Lillian, and now you're chasing after that bastard girl? Did

that kidnapping knock something loose in your head?"

Spencer's control snapped, and his fist slammed into the column with such force that it came away bloody.

Faith yelped, instantly pulling out a handkerchief with a maternal instinct. "What are you doing?"

Spencer's lips parted as if to speak, but before a word could escape, a sharp slap cut the air. His cheek flared with pain, and his

mouth filled with the metallic taste of blood.

Spencer turned to face the assailant, meeting Ryan's burning gaze.

Ryan and Faith had been there the whole time, waiting for Max to leave before they dared to show themselves. Ryan was no

fool. He saw right through his son's intentions. It wasn't just about vying for the family fortune; it was about winning over a

woman.

Was it a case of the early bird getting the worm? But could Brielle even be considered a prize?

Faith's pupils shrank in fear, yet she didn't dare go against Ryan. Her voice sounded timid as she intervened. "Let's just talk this

through. Spencer's probably still rattled from the kidnapping. He never gave Brielle the time of day before."

But Spencer, clutching his stricken face, was already staring off in the direction Max had gone. "Mom, Dad, that was then," he

said, wiping the blood from the corner of his mouth before striding away with a resolute step.

Faith and Ryan were left behind, and their expressions were turning stormy. A dark resolve flickered in Ryan's eyes. He had

thought to use Brielle to get at Max, but now it seemed unnecessary. Max was heartless. No woman held a special place with

him. And now his own son had fallen under Brielle's spell, and nearly incited the wrath of the patriarch, Michael.

Brielle was a disaster that couldn't be allowed to linger.

Max reached the family estate's driveway and got into his car, unbuttoning the top button of his shirt.

Since Michael had been rushed to the ER, nobody had rested. The day before had been spent executing the patriarch's orders

and dealing with the Barnes family. By his count, Max hadn't slept in two days.

Patrick sat in the driver's seat, catching the red in Max's eyes through the rearview mirror. "Sir, shall we head back to Premier

Palace for some rest?"

Max's eyelashes quivered, and his hand massaged his temple as his voice came out husky with fatigue. "Take me to Radiant

Light Church."

Patrick looked surprised. "Now?"

"Yes."

Max's voice was soft, and his exhaustion was evident as he leaned back in his seat, his aristocratic bearing undiminished. With a

few buttons undone, his Adam's apple stood out starkly against his skin.

Patrick knew better than to argue. The weather service had already issued travel warnings. The temperature was expected to

plummet, and there might even be snow in higher elevations. It wasn't safe to travel, but he knew Max was aware of the risks.

Max was probably feeling guilty about standing up Brielle, and even though he was two days late, he felt compelled to go.

Patrick had often thought that in some ways, the two were alike. The day he informed Max that Ms. Brielle planned to rest at

home, Max had predicted she would go to the church alone. But at that time, with Michael still in the emergency room, Max, as

the Dorsey family's pillar, couldn't leave.

Turned out, Ms. Brielle had indeed gone alone.

"Sir, why don't you rest a while? I'll drive slower."

Max didn't respond and just closed his eyes and rested against the seat, surrendering to his weariness.

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shake

Max couldn't he thought of reaching out to Brielle, but what on earth could he say? He

had stood her up, plain and simple, No excuses could erase that fact. "Some things are better said in person," he reasoned.

By now, Brielle had finished her meal, surprised to find that Kenzo, who looked like he'd never lifted a finger in the kitchen, had

whipped up something delicious.

She took her time savoring every bite of her pasta bowl, then couldn't help but ask. "Kenzo, if there's a signal jammer around

here, where's the switch?"

Kenzo rubbed his temples with a sigh. "I don't know. He must've run into some trouble recently: otherwise, he wouldn't have set

up a jammer around this place. The last time I was here was

two years ago."

Brielle couldn't help but laugh at the irony of their situation. It seemed they were destined to be out of touch with the world for the

night.

After washing up the dishes, she heard a clinking sound on the floor and turned to see that a fortune cookie had fallen from

Kenzo's pocket. Brielle paused, a little puzzled.

She bent down to pick it up, but Kenzo was quicker, slipping the little slip of paper back into his pocket.

Brielle found it amusing. So, even a guy like Kenzo believed in these things? "Did you ask the fortune cookie for love advice,

Kenzo?"

His eyes crinkled with a smile. "Something like that. It was a good fortune, and I didn't want to throw it away."

"You'll find what you're looking for, I'm sure of it."

Kenzo didn't reply but took a seat on the couch. "Hopefully." His tone was nonchalant, as if he wasn't particularly enamored with

the idea of his destined other half. But Brielle didn't pry. That was his personal business, after all.

Kenzo pointed upstairs. "Go up the stairs, and to the right, there's a guest room. I'll take the one downstairs. Goodnight."

With one upstairs, and one downstairs, they were being considerate of each other's space.

Brielle appreciated the thoughtfulness and nodded. "Alright then, I'll head off to bed. Get some rest yourself, Kenzo."

After settling into the guest room and taking a shower, Brielle still couldn't resist checking her phone one more time. No signal.

She sighed and lay down, drifting off into a peaceful sleep.

The next morning, the sound of the wind woke her. Opening her eyes, she saw the forest had burst into bloom. She flung open

the window; the air was fragrant with the scent of fresh. flowers.

After freshening up, she went downstairs to find bread and milk on the table. With her stomach. full, she stepped outside. Kenzo

was there with his camera, capturing the forest in its glory.

Brielle quickly retrieved her grandfather's ceramic urn.

Kenzo paused, pointing to a bare tree in the distance. "How about burying your granddad's ashes under that tree? It's a peach

tree. It'll bloom after winter."

Brielle had had the same thought, but this was Kenzo's friend's property. It seemed presumptuous to bury a stranger's urn

without asking. Reading her hesitation, Kenzo smiled. "He never believed in these things. He won't mind."

Brielle nodded, found a shovel, and carefully dug a small hole at the base of the tree. She placed the urn inside and tenderly

covered it with soil. Kenzo didn't watch, focusing instead on the scenery through his lens.

When it was all done, they headed back to the car, ready to leave.

Meanwhile, at Radiant Light Church, Max had arrived. Hearing from the clergy that Brielle had indeed been there but had left the

previous evening with a man, his heart sank.

A man?

## Chapter 329

Tucked away in the remote countryside, the Radiant Light Church stood in a place where

security cameras were considered disrespectful to the deities worshipped within its hallowed walls. The backroads that Max and

Patrick had traversed were even less likely to be monitored. Who was Brielle with when she left?

Max whipped out his cellphone and dialed Brielle's number without hesitation.

No answer.

His expression darkened instantly. "Patrick, get someone on it. Now."

Patrick nodded, his movements quickening as he began to make arrangements.

Max pondered for a moment before he decided to call Aubree. If Brielle had made plans with someone else to come to the

retreat, Aubree would certainly be in the know. But Aubree didn't pick up her phone either.

A sense of unease gripped Max, stronger than even the night he had found himself amidst the flames of a fire. It was as if a

sealed valley had suddenly flung open to let a relentless wind tear through, chilling to the bone.

While waiting for any news, his phone rang urgently. It was Alivia calling. Max didn't want to answer and contemplated hanging

up, but then a text from Alivia came through. Max's mother had just been rushed into the ER at an overseas hospital.

Max's pupils contracted sharply, and he called Alivia back immediately.

Alivia was currently at the Barnes family's estate, and couldn't help but feel a twisted sense of

relief upon receiving the news. Max's mother's deteriorating health meant it the time

Alivia was needed most. She had been Max's mother's most trusted confidante over the years. even more than her own son.

"Max, the attending doctor just called me. Your mother's mental state isn't good. If she pulls through this time, they'll have to

increase her medication dosage. But you know the side effects of those drugs."

Max rubbed his temples wearily. "I'm coming back right away."

A car would be far too slow. Within an hour, a helicopter dispatched from the nearest base arrived. Max climbed aboard, but not

before giving Patrick one last order.

"Stay here and make sure Brielle is safe. I've got to go abroad."

Patrick, recalling that Max hadn't rested for two nights straight, worried that he might have another spell of discomfort like the last

time. "Sir, you must rest when you get there." Patrick implored.

"Understood."

Max buckled himself in, paused, and then added, "Call me once you've confirmed her safety." Sleep would elude him every time

his mother had a crisis.

As Max's helicopter lifted off, he looked down to see a car speeding through the mountain. roads, but he didn't dwell on it,

retracting his gaze..

At that same moment, Brielle glanced up and caught the fleeting shadow of the helicopter as it flew overhead. She raised an

eyebrow, a slight smirk on her lips. "Who's flying a chopper out here? Could it be someone scouting for movie locations?"

Kenzo, who was driving, chuckled. "Maybe it's some rich kid playing around."

Brielle didn't respond, her gaze fixed on the receding silhouette.

Suddenly, she longed to return to B The retreat offered stunning sunsets and

sunrises, but one couldn't run away forever. She exhaled deeply, and just then, her phone rang. Did she have a signal now?

Surprised, she exchanged a puzzled glance with Kenzo, who, after a few seconds, suggested, “Must be out of the signal—  
blocking area.”

Brielle quickly checked the caller ID. It was Aubree. “Aubree, what’s up?”

Aubree was frantic, but hearing Brielle’s calm voice helped her relax.

“You have no idea how worried I was. I couldn’t reach you at all. Max called me half an hour ago, but I didn’t pick up.”

She had purposely ignored the call, suspecting Max was inquiring about Brielle. After all, if decisions had been made, there was

no need for further dragging of feet.

Brielle fell silent for a moment before letting out a sigh. “Yeah, I know. I’m on my way back now.”

Before she could finish, Kenzo pointed out. “Look at that cliffside.”

Instinctively, Brielle turned to see a pair of cliffs standing in opposition, their towering forms etched against the sky—a testament

to nature’s awe-inspiring craftsmanship.

Aubree perked up at the sound of a male voice in the background. “Who’s with you?”

Brielle hesitated, wary of saying Kenzo’s name. Kenzo and Max moved in the same circles, and with Aubree’s penchant for

gossip, there was a chance Andrew would find out, leading to yet another complicated explanation.

“Just a friend,” she said cautiously.

Aubree wasn’t buying it. “Sounds like someone I know. And you won’t say his name because you’re afraid I’ll tell Andrew, right?”

Is it that man from your college?”

Brielle felt a headache coming on.

“Bri, you’re something else. Alivia snagged the guy you had your eye on; and you just go after

her brother. Now you outrank her, and I can just imagine her squirming in front of you... must. feel pretty good, huh?”

Brielle could only manage a wry smile when suddenly the car lurched forward—their vehicle had been hit.

After the first impact, a second blow came. It was deliberate!

## Chapter 330

Brielle's brows furrowed sharply as she quickly bid farewell to Aubree and turned her attention to Kenzo. "Kenzo, are we being followed?"

Kenzo nodded, hastily securing all the windows. "Brielle, buckle up."

She felt the nerves kick in. Were they after them, or...

Before she could finish her thought, the sound of gunfire pierced the air, shattering the rearview mirror, Kenzo jerked the steering

wheel fiercely: his expression was as dark as a storm cloud.

With only one mirror left, Kenzo glanced through it to see four or five cars that had seemingly come out of nowhere now tailing

them. "Brielle, do you know how to handle a gun? There's one under your seat. Load it and pull the trigger."

Brielle had aced her college shooting class, but it had been years since she'd touched a firearm. Without hesitation, she

retrieved the gun from beneath her seat. As the car was about to make a sharp turn, she held her breath.

Kenzo was about to advise her on when to shoot but instead saw her poke her head out during the turn, aiming directly at the

driver of the pursuing car. The vehicle behind them veered out of control and plummeted off the cliff's edge.

Before Brielle could even celebrate, a massive truck loomed ahead.

Pincer attack. The people behind them had no intention of letting them live!

"Hold on!" Kenzo spun the wheel almost reflexively, hastily making the most advantageous choice.

The car plunged down an embankment, crashing through several trees. Kenzo's head struck the windshield, and blood instantly

clouded his vision.

"Kenzo!" Brielle was unharmed but dizzy. She quickly opened the car door, intending to unbuckle him.

But Kenzo shook his head, his tone eerily calm, "Have you had any accidents lately?"

Brielle recalled the attack she'd experienced with Patrick and nodded.

Kenzo pursed his lips. "They're after you, and they want you dead. Go on ahead."

How could Brielle leave at such a moment? If she left, would Kenzo even survive? Out here in the wilderness, with his leg

injured, infection could lead to fever and unconsciousness.

"Brielle, there's a village close by. Find someone there to come for me. If you stay, we're both as good as dead."

After a moment of panic, Brielle spotted searchers already nearby. "Kenzo, at least let me get you out."

Kenzo chuckled softly, sighing. "My leg's injured."

"I'll help you hide somewhere else, then go for help."

Kenzo nodded, gritting his teeth as he pulled the debris from his leg. Brielle's heart skipped a beat. She tore a piece of cloth from

her clothing and hastily bandaged his wound.

The voices of their pursuers grew nearer. She hid Kenzo behind a large tree, camouflaging him with branches and leaves.

Both of them moving together was out of the question. Kenzo's leg was severely injured, and she couldn't carry him far. The

likely outcome would be both of them dying here.

"Kenzo, wait for me here."

Kenzo slowly nodded, sweat beading on his brow from the pain.

Brielle took a deep breath and started running towards the village Kenzo mentioned. She also tried to use her phone to contact

the outside world, but after their fall, there was no signal. She stumbled down a small slope, tumbling to a creek's edge.

Kenzo was right; they were after her. As long as she remained alive, they would keep pursuing her and ignore Kenzo. Only if she

left would Kenzo be safe.

She pushed herself up and ran another thousand meters before collapsing from exhaustion. Her hands and knees were scraped

and bleeding.

Gunshots echoed in the distance. She looked around at the isolated terrain and felt a wave of despair wash over her.

“Bang!”

“Bang! Bang!”

She looked down, curling her fingers, then staggered to her feet and forced herself to keep running, but after only a few steps,  
she fell again.

The area was strewn with jagged rocks, and the only thing in sight was the flowing creek, offering no place to hide. Once out of

the car crash’s woodland cover, there was nothing but the stream. If she slowed down even for a moment, she’d become a target

for their guns.

With no patch of unscathed skin left on her hands, she heard shouts and more gunfire in the distance. She closed her eyes,

accepting her fate.

Strangely, regret filled her thoughts.

Her last wish at the Radiant Light Church should have been about Max, if she had known she was going to die the next day.

Even if Kenzo had teased her about the wish, it wouldn’t have mattered,.

Only regrets... that’s all that remained.