

Master 341

Chapter 341

Aubree was nursing a headache. "Love," she mused, "is undoubtedly the most confounding enigma in the world."

"Let's drop that topic, Bri. Come on, tell me, did you make a wish for me?"

The conversation took a lighter turn. Aubree's eyes gleamed with expectation as she intently watched Brielle's face.

Brielle was in high spirits, and her smile was shining brighter than usual "Of course I did. The very first wish was for you."

Aubree cheered, "That seals it. Andrew can't shake me off now."

They would be tied together for life.

"By the way, this time Andrew got me this stunning necklace, said he designed it himself, with my name and all."

Aubree cocked an eyebrow in pride, nudging Brielle's shoulder. "I'll bring it over for you to see sometime."

Brielle didn't want to dampen Aubree's spirits, so she played along. "Sure thing."

They sat in the living room, gossiping about the latest scandals in Beaconsfield before dozing off, leaning against each other.

Meanwhile, the online world continued its relentless churn. Alivia's post was laden with insinuations, just short of a public

declaration that she and Max were an item. Anyone would take it for a public display of affection.

But at that moment, Max was slumped on a couch in a hospital ward. His neck was treated with ointment for several scratch

marks. He hadn't slept for days, and now that the patient. was finally stable, he succumbed to sleep on the sofa.

The patient had always been dependent on Alivia, so Alivia was allowed to stay in the room.

On the other side was a large bed with a woman lying on it, weak and sedated, now fast asleep. Just two hours earlier, her

hysteria had peaked, and her sharp nails had slashed across Max's neck as he fed her soup.

Her tirade in the ward had been manic, until the doctor swiftly administered a sedative and discussed further treatment plans with

Max before treating his neck wounds.

The woman's nails had been unforgiving; the three bloody scratches were visible, extending from his shirt collar up to his jaw,

even with the top button done up.

"Max, you've had your medicine. Try to get some rest," the doctor had urged.

The sedative in Max's medication, combined with his lack of sleep both at home and abroad, and now with the sleep-inducing

drugs he had taken, allowed him to drift off on the couch.

Alivia watched him, her eyes filled with obsession and resentment. When the doctor treated. Max, Alivia had seen the bite mark.

It was like a thorn piercing her heart, bleeding her dry.

Another woman had left it, and to be in such a place, it had to be someone close. Who could it be?

She trembled with rage, exerting great effort to keep from lashing out. She had so many questions, yet she bottled them up.

Seeing him asleep, she longed to draw near. Alivia knew he was sensitive and dared not get too close. Even in this state, the

moment she approached, Max would instantly wake up. So she stayed a meter away, finding an angle to take a photo that made

their hands appear together.

In reality, there was about half a meter between their hands, but the angle made it seem as though they were intimately placed

side by side.

Pleased with the photo, Alivia promptly uploaded it to her social media account. After knowing him for so many years, she could

only afford such minor gestures behind his back.

That woman back home brazenly left such marks on his neck for all to see. What a harlot. flaunting it in such a conspicuous

place. Was the woman showing off?

Alivia was livid, her face ashen, yet she suppressed her emotions. She still had a chance.

Every time Martha had an episode, Max would rush back, and these were the rare moments they spent together. All her efforts

over the years to cultivate a relationship with Martha were not in vain.

Martha was Max's birth mother, and among the Dorsey siblings, only Victoria and Max shared the same mother. But Max and

Victoria were distant. Max always preferred to read quietly for days on end, secluded in his room.

Max felt that uncomfortable gaze, and his brow furrowed, and he slowly opened his eyes.

Alivia hastily tucked her phone away at the sight. "Max, you're awake. Do you want to sleep some more?"

Max had only slept for two hours and still looked weary. He glanced at his mum lying on the bed, slowly got up, and drew open

the curtains.

The facility was a three-story sanatorium, dedicated entirely to Martha's care. So, Max never worried about Martha's basic

needs. But Martha's condition was deteriorating with each episode. What could be the cause?

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Alivia watched his retreating figure, a hint of infatuation flickering in her eyes.

She had met plenty of men, each like a firework at her fingertips, bright for a moment before fading into dull ash. But Max was

different, a constant presence in her life, like the North Star, illuminating her entire existence. No matter who the other woman

was, Alivia was determined to eliminate her competition.

A sharp glint crossed her gaze.

Raised as an elite lady of high society, she had been groomed for greatness from a young age. Upon reaching an age of

awareness, she began to scout for a suitable future husband.

It was at one of those high-society parties that she first laid eyes on Max. Even then, he possessed an aura of

unapproachability, standing stoically beside Michael.

Pride emanated from Michael as he proclaimed to everyone that this boy was the chosen heir to the Dorsey family legacy.

Immediately, the atmosphere thickened with significant glances. Alivia even thought she saw a few glares, sharp enough to cut.

Max, the youngest son of Michael and Martha, had nearly cost his mother her life at birth. And indeed, he had shown

extraordinary abilities from an early age. Yet, he was only ten when Michael announced him as the next heir. Facing siblings

nearly two decades his senior, how did he survive the conspiracies that surely followed?

Nobody knew how many assassination attempts Max had endured. To the adults, a ten-year-old child was like a fish on a

chopping board.

Alivia etched that face in her memory.

It was only after eavesdropping on the grown-ups at home that she understood Michael's intentions. The heir of the Dorsey

family had to pass through trials by fire. Leaking the news early was a test for Max.

If he lived to adulthood, the title would be his. If he died, he would simply be a stepping stone for someone else's success. This

was Michael's philosophy of leadership.

A successful person was often built upon a mound of defeated adversaries.

Alivia quelled the surge of emotion in her chest, softening her tone. "Max, you've barely rested two hours. Aunt Martha's

condition needs further observation. Why don't you rest a bit more?"

"Alivia, thank you."

A ring of red marks marred Alivia's neck, remnants of Martha's ruthless attack. Had it not been for timely intervention, Alivia

might have been seriously hurt. But she shrugged off the incident. If sacrificing her life was the price for a chance with Max, she

would pay it without hesitation.

No one knew the depth of her obsession with Max, even if it meant becoming a demon herself.

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"I'm okay. But are we sure about using this new medication? It's only been in research for two years. Though it can suppress

Aunt Martha's condition, there are potential side effects."

If Martha's condition were merely madness, it would be manageable. But in her frenzied states, she would lash out at anyone

nearby, and in their absence, she would turn on herself. This was the extreme manifestation of bipolar and depressive disorders.

Martha had even bitten her own arteries in an attempt to sever them.

Martha was a danger to others and herself. Without a better option, Max would never consider such medication. But if they did

nothing, Martha would never regain her sanity and remain at best capable of attack.

He had made his decision and nodded in agreement.

Alivia sighed, her eyes filled with compassion. "Remember how Aunt Martha used to make us croquettes and those sweet buns?

She was so precise and tried to teach me, but I never got the hang of it."

Martha's decline had accelerated after the announcement of Max as the heir. Before that, she had always been a devoted

mother, albeit one who cried too often, which drove Max toward finding solace in complex literature.

"Max, sometimes I wonder if Aunt Martha's worsening condition is because she misses her family abroad. Maybe we should

consider transferring her to a sanatorium back home?"

The deeper Alivia's bond with Martha, the stronger her connection with Max would become. Martha trusted Alivia implicitly and

couldn't bear to be apart.

Alivia had noticed that Max's only moments of vulnerability were in the presence of his mother. By securing Martha, she would

secure Max.

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Max had never considered the possibility, primarily because Martha's troubles had begun back home, within the borders of their

own country.

The closer he got to the Dorsey family, the closer he inched toward trouble. It was a certainty that someone would try to leverage

Martha's situation to manipulate him. He would not stand

for it.

“Max, Aunt Martha surely wants to see you all the time, and it’s more convenient back home,” Alivia suggested, her shrewd

intentions hidden beneath layers of concern as she pressed on.

Max turned, casting a glance at his mother lying quietly on the bed before letting out a soft sigh. “We’ll see.”

If it were indeed being isolated in a foreign land, without familiar faces to care for her, that had exacerbated the situation, he

would consider bringing Martha back.

A flicker of excitement passed through Alivia’s eyes, and her lips curved into a subtle smile. She had tried to influence Max

indirectly over the years, but he had never wavered. Perhaps the severity of the current situation was finally making him

reconsider.

Max bowed his head, absent-mindedly touching the bracelet on his wrist. Noticing his action, Alivia felt a surge of warmth, and

her attention sharpened as he asked her, “Alivia, are you not planning to stay at the overseas research institute anymore?”

Alivia was a clever woman. She had joined the institute partly because it was close to Martha’s nursing home and partly for the

prestige.

Admission to the institute was a badge of honor; among her peers in Beaconsfield, she was the only one to have received an

invitation. This distinction made her the object of widespread envy. Naturally, being in such a prestigious place also meant

expanding her network significantly.

By now, her connections were vast enough. It was time to return and get engaged to Max and, incidentally, deal with the woman

lurking in the shadows.

“Mm, I’ve applied to study back home, and my mentor has agreed. We’ll be establishing a branch there, and I’ll be the head,” she

said with a note of pride. Her mentor was a titan in the field, revered by many.

Max's expression softened slightly. "That's good. Your mom probably wants you back, too." His tone was indifferent, showing no

particular reaction to Alivia's decision to stay back home.

Alivia felt a twinge of disappointment but knew this was just Max being Max.

Max's gaze drifted out to the scenery, settling on a cluster of blue flowers. They were irises; their petals were shaped like the tail

feathers of a bird. He chuckled softly, a rare warmth touching his usually cold demeanor.

Alivia had never seen Max like this. He was always the distant enigma, but today, he seemed almost earthly.

Was it the view that captivated him? Nature did have a way of soothing the soul.

Unaware of Alivia's observation. Max was still looking at the irises.

Time for him was a straight line, and he was too focused to be concerned with anything outside of it. Yet the sight of those

flowers seemed to slow everything down. Blue irises were a symbol of hope and a passion that was fragile and fleeting.

"Cough, cough."

A cough from the bed snapped him back to reality. Martha's eyes fluttered open. Recognizing the familiar ceiling, she knew she

had suffered another episode. "Max," she called out weakly, trying to sit up but finding no strength.

Max approached, his face softening, though his aura remained chilly. "Mother."

Martha's eyes trembled, and tears fell instantly.

Max frowned and sat beside her. "You wanted to say something?" His words lacked warmth, yet they carried a different tone from

how he addressed others.

"Max, I don't think I have much time left. The only thing I'm worried about is you..."

"They're all out to get you, Max. You have to protect yourself. You must marry someone who can support you in your ambitions.

Alivia is perfect; her family is a match for ours, and she's kind-hearted."

Martha struggled to breathe after every few words. "You must survive; you have to live."

Max's frown deepened, and after a long pause, he finally asked, "Do you want to go back home?"

Martha's eyes flickered, and then she quickly drew her legs in. Her face was clouded with fear. "No, I won't go back, there are ghosts... The Dorsey family is haunted, Max. You must survive and take control of the Dorsey family."

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Martha's emotions surged again, and she threw back the covers, poised to leap out of bed. Max. held her firmly in place and

pressed the call bell beside the bed.

The doctor hurried in with a sedative and administered a shot.

Max looked at his gaunt mother, his face betraying little emotion. Only after the sedative had taken effect did he turn to the

doctor. "When do we start with the new medication?"

"In three days at the latest. For now, we have to rely on sedatives to keep her under control. When she gets agitated, she

becomes aggressive and hostile to everything around her. This isn't just a simple case of mental illness. Maybe we should try to

find the root cause."

What was the root cause? Max racked his brain. Martha's moods had always been volatile, but what could be the trigger? The

Dorsey family had skeletons in their closet, but which one was coming back to haunt them now?

He frowned, and his hand automatically moved to massage his temple.

The doctor gestured upstairs. "Max, you should get some rest, too. Dinner will be prepared downstairs later, and I'll come up to

get you."

He nodded and then glanced at Alivia.

Of course, Alivia wanted to stay, but before she could voice her desire, Max asked, "Are there other rooms on the ground floor?"

He didn't even want her on the same floor as him.

A shadow crossed Alivia's eyes. Her resentment grew for whoever had managed to leave such an intimate mark on Max. Her

chest trembled with suppressed emotion, and her hand clenched slowly, yet her voice remained steady.
“Yes, there is one next to

Auntie Martha’s. I’ll go and rest then, Max.”

Alivia retreated to her room, taking deep breaths to compose herself. She perched by the window, her brows furrowed in thought.

Max had always been distant with her, but she never minded. She wanted Max, If Max returned her affections, all would be well.

But if his heart lay elsewhere, it didn’t matter. As long as she tied him to her, there would be ample time to erase the marks left

by other women.

This was the worst–case scenario. A scenario Alivia had never even considered. In her mind, Max was incapable of love.

When she used to visit Martha, she’d heard stories about Max’s childhood, how he rarely smiled, how he might have starved in

the attic had no one brought him breakfast. Once, due to a servant’s negligence, Max went without food for two days and lost a

significant amount of weight. Martha had thought her son was simple–minded until she realized he simply lacked certain

emotions.

Hearing these stories, Alivia felt they were beyond her comprehension. What kind of child didn’t cry out when hungry? Was he

really prepared to starve in the attic?

It was terrifying. How could a man who could be so indifferent to himself, ever show warmth to others? So, she believed Max

was incapable of love.

But if that were true, how could he let someone else leave such a mark?

That bite mark would haunt Alivia’s nightmares. She was desperate to return home to Investigate, but she couldn’t afford for

anything to happen to her anchor, Martha.

Having calmed her nerves, Alivia gazed out the window at the garden, designed by a renowned landscape architect. The sight

was genuinely soothing.

Her eyes landed on some purple flowers – irises. Her expression darkened, a flash of malice in her eyes. She hoped it wasn't

what she thought.

Pulling out her phone, she hesitated, then dialed Spencer. She knew Spencer well because they grew up in the same circles.

These days, Spencer was consumed with finding evidence of Brielle and Max's secret encounters. He didn't care about anything

else. The suspicion gnawed at him, a pain that throbbed relentlessly. He needed answers to either confirm or dispel his hunch.

After a fire at Brielle's apartment building, all the residents had relocated. Spencer had asked around, and thanks to connections

through Ryan, he was at yet another temporary housing unit. His eyes were red with a predatory glare.

Before stepping in, he called Brielle, even though it was approaching eight in the evening. The time difference meant his call

coincided with Alivia's. He had no intention of answering Alivia's call anyway. As if under a spell, he waited for Brielle to pick up.

Brielle had spent the day at home. Seeing Spencer's call, her brows knitted together. What was he up to now? She hit the

decline button.

Spencer's message came through immediately. [Brielle, this is your last chance to come clean withstand my retaliation.]

with me. If I find out myself, you won't be able to

Madman.

Brielle regretted removing him from the blacklist, yet she was curious about what Spencer could possibly stir up.

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Spencer knew Brielle wouldn't respond, just as she hadn't when he'd sent a similar message earlier that morning on his way to

the temporary housing unit. Every time he stepped into one of those units, he felt as if he was on the brink of uncovering the

truth.

His blood boiled with both excitement and resentment.

If it was true.

If it was true, he'd make damn sure to pay back in spades!

Only a handful of families had been relocated to this particular floor from the building that had burned. Standing in front of one of

the doors, Spencer pulled out the photograph he'd come prepared with..

"Excuse me, had you seen this man around the apartment complex before the fire?" he asked, showing the woman a sneakily

snapped picture of Max.

The angle wasn't great, but Max's face was still flawlessly handsome.

The woman, in her thirties, shook her head. "No, haven't seen him.

Spencer got a bit frantic, his voice rising unintentionally. "Could you please think again?"

The woman chuckled, "Honey, I really haven't. If I'd seen a face like that, trust me, I wouldn't forget it. When you pulled out that

photo, I thought he was a movie star or something. Nope, movie stars don't even come close to this guy."

Spencer's face darkened, feeling a pang of humiliation. If Brielle's beauty could spark envy among women, Max's looks were

enough to make any man insecure. And what pissed Spencer off the most was that looks were the least impressive of Max's

many attributes.

Spencer's clenched hand trembled with rage, as he snatched back the photo and knocked on another door, but after nearly

canvassing the entire floor, no one had seen Max's face. He'd been to countless places over the past few days, and this was the

last stop.

The torched apartment complex had housed a diverse group of residents and was old and rundown, with hardly any places to

hide. If Max had visited, his presence would have certainly drawn attention.

But no one had seen him!

Was his gut feeling wrong?

This realization brought a sense of relief to Spencer, but with it, his eyes reddened.

Thank goodness Brielle had the sense not to get involved with Max. The mere thought made him feel queasy.

His fiancée rolling in the hay with his uncle – how could that not be sickening?

Spencer exhaled deeply.

Having checked the last few places, it seemed pointless to continue the investigation. He chuckled at his own paranoia. How

could he have suspected Max of getting involved with Brielle? Sure, Brielle had some talents, but after all Max had been through,

why would he settle for her?

Max did admire Brielle, but that was because she truly had the chops, right?

Spencer breathed a sigh of relief and shot Brielle another message. [Lucky, you played it smart.]

Brielle was lounging on the couch when she received the text.

Patrick's words had resonated with her; she hadn't visited Kenzo but had sent some fruit and flowers through Tiffanie, choosing

to rest at home instead.

Seeing Spencer's message, she scoffed with irony. It seemed he hadn't found a shred of evidence. She didn't reply. Instead, she

picked up her laptop to work on some documents. She should be able to return to Dorsey International tomorrow.

Scrolling down, she noticed an email from the HR department. It was about Spencer's employment approval.

Brielle thought she had misread. Did Spencer's employment really need approval? She dialed the HR director.

The HR director sat upright in his Dorsey Tower office the moment he saw Brielle's incoming call, mustering all his attention. "Ms.

Brielle, hello."

Brielle hadn't worked directly with the director but was familiar with the office gossip that he was a bit difficult. Yet, he seemed

almost overly gentle with her.

A man with foresight, the HR director knew that even though the CEO had seemingly dumped Brielle, he also remembered how

the CEO had removed Brielle's crutch for her during the elevator incident.

Men could be fickle, decide to break up in anger, and perhaps later decide they still have a taste for the past.

So, Alivia would be the future Mrs. CEO, and she couldn't be offended. Brielle was the one who could bring the CEO down from

his pedestal. She was also not to be trifled with.

"Ms. Haywood, are you referring to Spencer's employment application? As per the rules, you also have the right to vote."

Brielle found it amusing. It hadn't been long since Spencer had wanted her out, and now, his employment was subject to her

vote. What skills did Spencer have?

She pondered without bias but couldn't think of any noteworthy talent except, perhaps, his arrogance.

"So, I can cast a dissenting vote?"

"Absolutely."

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Upon hearing the words, Brielle couldn't help but laugh. "Alright, got it," she said, with a casual and friendly tone. After hanging

up the phone, she voted a firm 'no' in her mind.

Did Spencer think he could waltz back into the company and ruffle her feathers? In his dreams.

The following morning, Brielle finally made her way to the office. As she entered her department, she felt the weight of her

colleagues' gazes upon her. Sensing her attention, they quickly diverted their eyes and returned to their work in silence.

Brielle's brow furrowed slightly.

She settled into her chair and booted up her computer, noticing a flood of emails. Most were from her department, but one

caught her eye—it was from Max. The email was several days old, sent during her hospital stay, and thus unseen until now. It was

a formal email strictly about business. She pondered for a moment before replying with a succinct "Received."

As soon as she sent it, she regretted it. Surely, the department had already dealt with the matter. Replying now seemed a bit

personal, as if she were looking for a reason to connect with him.

Why not just reach out to him openly if she wanted to talk? It would also be a chance to clear the air about the other night. Just

the thought brought a flush to her cheeks.

She hurried to retract the email but before she could do so, Max replied with a new message.

[Received what?]

Heat crept up Brielle's face. She needed to keep her cool.

[Sorry, I didn't realize the work email was from a few days ago. My apologies for the disturbance.]

[Apologies?] Max's response seemed tinged with emotion.

Their conversation was as cold as ice, a stark contrast to the heated kiss they had shared not long ago. Separated by screens,

neither could guess the other's expression.

Max stared at the email for a few minutes before closing his laptop. His chest felt tight. He missed the way Brielle had kissed him

tenderly in bed.

Behind him, Martha was being fed soup by a caregiver at the nursing home.

The caregiver offered Max a bowl, too, her demeanor shy and bashful around him. However, Max's attention was fixed on his

computer, not sparing her a glance.

Unable to resist a comment, the caregiver said, "Ma'am, your son is such a workaholic. He needs to take care of himself.

Overworking at his age can lead to health issues later on."

Martha paused before looking at Max with concern. "Max, don't forget to get a check-up every year."

The caregiver's eyes lit up at the mention of a check-up. It was an opportunity for closer interaction with Max. "The nursing home

has all the facilities for a thorough check-up. We have top-notch doctors on call, knowing your son is the cream of the crop. A

simple check-up will be no trouble at all."

Martha smiled with pride. "Max is indeed outstanding. I just wish he'd settle down and give me a grandchild. I don't have many

years left, and I'd love to hold a chubby little one in my arms."

Unmarried?

The caregiver had assumed the woman who visited earlier was Max's wife. A hint of elation crossed her face as she encouraged

Max to get the check-up. "It's always better to be safe. Some conditions can go undetected for a long time."

Martha agreed. Turning to Max, she began, "Max, maybe you should-"

Before she could finish, there was a knock at the door. Max's primary doctor had arrived. Leaving his phone and laptop behind,

Max stepped out to speak with the doctor.

"Max, the specialists have decided to start the treatment the day after tomorrow. We'll prepare nutritional meals for her to build

her strength. And regarding her phobia, it's important to investigate. If she continues to resist treatment, even the new

medication won't be effective for long."

Max nodded and asked a few more questions. Meanwhile, his phone began to ring—it was Brielle calling.

Brielle had been hesitant about making the call, but now it seemed urgent. Today was her first day back at work after her leave,

and with Max and Patrick absent, she'd learned that the Book investment project had been handed over to William.

William had already snagged the small Kingston Enterprises project, and now he was poaching the major book project. Brielle

wondered if Max was even aware.

Feeling anxious, she feared William had ulterior motives, but as soon as the call connected, a perky female voice came through

the other end.

"Hello, are you looking for Max?"

Brielle felt a chill run through her. The woman continued, "He's busy right now, but if you have a message, you can tell me."

"I'll make sure Max gets it later."

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The carer deliberately slowed her speech, making it sound a tad syrupy.

Brielle's momentarily stalled brain clicked into gear. "I'm Mr. Dorsey's employee. I need to discuss something with him."

"Oh, is that so?"

A flicker of disdain passed through the carer's eyes. Was this one of those assistants who used the guise of reporting to Mr.

Dorsey as a ploy to flirt? And with that pleasing voice, the possibility seemed even more likely.

"Max is aware of the situation already," she stated dismissively and hung up, placing Max's phone back in its spot.

No sooner had she done this than the door swung open, and Max stood in the doorway, his gaze turning icy and piercing. "What

are you doing at my desk?"

His computer had a privacy screen, and all the folders were locked. There had been attempts to steal company secrets before,

but none had succeeded. So the instant he saw someone near his computer, he was on alert.

The carer's cheeks flushed instantly. "Max, about the health checkup I mentioned..."

Her shy and coy demeanor did nothing to stir Max; instead, he addressed someone behind him, "Get someone else to take care

of my mother, she's too noisy."

The carer's face froze, thinking she must have misheard. She was attractive, and whether at work or out and about, men often

ogled her figure. But Max had never given her a second glance, and even labeled her intentionally soft tone as 'noisy.'

Her face turned crimson, a sense of defeat like she had never felt before washing over her.

Max approached, frowning as her perfume assailed his nostrils. Just as he reached for his phone, his fingers paused. "Did you

touch my phone?" He always placed his phone about six inches from the edge of the desk, but now it seemed closer to eight.

The carer's face grew even more uncomfortable. Hadn't she placed it exactly where it was before? And surely Max hadn't had

time to check the surveillance footage. She had even gone as far as to delete the call log. How could he know?

Her heart pounded erratically, but she feigned innocence. "I didn't."

Martha was sound asleep; her mental state hadn't been great, and a sedative meant not even thunder could wake her, leaving

her unable to corroborate any story.

Max's expression turned to stone, his aura sharp as a knife's edge.

The carer's eyes darted about as she slowly began to peel off her clothes. "Max, I've fancied you from the moment I first saw

you."

Before she could react, Max whipped out a handkerchief, which he swiftly tied around her wrists. With a firm tug, she was pulled

out of the room. She didn't land on her feet, her clothes were disheveled, and she found herself sitting on the floor.

The door slammed shut with a loud "bang."

The carer clutched her blouse, and her face turned pale. She heard the click of high heels approaching. Shortly after, Alivia, a

woman she often saw around, appeared before her.

Just by looking at the carer's disarray, Alivia knew what had gone down. Alivia's eyes were ruthless as her heel bore down onto

the carer's hand.

The woman nearly screamed from the pain but heard Alivia's cold voice, "Make a sound, and I'll ruin that pretty face of yours."

The last bit of color drained from the carer's face as she trembled, silent.

Alivia leaned in, her gaze fleetingly cold as she smirked. "Coveting what belongs to others is punishable. Now scram."

Tears streamed down the carer's cheeks as she clutched her blouse, attempting to stand. But Alivia sneered, "I said strip and get

out of here."

"Ms. Alivia, I... I'm sorry." She knew of Alivia's renown; everyone at the sanitarium treated her with the utmost respect, and her

research institute held a global standing.

"I won't repeat myself." Alivia was never lenient with those who eyed her possessions.

The carer sobbed once, shamefully undressing before leaving.

Disgust flickered in Alivia's eyes. She thought of the woman's audacity to get close to Max and scoffed at her lack of self-

awareness.

As she cracked the door slightly, she heard Max's voice, softer than she had ever heard it. "Brielle, did you call?"

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Max guessed it. He had assumed that the female employee was after company data, but as he watched her shed her clothes, it

dawned on him that she was pursuing a different kind of relationship altogether. A wave of revulsion surged through him.

There was disinfectant in the room, and he doused his phone in it repeatedly, gingerly holding it in his palm afterward. Still, there

was a hint of reluctance in his heart. That carer had definitely touched his phone and even answered his calls.

He checked the call log. It was clean—conversations with some executives at Dorsey International and then with business

partners.

If any of those people had called, the female employee wouldn't have dared to delete it. But since she did, it meant the caller

was a woman.

Which woman would call him? Only Brielle.

His private number was a closely guarded secret, and as for Aubree, he dismissed her instantly, not even considering her as a

woman.

Max analyzed the situation briefly and made the call. It took a full minute for the call to be picked up on the other end.

By then, Brielle had composed herself enough to remain calm. So when Max asked, she nodded, then realizing he couldn't see

her, she quickly spoke up. "Yes, Mr. Dorsey, I came into work today and found out that the book project was handed over to

William. Why

Dorsey International was set to invest two billion in the project. Although she and Max had been skeptical at first, the book had

made some concessions, prompting Dorsey International to take on the project.

Logically, with Alivia's involvement, Max, as the CEO, should have been approving every stage. of the project. Now, it seemed he

was completely out of the loop—even the approvals hadn't gone through him. What was going on?

"Are you aware of this, Mr. Dorsey? If William has bypassed you, that means he's—"

She was cut off mid-sentence by Max. "Is your injury healed?"

His tone was soft, so tender it felt like it could drip through the phone. Across the miles and through the wires, his words pierced

Brielle's heart. It was a mixture of pain, and sweetness.

Max had always had this unreasonable way of invading one's heart. She fell silent, waiting for her rapidly beating heart to settle.

It was like an arrow shot across mountains and rivers, always finding its target in the person whose heart fluttered.

Max, however, didn't give her time to respond. "What wishes did you make at Radiant Light Church?"

Why did he even need to ask that?

Brielle bit her tongue her delicate flesh was caught between her teeth as if she might draw blood. She hated how vulnerable she felt.

She was like a fish gasping for breath on a cutting board, surviving only on the occasional droplets of water Max spared her. In

the moments he withheld, she lay there, gasping, staring at the sky.

The feeling of being out of control or of placing one's hope in someone else was truly dreadful.

"Just a few simple wishes." She deliberately cooled her tone, but then she heard Max chuckle softly on the other end.

"You have every right to be angry. I broke our appointment and haven't had the chance to apologize."

Brielle's eyes welled up instantly, reminded of the sunset she'd seen on her way to Radiant Light Church. If only the person who

had made promises to her had been there to see that brilliant sunset with her. But some moments, once missed, were gone

forever.

Even if there were more beautiful sunsets in the future, they would never be like that one. Such a sense of loss would stick like a

thorn in one's heart.

But on the night Max left the country, they made love.

In truth, she had regrets because Max was the most rational person she'd ever met. He was always able to control his emotions

with ease. He could have anyone he wanted, and if he chose to leave, he could do so without a second thought.

They had just broken up, yet they had immediately shared an intimate moment.

She could still feel the warmth he left on her skin.

Scorching.

Burning hot.

Chapter 349

"Mr. Dorsey, what I'm talking about here is strictly business—the Book project is no small feat." "Brielle. I really don't feel like

talking shop right now." His tone was casual, and his presence emanated a gentle coolness that seemed almost out of place for

a man who'd just shown such repulsion to the advances of an undoubtedly attractive woman.

Brielle fell silent. Her experience in matters of the heart was scant. Beyond traveling over hills and across streams to follow her

desires, she knew nothing of love's games, content instead to wait awkwardly for her beloved's return.

This was Brielle in her most raw and precious form.

His voice continued to reach her ears, "Haven't you missed me?"

Brielle's lips pressed tighter, her heart pounding a wild rhythm. She was no match for Max. If Max decided to use his charm, no

woman could escape.

Tears welled in her eyes as if she had been hurt.

Despite his hot—and—cold demeanor and despite the lack of promises, which included a featherlight assurance — wait for his

return, she wanted to believe, to love with fervor.

Human greed could be quite endearing at times. Faced with feelings of affection, it was innate to become a gambler. Everyone

hopes for that stroke of luck to hit them—just one gamble, just

once.

“Yeah, a little.”

“Only a little, Brielle?”

Max chuckled softly on the other end, gazing out at the few irises blooming outside his window. He seemed to feel more than

‘just a little.’

“When will you return, Mr. Dorsey?” To clarify everything...

A flicker of amusement crossed Max’s eyes, but before he could speak, a commotion arose at the door. It was Alivia, her arms

full of a lunchbox that now spilled its contents chaotically across the floor.

His brow furrowed in annoyance.

Horror painted Alivia’s face as she struggled with disbelief. Max was using such a tender tone with someone else. Max could be

sweet, laugh, and be as careful and hopeful as any ordinary man in love.

Alivia’s features twisted in a fury, her head bowed to hide the storm raging across her face.

The hatred was palpable. Brielle—was it Brielle who had stolen what she loved most? Was Max’s smile for the irises, or was it for

Brielle?

Alivia’s beloved deity seemed to have descended among the common folk, and for that, she was unforgiving.

Alivia’s chest heaved with suppressed rage, yet when she lifted her head, her face was alight with a radiant smile. “Clumsy me, I

just got a bit shaky, Max. Are you on the phone?*

Max, interrupted at a crucial moment, felt a noticeable Irritation. As his gaze met Alivia’s, all warmth withdrew, replaced by the

detachment of a machine.

Behold, the stark contrast between affection and Indifference.

Alivia seethed internally, her surface smile belying the tempest within. "I made some soup for Martha. The doctor did say we

should nourish her well, didn't he? I've been out since dawn gathering the ingredients."

Max didn't respond to her. Instead, he quietly told Brielle, "I'll talk to you when I get back." He didn't want Brielle to be exposed to

Alivia.

After hanging up, he frowned in confusion. "We have top chefs here."

He couldn't grasp why anyone would engage in tasks outside their expertise. What was this thing called 'human touch?'

To anyone but Brielle, Max seemed to lack certain emotional circuits because his words spared no one's feelings. Although Alivia

maintained her composure, Max's comment wounded her.

Earning Max's favor was a challenge. His brain was always engaged in rational analysis, making judgments on the viability of

every action.

With top chefs and ingredients available at the sanatorium, why bother making soup herself? He didn't understand, nor could he

feel moved. From his perspective, the gesture was simply incomprehensible.

"Alivia, let the professionals handle their work."

Another cutting remark.

Alivia's hatred grew wild inside, wishing she could fly back home and tear Brielle to pieces.

How could Brielle deserve his love!

Chapter 350

But all the madness was cloaked beneath a calm exterior. She moved towards the bed where Martha lay sleeping, and in a

corner where Max couldn't see, a resentful curl touched her lips.

"Hmm, I get it. It's just tough seeing Aunt Martha like this, you know? Always makes me wanna do something for her."

Max's chill seemed to dissipate a bit. "Alivia, I really appreciate you taking the time to visit my mom. Whether it's cash or getting

Dorsey International to invest in the research institute, I can make it happen for you."

That was what they had agreed upon from the start, and he had provided Alivia with a card in the past.

What mattered most was that Max had made it crystal clear years ago—if he happened to meet someone he liked, he was going

to marry that person. So, he didn't need anyone waiting for him.

Everyone was an independent entity in this world. There was no need to waste time on someone else.

Alivia's hand, hanging by her side, slowly clenched into a fist. Her nails dug into her palm. Before, she would have agreed

without hesitation because she was confident that Max would never meet anyone he liked.

But reality had hit her hard. She would have to go back to the States and see for herself who this Brielle was that had ensnared

Max!

"I know, Max. Don't feel burdened. I visit Aunt Martha because she was always good to me, and you can't let go of her, can you?

If you do find someone in the future, I'll just be happy for you. But I hope that doesn't mean you'll drift away from me. After all, we

grew up together, didn't

we?"

She played the sentiment card first, to bridge the gap between them.

Max wouldn't speak too harshly, whether it was for the years of acquaintance or her care for Martha, even considering Kenzo's

sake. As long as she could be by his side, even just as a friend, there would be opportunities in the future. Her presence would

always be a threat to Brielle. The thought of Brielle defeating her was simply ludicrous.

After quickly weighing the pros and cons, Alivia's eyes settled into a detached calm. "Max, have you met someone you like?"

Max's expression softened in an instant, and he looked down with a gentle laugh. "I suppose

50."

Alivia tasted bitterness, but thankfully, he had said "I suppose" and not "definitely." Considering the obstacles lying between him

and Brielle, their path wouldn't be easy. But if Max were with Alivia, it wouldn't be so difficult. Everyone would bless their union.

Even Michael couldn't wait

for them to tie the knot.

A cold sneer flickered through Alivia's eyes. The whole world seemed to be against Max and Brielle being together, yet it was

rooting for Alivia and Max. No matter how capable Brielle was. how could she fight against so many? Moreover, Max's feelings

for Alivia were still unclear even to himself.

With this in mind, Alivia felt increasingly confident. She slowly unclenched her fist, the bloody marks marred her palm.

"Once you're sure, you've gotta tell me, Max. Our relationship is special. Our families have been close for generations. I haven't

married, and people think I'm waiting for you. But we're both clear-headed. The most suitable person for you to marry is me, and

vice versa. Even if we meet others we like, it won't affect our friendship, right?"

No matter what, she wasn't going to be left behind.

Now that Alivia had positioned herself advantageously, if Max and Brielle ever did come out as a couple and Brielle took issue

with Alivia's presence, then Brielle would seem petty and small-minded. By then, a host of people would be up in arms

defending Alivia. After all, compared to the time Alivia had known Max, Brielle was, at best, just a passing fancy.

Having analyzed all this, Alivia took a moist towelette and gently wiped Martha's palm. "But Max, let's not tell Aunt Martha until

you're sure about your feelings. She's always hoped we'd end up together. Hearing another woman's name out of the blue would

disappoint her. Don't worry, I'll keep your secret."

Indeed, Alivia's words scored major points with Max. From Max's perspective, this was the Alivia he knew, the girl raised with the

best of everything since childhood.