

Master 411

Chapter 411

Brielle's stomach churned uneasily as she stared at the pregnancy test in her hand, feeling utterly clueless for the first time. She

had attempted to tear open the wrapper several times but couldn't muster the courage. Instead, she just leaned back on the

couch, trying to alleviate the pain in her abdomen.

It was almost laughable that a woman could forget to take precautions during an intimate encounter with a man.

Was Max's devilishly handsome face so distracting, or did she, somewhere deep down, actually want to leave something behind

from their fleeting moments together?

But this lovesick foolishness was so not Brielle.

She sighed, simply sitting on the couch, lost in thought. Eventually, she fell asleep right there, slumped over the armrest.

When she woke up at nine in the morning, dark circles had taken up residence under her eyes. She was already late for work.

Glancing at the pregnancy test, still unopened, Brielle massaged her temples and headed to the bathroom to freshen up. Finally,

she ripped open the wrapper.

Six minutes later, she stared at the two lines on the stick, her mind going blank. The pregnancy test felt like it was burning her

hand. Once she snapped back to reality, she chucked it into the trash bin.

With no appetite for breakfast, she sat back on the couch, zoning out just like the night before. Her computer automatically

updated with new messages.

Photos of Alivia and Max had already hit the front-page headlines. And there was Alivia, supporting a figure dressed in an

elegant suit. The media only captured a back shot. Speculation was rife that this was Max's mother—Martha.

Brielle stared blankly at the screen as every channel buzzed with news about the power couple. The media was even hyping up

their matching rosaries, positing that the wedding bells would ring within the month.

Whispers suggested that even Martha's return to the country was to orchestrate Max's nuptials.

"A match made in high society heaven."

"Are the golden girl and golden boy compromising for love, or is it just another tale of aristocratic romance?"

"Everyone loves a storybook romance, and Max and Alivia are living proof that fairy tales come true."

Beyond the media frenzy, online commenters were leaving thousands of messages, and the buzz was relentless.

Brielle, staring at the photos and videos, along with the revelry of the comments, felt eerily calm. She knew full well the clout

Alivia wielded in Beaconsfield, so none of this came as a surprise.

Her thoughts drifted back to the pregnancy test with the damning two lines. She had no idea what to do next.

By noon, she dragged herself to Dorsey International, still in a daze. It was clear to the whole department that she was

distracted. Even the documents she reviewed were riddled with errors.

"Ms. Haywood, if you're not feeling well, maybe you should take a sick day?" her colleagues suggested, genuinely concerned for

her well-being.

Brielle seemed to snap back to reality, noticing her scribbles on the documents, and again. pressed a hand to her temple.

"I'll be okay in a bit," she assured them.

But just then, Spencer walked in. Brielle's face darkened immediately. Why couldn't this guy. take a hint?

Spencer noticed the slightly pale look on Brielle's face, his eyes full of triumph. "Alivia only just got back, and she already can't

stand it?" he thought.

The employee standing by, aware of the past grievances between the two, wisely left. Once she had left, Brielle looked up

without courtesy. "Get out."

But Spencer didn't seem angry, rather there was a sense of smug satisfaction. "Brielle, Uncle Max left you to go pick up Alivia.

You must be very upset?"

Brielle thought Spencer was seriously sick in the head. She was never pleasant to him, yet he kept coming back for more.

"I'm indeed very upset. You know how thirsty I am." She said with mock severity, trying to rattle him.

Spencer, however, seemed taken aback and struggled to respond. "Since when did you start talking so coarsely?" But he

couldn't deny the rush of excitement he felt.

The words Brielle had uttered yesterday-"I do enjoy being with him on bed"-had haunted his dreams all night, her voice echoing,

her flushed face haunting him.

Spencer had gone through adolescence like anyone else, but this was the first time since reaching adulthood that he felt

embarrassed by a dream about a woman. In the morning, he had even thrown away his pants in a guilty panic, as if they were

tainted with his dirty thoughts.

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He had toyed with the idea of inviting that woman whose voice was a dead ringer for Brielle back to his hotel room, but he hadn't

snagged her contact information after their last encounter.

Spencer's Adam's apple bobbed as he lowered his voice. "If you're itching for it, I can satisfy you right here in the office,"

No sooner had the words left his lips than a cup of coffee splashed on his face. The brown stain of the coffee slid down his

cheek, soaking through his suit to the white shirt beneath.

Brielle hadn't expected Spencer to be so brazen, so utterly shameless. A colleague had brought in the coffee, but due to the

morning's positive pregnancy test, she hadn't touched it, and it had gone cold.

Spencer wiped his face, unsurprised by Brielle's retort. "Are you still holding out for Uncle Max to sweep you off your feet?"

Brielle, how low can you get?"

The more he insulted her, the more it pained him.

"Get out." Brielle shifted her gaze to the computer, unwilling to waste any energy on such a person.

With pursed lips, Spencer gave her one deep look and then pushed the door open to leave.

The colleagues outside saw his coffee-stained figure but dared not stare, all thinking Ms. Haywood was the real powerhouse.

Once Spencer entered the elevator, he leaned against the wall, catching his breath, and glanced at his arousal. It wasn't Brielle

who was cheap, it was him, so cheap that despite knowing her disdain, he almost lost it over her words.

Frustrated, he punched the elevator wall. With no outlet for his pent-up energy, he felt suffocated.

Back in the office, Brielle felt nothing but irritable. She had a sharp sense that Spencer had changed; his eyes held not only

disgust but something more that made her feel endangered. But she had no time to dwell on these feelings. Her mind was

preoccupied with the two lines. on the pregnancy test, still feeling like an illusion.

Her computer kept pinging with notifications. The Beaconsfield media was all praise for Alivia, nearly putting her on a pedestal.

And as for Max, he was already a figure of reverence.

Brielle felt no stirrings in her heart, nor did she call Max to ask about the details. She had long known Alivia's maneuvers, how

she hid behind others in an armor of generosity and gentleness, deceiving the public.

This media circus, this deluge of blessings, was Alivia's warning shot. If Brielle showed any sign of weakness now, she'd be

conceding defeat to Alivia before their battle had even begun.

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Alvia's spectacle was meant to provoke her. If Brielle called Max now to check on him, she would seem petty in comparison to

Alvia's poised and dignified front after all, Alvia had truly taken care of Martha for years.

gaze dropping to her belly with heavy thoughts. This was a

Belle shut down her computer, her gaze dropping to the problem.

Meanwhile, at the Rowland Health Center.

This was Beaconsfield's most prestigious sanatorium, and Martha's thousand-square-foot villa was dedicated to her service

alone. The treatment rivaled that of any facility abroad. However, ever since her return, her spirits had been low. Her hands

lightly clutched the sleeves of Max's suit

Max had someone bring in a light meal for her, but Martha just waved it away, "Max, why don't you stay for dinner tonight? It's

been ages since we've had a meal together,"

Max's thoughts still lingered on Brielle, but seeing Martha's weary and anxious face, he nodded. "Alright."

Martha's expression softened, and she eventually drifted off to sleep.

Upon leaving, Max pulled out his phone, intending to call Brielle to explain the situation. But Alvia approached, a smile appearing

on her face upon seeing him still there. "Max, I thought you'd have gone back by now."

She noticed his phone in his hand, but her expression remained unchanged. "Do you remember our last conversation? I asked if

you had someone special, and you said maybe. What about now? Have you made up your mind?"

Max looked into the distance, his face lighting up with an involuntary smile at the thought of Brielle. "Yeah."

The word plunged into Alvia's heart like a knife, swift and unhesitating. Despite agony in her heart, her face betrayed nothing.

"Really? Congratulations. Are you planning to tell your mother?"

"The situation with my mother isn't great. I'm not planning to tell her just yet. Plus, the woman I like has her reasons for not

wanting to make our relationship public.”

Alivia’s jealousy made her tremble, unable to fathom someone who did not want to declare a relationship with a man like Max.

Was Max waiting for this woman to give him commitment?

How could Brielle be worthy? What gave her the right to have Max wait for her?

Alivia’s nails dug into her palms, wishing she could subject Brielle to the cruelest tortures imaginable. The heartache Alivia felt

now, Brielle would have to repay it a hundredfold!

But she couldn’t rush. Brielle had never been her match, after all. All she needed to do was stir others into action against Brielle.

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Alivia’s face still held a gentle warmth as she spoke, “We’ve known each other for so many years, and it’s the first time I’ve heard

you talk about someone special. She must be quite the catch. As a friend, I’m really happy for you. Are you sticking around for

dinner tonight? If you’re eager to be with her, maybe you should head over, especially with how outrageous the media has been

today. I worry it might give her the wrong idea.”

It was a tactical retreat. Alivia was playing her cards right by suggesting Max should go to Brielle and mentioning the media’s

exaggerated stories, implying that the media’s fabrications had nothing to do with her.

Having known Max for years, Alivia was aware that aside from his work, he hardly paid attention to anything else, let alone

spontaneously checking someone’s social media. That’s why she felt confident enough to post those ambiguous messages on

her own account, only to delete them shortly after posting. Even if someone took screenshots, she could claim it was malicious

intent, and she’d still manage to come out squeaky clean.

In Alivia’s eyes, Max’s affection for Brielle was simply due to men’s natural inclination to protect the vulnerable. Yes, it was

because Brielle was less capable, less dazzling than Alivia was, that Max was momentarily beguiled by her.

Men didn't fancy women with too much guile; they felt threatened and found them hard to handle. But if she positioned herself as

a humble admirer, whose every action sprang from her affection for him, what reason would Max have to be harsh with her?

If she could soften his heart just once, she knew it would gradually lead to a bond of compassion, tipping the scales of love in her favor.

Even now, Alivia refused to believe that Max could truly love Brielle. She saw Brielle's emergence as a minor disturbance; as

long as Alivia's relationship with Max could withstand this trial, she had nothing to fear from any future storms.

In short, Brielle was nothing more than a spice in Alivia's emotional recipe, not worth fretting over, and certainly not worth a full-

scale war.

Still she had no intention of making life easy for her either.

Ultimately, Max set down his phone. "I'll stay. Spend time with Mom." He stood by the window. his voice indifferent.

A hint of amusement flickered in Alivia's eyes as her lips curled into a smile. "Aunt Martha will. be thrilled. I'll let the chef know to

get started."

Max nodded, and it wasn't until he had left that he raised his hand to massage his temples.

Alivia's admiration was too evident, though she tried hard to disguise it. Max was no fool and could see right through it. He had

rejected her once, twice, countless times, and had made his position crystal clear. But Alivia was cunning. Her admiration was

open and seemingly without the intent to disturb him. If he couldn't tolerate even this, pushing her completely out of sight, it

would border on ingratitude, given how attentive Alivia had been to Martha over the years.

After all, she had said it herself; she was just a friend of many years. From Max's perspective, there seemed to be no fault to

pick. But he still worried about Brielle getting the wrong idea. He never paid any mind to gossip, but he's not sure about Brielle.

So, he picked up the phone and stepped onto the balcony to call her.

Brielle was bagging up trash in the bathroom at that moment. She had tossed the pregnancy test into the bin that morning and

hadn't thought about it since. Max could show up at any time: she couldn't let him see that.

Startled by Max's incoming call, she felt her heart clench and her grip loosening, dropping the trash to the floor. "Max?"

Just hearing her voice made Max feel a soft pang in his chest. "Have

"About to."

"Did you make something yourself?"

As Brielle picked up the scattered trash, she replied, "Yeah."

U had dinner yet?"

Distracted, she didn't notice the pregnancy test that had fallen under the sink cabinet. She hastily tied up the trash bag, feeling a

bit like a thief.

"If you don't feel like cooking, I can have Patrick send over a chef."

"No need. I've not been that hungry lately."

Hearing her lack of appetite only made Max's smile grow. Was it jealousy over the medial reports?

He looked out at the twilight sky, his expression tender. "Brielle, don't believe the media. They're all talking nonsense. I've never

thought of marrying Alivia."

What he really wanted to say was, "I have you now, so I've never thought of marrying Alivia."

In his twenty-something years, Max had never spoken such words to a woman, which gave him a secret sense of

embarrassment. It was as if he was breaking himself apart to be reassembled into a completely unfamiliar version of himself.

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Max had never truly understood the notions of fondness or yearning. His life was a constant climb, an unending quest for

achievement, with scant regard for the journey's joys.

He was a man devoid of excess emotion; even during the year Martha descended into madness, he remained stoic.

His father always said he was born to do business. But now, a curious new sentiment was taking root within him, warming him to

the core and leaving him utterly disconcerted. He didn't recognize this feeling as shyness; rather, it felt as if every pore was

radiating heat. So, he never did utter the words, "because I found you.

His tone was even, and through the screen, Brielle couldn't see the expression that played upon his face, but for Max, even in

the midst of a tempest, one would be hard-pressed to see him furrow his brow.

Brielle paused, ensuring the trash bag was securely tied before heading downstairs. "I know."

Ever since Max had given her that rosary, she had a hunch about his feelings. But now, things were different. She glanced down

at her belly and thought it wasn't the right time.

Her world was in utter disarray.

"Brielle, is your loss of appetite because you're... jealous?" It was rare for Max, a man seemingly oblivious to the throes of love,

to even recognize the concept of jealousy.

"No. I just need some rest."

The hint of a smile in Max's eyes faded slightly. Was she not jealous? He furrowed his brow, wondering if Brielle really liked him.

Wouldn't she feel uneasy knowing he was getting close to another woman?

"Max, don't worry, I won't be affected by these trifles."

Trifles? Max's frown deepened, unsure of what he was feeling. He didn't want Brielle to be upset, yet if she truly felt no twinge of

jealousy, he felt oddly deflated. This must've been what Andrew meant by 'torture.'

"Yeah, as long as you trust me, that's all that matters."

After hanging up, he pursed his lips, a picture of puzzlement.

Just then, the chef rolled in the dinner cart, and he followed them inside. Martha hadn't rested long before she was up and

smiling at Max, beckoning him over. "Max, come and sit down."

The room was spacious, with a large dining table by the window. Martha was already seated there, prim and proper.

Max walked over, taking a seat opposite her.

Martha's gaze shifted to the door, noting Alivia's absence, and frowned. "Where's Alivia? Did she leave? Max, how could you not invite her to stay for dinner? After all these years, you still have no clue how to treat a lady."

As she finished speaking, Alivia entered, carrying a bowl of soup. "Aunt Martha, don't blame Max. I wanted to make you some soup to help you recover."

Martha stood up happily to take it, casting a reproachful glance at Max. "What are you waiting for? Max, go help her."

Max's face remained impassive; he didn't refuse but took the soup from Alivia's hands.

As Martha thought the two might grow closer, she heard Max say. "As I've said before, soup-making is best left to the professionals."

Alivia's face fell, a look of hurt flashing in her eyes.

Hearing Max's words, Martha felt exasperated, wondering how he could be so tactless, even with the woman who might be his

future wife. She quickly took Alivia's hand, blowing on it affectionately. "Don't mind Max's nonsense. I'm truly touched you made

soup for me. I can't wait for the day you join the Dorsey family."

Alivia glanced at Max, knowing that any hesitation or coyness would only erode his trust in her. Max had already made it clear he

had someone else in his heart. "Aunt Martha, let's talk about that later. Max and I are still young. There's no rush."

From Max's perspective, Alivia was making excuses for him. Although he was dissatisfied with the current atmosphere, he said nothing.

Martha smiled even more warmly, patting Alivia's hand. "Let's eat."

Max's mind was elsewhere during the meal, only picking at his food. When his phone rang, it provided the perfect excuse to

leave.

“Mother, Alivia, please enjoy. I have to go to the office.”

Martha’s face clouded with displeasure. It was already late; why hurry to the office? “Max, it’s been so long since we’ve had a

peaceful meal together, and Alivia is here, too,”

Alivia swiftly served Martha some food. “Aunt Martha, there’s no helping it. Max is busy with the company. Now that you’re back

in the country, we’ll have plenty of opportunities to dine together. We can always do it next time.”

Seemingly making excuses for Max, Alivia cleverly set the stage for another mealtime.

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Martha couldn’t help but chuckle, shooting Alivia a look of exasperated amusement. “You, my dear, haven’t even walked down

the aisle yet, and here you are, putting his needs first.”

“Mother, enjoy your dinner,” Max paid no mind to their conversation, his gaze steady and undisturbed.

As soon as he left, Alivia looked forlornly at her plate, her appetite completely gone.

Martha sighed with a mother’s concern when she saw her daughter-in-law-to-be like that. “Last time you mentioned Max was

seeing someone, who is she? Is it just a fling, or is he serious?”

Alivia slowly looked up, realizing her slip in composure, and forced a smile. “Aunt Martha, really, these matters are for Max to

decide. Besides, I promised to keep his secrets. You’ve been. unwell; don’t stress yourself over this.”

The more understanding Alivia was, the more Martha’s heart ached for her. Martha snorted dismissively. She was determined to

find out who this sly girl was!

Alivia tactfully added, “I’ve heard she’s an employee at Dorsey International. She must be quite competent, I suppose.”

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“An employee of Dorsey International? Competent, my foot! She’s using her position to seduce her boss—everyone knows her

game. Max won't be fooled by that kind of woman. It's just a whim at best. I won't let someone like her step foot into the Dorsey

family. Alivia, rest assured, you won't suffer any injustice. If Max marries someone else, I'd rather be six feet under."

Alivia was taken aback and quickly patted Martha's back. "Please, don't talk like that. I promise, I'll work hard to win Max back. I

won't let him go to another woman."

Martha relaxed a little, her lips pursing in satisfaction. "That's more like it. No other woman is worthy."

Alivia had achieved her aim, her lips curving in a faint smile. She had said it before—Brielle was no match for her, not even worth

her personal intervention. A woman of lowly birth had no right to set her sights on Max, no right to dare love him, no status to

love him.

Brielle's fate was to struggle and scrape by in Beaconsfield. From birth, it was decided. Alivia was as radiant as the moon,

Brielle as lowly as the dirt. Brielle had never been her rival; Alivia's true opponent had always been Max's heart.

Max got into his car, intending to drive to Pearl Estate, but on a whim, he turned back to Premier Palace.

The snow continued to fall outside, as Beaconsfield's winters were notoriously long. He handed the keys to the housekeeper and

walked in.

Wesley, the butler, opened the door for him, his expression hesitant. Max felt an inexplicable unease, as if the mansion were

hollow. That feeling vanished the moment he saw Brielle sitting

on the couch, engrossed in a children's cartoon, the flickering light softening her features.

Max shook off the snowflakes from his coat, hung it on the rack, and approached her, Brielle watching a financial seminar

wouldn't have surprised him, but a children's cartoon? The contrast amused him, and he couldn't resist scooping her into his

arms,

"What's got you into this kind of show all of a sudden?"

The weariness of the past few days seemed to vanish at the sight of her. He leaned in to kiss the skin of her neck. His hands

slowly moved down as the others in the room discreetly withdrew.

Brielle wasn't in the mood tonight, turning her head away from his kiss.

Max tilted her face back, noting the troubled look in her eyes, and asked softly, "What's wrong?" Her lips pressed together, and

after a moment of stillness, she regained her composure. "I just... I saw this little kid at the office today. He was wearing a coat

with cartoon characters on it, from this show."

Max frowned, not quite grasping her point. After a minute, he ventured, "Do you want one?"

Brielle, still anxious, couldn't help but laugh at his off-beat response.

Max thought he had guessed right. "Which character? I'll have one of my companies make an adult version for you."

So Mr. Dorsey still harbored a touch of that straightforward, male thinking.

"It's not that; I just thought the kid was adorable." The hint was there; surely he would understand now?

But before she could gather her courage to speak plainly, Max's phone rang—it was Michael. His brow furrowed, and after a brief

pat on Brielle's head, he answered. "Father."

"Max, did you hear about Ryan's bastard child making a scene in public?"

Michael was seething. "It's scandalous. That woman brought the child right to our doorstep!"

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Max wasn't surprised, really. After all, Ryan had always been the black sheep, a playboy whose escapades were the talk of the

town. Poor Faith, the cuckoo in her nest, probably didn't even know the count anymore.

However, Faith had the patience of a saint. She turned a blind eye because she adored Ryan, and he had only one son,

Spencer, so she chose to overlook his dalliances.

But an illegitimate child? That was a whole different can of worms.

Back in the day, Michael had his fair share of lovers, but only those he permitted could have his children. Even with his

wandering eye, Michael never let any of those nameless flings cause the scandal of a bastard child. The Dorsey family despised

nothing more than the stain of illegitimacy.

And now Ryan, fresh back at Dorsey International, had stirred up this hornet's nest. It seemed this woman was playing for keeps.

Max frowned, and Michael's stern voice carried on. "Max, your brother has really crossed the line this time. His affairs are one

thing, but a bastard child? That's a stain on the Dorsey family legacy we simply cannot abide."

"Father, we all know the rules. A child born without our blessing cannot be part of the Dorsey lineage.*

Michael's eyes were cold as he massaged his temples. "I'll see to it that the child is taken care of. Keep an eye on Ryan at

Dorsey International."

"Understood."

Max was always business—first with Michael. But Brielle, sitting by his side, couldn't shake the weight of the words—'a child born

without our blessing cannot be part of the Dorsey family."

Her lashes fluttered down, her mind reeling in a void.

Max's voice continued to echo. "Trying to leverage a child for status? I told her, she'd be compensated, but the child couldn't

stay."

This scandal would be a blot on the Dorsey family's reputation.

Brielle tried to tune it out, but each word Max spoke drilled into her ears, shredding her peace of mind.

Love was supposed to be a dalliance between equals, not a desperate grasp at status from a world apart. If Brielle fell pregnant

carelessly, everyone would assume she was just like that woman, trying to set foot in high society through a child. Besides, Max

was with her, but he had never talked about marriage.

Max ended the call and turned to find Brielle daydreaming. It was rare to see her so out of sorts, and he found it amusing,

pinching her earlobe affectionately. "Were you about to say

something?"

Brielle snapped back to reality, shaking her head quickly. "No, nothing."

She stood up, eager to escape somewhere, anywhere—but home wasn't an option. Mentioning home now would clue Max in on

her unease. She forced a smile. "I'm going upstairs to rest."

Max was still buried in work and pulled her into a hug, pressing a kiss to her lips. "Okay."

Brielle trudged upstairs, and after a shower, she examined her stomach in the mirror from different angles.

Nothing showed. Should she get checked out? But she feared being watched—by William, Spencer, or maybe Alivia. If any of

them were on her tail, a trip to the obstetrician would scream headlines, and the Dorseys would be plunged into scandal.

Her plan was simple: if the Dorseys wouldn't acknowledge the child, and the child was a ticking time bomb for Max, she'd keep it

to herself. When she started showing, she'd request a work trip far away, have the baby in secret, and then return.

Though she hated to admit it, she was thrilled about the life growing inside her. Her feelings for Max were deeper than she'd ever

let on.

Clothed and in bed, she tried to sleep but was awakened by a heat stirring within her. As Max's advances became imminent, she

shifted away.

Max, his arm around her waist, felt her resistance and held back with effort. "Brielle?" He called out and leaned in to kiss her

again.

Silently, Brielle pulled the covers over herself. "I'm a bit tired."

At those words, no matter how much he desired her, Max couldn't continue. He even checked her forehead to make sure she

wasn't feverish before he relaxed.

Brielle noticed his concern and sighed inwardly. She couldn't help falling: Max's tender trap was simply too enticing.

“Just rest if you’re tired,” he said as he lay on his side, pulling her close by the waist.

Brielle turned to nestle into his embrace, hearing his lingering question. “Sure, you don’t want. that cartoon-themed down

jacket?”

So that was still on his mind.

In Max’s eyes, Brielle was unlike any other woman. She might’ve appeared dull, but her thoughts were more intricate than

anyone’s, never demanding anything from him, nor voicing her own needs. Yet, that very fact left Max on edge, always fearing he

might inadvertently. cross some unseen boundary and accumulate enough disappointments in her to walk away in silence.

Brielle was like the shattered bits of colored glass in a kaleidoscope, tiny and fragmented, hidden deep within, and impossible to

fully see.

Max was willing to fulfill all her wishes if only she would ask, but she never did, so he remained clueless about her desires.

“No, let’s just sleep,” she replied.

Max’s arm, draped around her waist, tightened, and he gave a reassuring pat. “Okay, let’s sleep.”

But wasn’t sleepy. It wasn’t that she was rejecting Max’s affection; it was just best to be cautious during the early stages of

pregnancy.

Max had a robust vitality; once he got going, there was no end in sight, which completely contradicted his seemingly reserved

exterior. It was out of concern for the baby that she had declined.

Max let go of her and got up to head to the bathroom, where the sound of running water soon. filled the room. He had already

taken a shower that night; he probably wanted to cool down his urges with a cold shower.

Feeling a pang of guilt, Brielle was just turning over when her phone by the bedside began to ring. She cursed her sharp

eyesight and immediately recognized the flashing name “Alivia.”

She wasn’t naive; she could guess Alivia’s game. She trusted that Max wasn’t the type to keep looking for something better while

he had something good, so he must have made his stance clear to Alivia. But Alivia knew how to use Max's mother as a tie,

binding their relationship tightly.

If Max had been entirely indifferent to Martha, he wouldn't have sent her abroad for convalescence, away from the troubles of

Beaconsfield. So if Brielle ever showed displeasure at Alivia contacting Max because of Martha, that would be Alivia's cue to

gain an advantage.

The ringtone persisted, especially intrusive in the dead of night.

Brielle could have played the same game as other women, and picked up the phone at such a moment to rile up Alivia, but while

effective, that tactic also disrespected Max himself. So, she got up, took the phone, and knocked on the bathroom door. "Max,

your phone's ringing."

The sound of water stopped, and his voice came through, "Who is it?"

"Alivia." Brielle's tone was calm, betraying nothing.

Max frowned slightly; a call at this hour likely meant something about his mother, "Can you take it for me? Ask what's needed. I'll

be a few minutes."

He sounded a bit embarrassed when he mentioned a few minutes.

Brielle blushed, thinking how the cold shower wasn't doing him any good in this chilly weather. But wasn't all of this her doing?

Max had respected her refusal to touch her earlier, showing her utmost respect. Now, he was deferring to her to handle a call

from another woman. Sometimes, Brielle even felt that seducing Max had been the most correct decision of her life.

The water started again, and Brielle glanced down at the phone, a slight smile curving her lips. Since Max had agreed, she

wouldn't hold back.

She pressed the answer button, and Alivia's voice came through. "Max, I suddenly remembered something about the new

medication the doctor mentioned. Are there any side effects? I'm choosing a new home nurse for Aunt Martha and want her to

be aware of any potential issues."

See, Alivia was so concerned about Martha. She was even selecting a trustworthy nurse for her in the late hours.

Woman to woman, Brielle knew the play. If Max had been the one to answer, even though he disliked outside interference, he

wouldn't have rebuked Alivia. After all, everything Alivia did was for Martha's sake, and even if it was to no avail, she was busy

until the wee hours.

"Ms. Alivia, Max is in the shower."

After saying this, Brielle suddenly recalled a past moment when she had called Spencer, and Lillian had answered. Lillian had

said Spencer was in the shower with a tone that seemed boastful as if reveling in besting the 'main wife' – It was quite

distasteful.

Brielle chuckled to herself; heaven was her witness, Max was genuinely in the shower, and she was merely stating the truth, with

no ulterior motive.

But Alivia was definitely not feeling it.

Chapter 418

The moment Alivia heard a woman's voice, her face contorted in disgust. Her hand at her side clenched so tightly that her nails

dug into her palm. There was no doubting it; Brielle picked up the call.

She had thought Brielle had some sort of talent, but as it turned out, she was just a man-stealer, a homewrecker. Such tactics

were despicable to Alivia, even contemptible.

She guessed that Max was either working late, with his phone out of reach, or he'd already fallen asleep, allowing Brielle to act

so brazenly.

The taste of blood filled Alivia's mouth. She yearned for Brielle to just vanish.

As low and vile as the method was, Alivia had to admit that the damn woman had succeeded in getting under her skin. “I need to

Speak with Max. Who is this?” She feigned ignorance of Brielle’s identity, keeping her tone as flat as possible.

Brielle arched an eyebrow, cool as a cucumber. Well then, let’s see how long Alivia could keep this up. A smirk danced at the

corners of her lips as she knocked on the bathroom door. “Max, Ms. Alivia here says she needs you.”

The sound of water stopped once again, with Max stepping out of the steamy bathroom wrapped in a towel. He towered over

her, looking down with a height advantage.

Brielle’s gaze slipped downwards, catching sight of his still-dripping torso. Her cheeks flushed as she averted her eyes. She

couldn’t help but say, “Why don’t you dry off?”

Caught up in the allure of his masculine appeal, she’d momentarily forgotten she was on the phone. Realizing her lapse, she

glanced at the mobile device.

Thinking she was gesturing for him to take the call, Max naturally grabbed the phone and held it to his ear. “Alivia, what’s up?”

Alivia was gritting her teeth, eyes icy with contempt. She was convinced Brielle was doing this on purpose, trying to make her

look foolish, but she was no ordinary woman, and if Brielle thought these petty games could drive her away, Brielle was sorely

mistaken.

Though disgusted, Alivia’s tone regained its composure. “I’m helping Auntie pick out a caregiver. I’ve gone through four or five

candidates, and none are quite right. I wanted to check on the specific side effects of the new medication so that I could brief

them properly. We don’t want them to mishandle her care.”

Max’s brow furrowed. It wasn’t that he found Alivia off-putting, he was just puzzled. It was midnight; surely, this could have been

discussed during the day. Why now? And the care facility he’d chosen was well-staffed with top-trained caregivers. Why would

Alivia need to find someone else?

“The care home’s staff is more than adequate.”

“But I’m still worried about Martha. Ever since you’ve been away, her spirits have been low. The professionals are very

competent but seem afraid of making mistakes. They lack a certain... warmth. The people I’m choosing are from the Barnes

family. They can keep her company and have a chat.”

Alivia’s reasoning was watertight.

The facility was part of the Rowland family’s holdings, and to curry favor with Max, they’d made it abundantly clear to everyone to

take great care of Martha, emphasizing her status repeatedly, and likely warning them of dire consequences for any slip-ups.

Under such pressure, the staff would naturally be walking on eggshells, afraid to err. So, Alivia’s concerns. seemed justified.

Brielle, overhearing this exchange, felt that if Max made things difficult for Alivia now, he’d be ungrateful. She moved to retreat to

the bed but was stopped by Max’s grip on her wrist.

Without hiding from Alivia on the phone, Max addressed Brielle directly. “Don’t walk barefoot on the floor. It’s cold.”

Only then did Brielle look down at her feet. The room’s floor was spotless and disinfected daily by the housekeeping staff. She

had forgotten to put on slippers when she got out of bed, and when Max reminded her, she felt a chill. She hurried back to the

bed, curling her toes.

Still talking to Alivia, Max moved closer to the bed and placed Brielle’s feet in his empty palm to warm them. “As for side effects,

there’s a propensity for agitation, same as before, but this new medication intensifies that unpredictability. Meaning, my mother

could lash out at any moment, like before, but she’ll have more moments of clarity.”

Alivia wasn’t really listening: her mind was reeling with Max’s tender instructions to Brielle. The thought of the two of them

sharing a room, possibly about to share a bed, was driving her to a jealous frenzy, but her voice remained calm and collected.

“Got it. I was just a bit anxious and called you. Sorry for interrupting your rest, huh?”

Chapter 419

Max thought of Brielle’s recent comment about being tired and responded with a simple, “Yeah.” That one word cut through the

air like a blade.

Max was an Impenetrable fortress around other women, impervious to their sweet nothings and flattery.

Brielle, feeling the warmth in her palm, couldn’t help but laugh at his response. He was like a log devoid of emotion. If she were

Alivia, she’d probably be seething with rage.

Indeed, Alivia was on the brink of exploding, but she managed to apologize, nonetheless. “I won’t call at this hour next time. Get

some rest, goodnight.”

After hanging up, Alivia took a deep breath, resisting the urge to smash everything in sight. She had to stay calm

Her mouth tasted of blood from biting her tongue in frustration. Finally, she decided to give Spencer a call. Noah had mentioned

Spencer was scheming to woo Brielle, which could make him a useful pawn in her game.

Spencer answered quickly, as Alivia’s return from abroad was no secret. He was surprised by her call, though. They knew each

other, sure, but they weren’t close.

“Spencer, it’s me.” Alivia’s voice was soothing, quickly settling into a poised and proper tone.

Despite his confusion, Spencer replied courteously, “Calling so late, is everything alright?”

“Well, there is a small matter. I heard you’re no longer the director at Dorsey International. What happened?” Alivia was cunning,

not mentioning Brielle directly but meandering slowly to her point, masking her true intentions.

For Spencer, the subject was a sore spot, especially since Alivia was an attractive woman. No man wanted to get embarrassed

in front of a pretty lady.

“Dorsey International is a fair place. Some rise above others when they prove their worth.”

“I heard it was a woman who took your place. I met Noah abroad, and he mentioned her not-so-stellar reputation.”

A cold smirk formed on Spencer’s lips. Alivia had barely set foot back home and was already targeting Brielle. If she knew about

Brielle’s tryst with Max, she’d probably spring into action right away.

“Her reputation is indeed tarnished.”

“Spencer, I don’t mean to pry. I’ve just returned to the States and was dealing with the signings with Book recently, so I’m

naturally concerned about Dorsey International’s affairs. We’re essentially family now, and I thought I’d ask. If the person who

took your place is truly problematic, I could have a word with Max on your behalf.”

In saying this, Alivia conveyed two things:

First, that she was close enough to Max to influence high-level decisions at Dorsey International.

Second, she was unaware of the intimate connection between Max and the person who replaced Spencer, portraying herself as

innocent and even pitiable.

Spencer had been scoffing internally, knowing her words couldn’t hold a candle to Brielle’s influence, but Alivia’s apparent

concern for him softened his scorn. He even thought Alivia, despite her status, was just a naïve little woman, a pitiable fool. Max

had passed over someone like her for Brielle, which seemed preposterous to Spencer.

He sighed, offering a word of advice, “The woman who took my place was once my fiancée, Brielle, and her relationship with

Uncle Max is... complicated. You might want to investigate further. Besides, why not ask Uncle Max directly about his marriage

plans?”

“Complicated? What do you mean? Max has always been above reproach. He wouldn’t fool around. And he’s already made it

clear he intends to marry me.”

“You haven’t seen how low Brielle can stoop!” Spencer was agitated, his emotions far more transparent than Alivia’s subtle

manipulations.

After speaking, he suddenly realized something – had Max promised to marry Alivia? Max was a man of his word; if he’d made

such a promise, it was as good as done. So, Brielle was just a mistress, after all.

A new scorn filled Spencer’s eyes. If that was the case, then pursuing Brielle himself wasn’t such a bad idea after all. Strangely,

he was reminded of Brielle’s crass words, which danced upon his heart, preventing him from finding peace.

*If Uncle Max truly intends to marry you, then congratulations, Ms. Alivia. But let me remind you, my former fiancée is quite the

catch. You’d best keep a close eye on Uncle Max, or you might find yourself dealing with a love child, and then you’ll really be

out of the running.”

“Impossible!”

The notion of a love child struck a nerve with Alivia, shattering her, composure as she became frantic.

Chapter 420

Given what Alivia knew about Max, she wouldn’t stand a chance if Brielle were indeed pregnant. Max was the kind of man who

stood by his responsibilities. Even if he didn’t love Brielle, he’d marry her just to give the child a proper family name.

A venomous look flashed in Alivia’s eyes. If that bitch dared to carry a child, she’d make sure to terminate the pregnancy herself

and ensure that Brielle believed Max wanted nothing to do with the baby.

With a cold press of her lips, Alivia thanked Spencer, “I get it, Spencer, But I’m still not gonna pry into Max’s business. I asked

him before I left If he had someone special, and he said no. He wouldn’t lie about that. Even if he did stray, it must’ve been that

woman throwing herself at him. Since she’s your ex–llancée, could you maybe talk some sense into her?”

Alivia knew damn well Spencer couldn't sway Brielle. In Brielle's eyes, Spencer was a nobody. compared to Max. No woman

would pick Spencer over Max. Alivia's words were just a ploy to craft her image – the youngest head of a research Institute, an

educated and well-connected heiress, yet her emotional life was as blank as a fresh sheet of paper.

Alivia was gentle and

intelligent, yet so pure.

Once this persona took hold, Spencer would undoubtedly speak well of her to Michael.

Alivia was never stingy with her charm unless it came to women eyeing Max. Those rivals would be driven away by any means

necessary.

Sure enough, Spencer felt a twinge of sympathy – a common male affliction, mistaking a strong woman's vulnerability for an

opportunity to shine.

"Ms. Alivia, don't worry. I'll put in a good word for you with Grandpa so you and Uncle Max can tie the knot sooner."

"Thanks, Spencer." Her mission was accomplished. She exchanged a few more pleasantries before hanging up.

A sly smile crept across her face. "Brielle, you'd better get past your ex before you even think about dealing with me."

Unaware of these machinations, Brielle woke up early, and after freshening up, she headed downstairs, only to find that Max had

already left.

As she reached the ground floor, she heard Wesley mention today's special tomato soup with red wine. Wesley was passionate

about brewing various soups for her, claiming they were to fortify her health. But the thought of red wine made Brielle

Instinctively glance at her belly.

She couldn't risk a hospital visit before confirming that no one was watching her, and to avoid arousing Max's suspicion, she had

to tread carefully.

Last night, she'd researched and learned that wine could be dangerous during pregnancy.

By the time Wesley served the soup and wine, Brielle had already decided to take it to the office,

not wanting to offend him.

“Ms. Brielle, you’ve got time before work. Have some soup,” Wesley urged with a smile.

“Could you pack it up for me? I’d like to take it to the office,” she replied, careful to eat just enough of the other dishes to maintain

a balanced diet before taking her insulated container and heading to work.

Just as she arrived at the office, she saw familiar police officers in the lobby. They took the elevator up as she entered her private

one, and they exchanged nods from a distance.

Brielle had seen police officers too many times this year, but this was the first time they weren’t there to question her. Who were

they after? William?

But even William had claimed that Sarah’s case wouldn’t lead back to him.

With these questions, Brielle entered her department to overhear colleagues discussing the police visit. They all expected the

officers to collect evidence for Sarah’s case, but instead, the police had gone straight to the top floor.

The chatter ceased as Brielle entered her office. She set the soup aside and began working on the files on her desk.

Around noon, a young employee came in to retrieve documents and couldn’t resist gossiping with Brielle. “Ms. Haywood, did you

hear?”

Brielle, about to take a sip of water, looked at her curiously.

The girl’s face was alight with excitement as she dished out the news, “Mr. William’s been accused of rape! The police took him

in!”

Brielle nearly spat out her water, coughing violently as her face turned red. She thought she must’ve been hallucinating.