

Master 481

Chapter 481

The car came to a sudden, jarring halt.

Aubree turned her head to stare at Brielle, her brows knitting together in worry.

“Even if you did find out, what then? Do you think you can just show up on their doorstep? Didn’t you hear what Spencer said?

That’s the Dorsey clan, the Rowland bunch, and the Barnes brigade meeting up. Any one of those families could squash you like

a bug with a flick of their wrist. Are you really planning to beg Max to plead with him to remember you now? Bri, snap out of it. If

he forgot you, it just proves he never loved you. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have been able to erase you so completely.”

“He just had an accident.”

Brielle’s lips pressed into a thin line, her trembling fingertips betraying her anxiety, “I heard about it when I was locked away, but I

don’t believe it. I need to see for myself.” And these past few days, she felt she had braced herself for the truth.

“If he hasn’t forgotten you, doesn’t that make it even worse? He’s about to marry Alivia. Bri, what the hell are you doing?

Remember how you counseled me back then, or are you just dying to play the other woman? I’m messed up enough for the both

of us. Why are you so eager to join the club? Why put yourself through this?” Aubree was truly getting heated now.

“He promised me, he wouldn’t marry Alivia.”

A trace of sadness flickered through Aubree’s eyes, reflecting the hopelessness of a woman in love. Once smitten, it was like

planting a tree in your heart, nurturing it into a towering oak whose roots invaded every corner of your being. To rip it out was to

tear at every inch of your heart, and god, did it hurt.

Aubree knew this pain all too well, but her disillusionment with Andrew had reached saturation; even a flood wouldn’t stir a ripple.

She had grown numb to it.

But Brielle was different. Or at least, Aubree hoped she was.

"Men's promises are worth jack, Bri. Let's just get the hell out of Beaconsfield," she said, ready to slam on the gas pedal, sparks

of fury in her eyes. She knew all too well how empty those promises could be. They might've felt genuine at the moment, but

when they expired unfulfilled, they only served as bitter reminders of what could have been. It was better not to dwell on them,

for the more you did, the more it hurt.

"If Max said he'll do something, he'll do it." Brielle's voice was soft but firm, echoing in the car, "And I believe he meant it. He

gave me his rosary."

"Doesn't Alivia have one just like it? Haven't you ever asked why she has one too? With your guts, how could you not be curious

about its origin? You're afraid to ask because you fear the answer might not be what you want, right?"

Aubree's words struck a nerve. Brielle's face instantly paled, and her lips pressed together.

Aubree felt a twinge of cruelty for speaking so harshly, but she was already in too deep, and she definitely didn't want her best

friend falling down the same hole.

Max was the object of countless desires, but he didn't give any of them a second glance. How could he truly care for a woman of

no standing?

He had toyed with Brielle's heart so effortlessly, and when he was done, he discarded it just as easily. His attitude had always

been one of disdain, the kind that itched at your pride.

After saying her piece, Aubree thought Brielle would see reason. After all, when unsure of Max's feelings, the Brielle of old would

guard her own heart well, never revealing a thing to

anyone.

But that was before she had been with Max. Not having been with him meant she had never fully seen herself. After all, one

couldn't see their own reflection without something to bounce back against. It took colliding with a man like Max, so aloof from

the world, for her to truly understand herself and realize what she longed for. Deep down, she yearned for someone to love her

fiercely, to the end, to show her that love was as powerful as death.

There were so many love stories in the world. There were even people who could spend a lifetime together without even

knowing each other's names. She didn't want that with Max. She didn't want such a pitiful ending, no more meaningful than a

farcical play.

She lowered her lashes, a stubborn bite to her lip, and fell silent.

Aubree took her back to Pearl Estate. Noticing her friend's weary state, she found her a set of pajamas. "Take a good soak and

get some rest. Once you're feeling better, we can talk about going abroad or whatever you want. The Dorsey family let you go,

and with Max's reach, no other company will dare hire you."

Brielle's hand paused as she took the clothes, a faint attempt at a smile flickering at her lips. But she couldn't muster the

expression no matter how hard she tried.

Chapter 482

Was this really the end?

After losing an innocent child and being left scarred and bruised, Max was about to marry someone else a perfect ending for him,

while she had been nothing more than a passerby in his eyes from the very beginning.

Brielle's head was pounding with a headache that only seemed to fade when Aubree pushed her into the bathtub. In the warmth

of the water, she felt like she was coming back to life, yet she made no other move and simply soaked in the hot embrace.

Aubree stepped out of the bathroom and ordered some comfort food for delivery, then sat waiting for Brielle. Her eyes glanced at

Brielle's phone on the counter, which had turned off automatically—probably hadn't been charged in days. She picked up the

phone and plugged it in. After everything was set, she settled on the couch, waiting for Brielle to emerge.

During that time, Andrew called. Aubree frowned upon seeing the flashing name and dismissed the call without a second

thought..

Andrew dialed again. He wasn't as heartless as he seemed. After being rejected once, twice, by the third call, Aubree gave in.

"What do you want?"

"Brielle's out of jail?"

Aubree let out a scoff, her lips curling with mockery, "Yeah, no thanks to you, Mr. Big Shot."

Andrew seemed unaffected by her scorn; instead, he lounged back, one leg bent, clad only in a bathrobe revealing his tanned

skin in a way that could set pulses racing—if anyone were there to see it. Drying his hair, he asked casually, "Are you upset?"

Aubree's eyes brimmed with tears. It was always this way with him—slap you, then dangle a carrot in front of you. And she was

already softening without even receiving that carrot yet.

That was the terrifying thing about love. It ate at you like ants on an elephant, leaving even Aubree disgusted by her own pitiful

state.

"No, it's just your usual way. I'm used to it."

Andrew paused, sensing her tone, and sighed. "Aubree, how long are you planning to stay out this time? If you're going to

forgive me eventually, why make a scene at all? Just come back. It's cold, and I'm freezing alone in bed."

That was Andrew for you—able to shrug off all of her heartache, regret, and sorrow with ease. But if Tessa so much as furrowed

her brow, he'd move heaven and earth to make her happy. That was the difference between love and indifference.

Aubree wanted to say 'she'd never return, but instead, she looked down. "We'll see." Those words were probably the most

hurtful thing she could muster.

Andrew didn't push further. "I'll be waiting for you. I haven't changed the locks."

Aubree ended the call and slumped on the couch, staring blankly at the ceiling. She hadn't slept well since Brielle's incident. Now

that Brielle was finally free, Aubree's tension was released, and fatigue washed over her from all sides. Yawning, she dozed off

at the edge of the sofa.

Brielle spent an hour in the bath, and the house was quiet when she emerged. Aubree was asleep on the couch, her body

slouched awkwardly.

The air conditioning was off, so Brielle turned it on. She did not want Aubree to catch a cold and fetched a blanket to cover her.

The food arrived. Brielle picked it up, noticing Aubree was still asleep. She had no appetite but warmed the food in pots anyway,

so it'd be ready when Aubree woke.

As dusk approached, the sunset cast romantic shadows across the room. Brielle stood by the floor-to-ceiling window for a while

before slipping on a coat and glancing back at Aubree.

Seeing her still asleep, Brielle let out a relieved sigh and tiptoed to the door, thinking she'd just sneak a peek. If she saw it with

her own eyes, she could give up, free from any lingering thoughts.

And if she were rejected quietly, at least it wouldn't be too embarrassing—Aubree wouldn't know or be there to judge her. With

that thought, Brielle closed the door behind her.

At the sound of the door shutting, Aubree's eyelashes fluttered, and she sighed, pulling a pillow into her embrace. She decided

to pretend she knew nothing. Sometimes, you don't hit the brakes until you crash into a wall.

Brielle called Tiffanie for the address of the Dorsey family gathering. Tiffanie was quick to respond, sending the address directly

to Brielle's phone, followed by a cautionary note. [A daring move, huh? Alivia's planning is tight tonight, intentionally setting the

Barnes family gathering next door. Everyone knows what she's up to; Maxie's engagement to her is all but sealed. If you barge in

now, it's suicide. You won't last a second against her.]

After a pause, another message came. [Just so you know, Brielle, if you go down in there, no one's coming to pick up the

pieces—not the Dorseys, the Rowlands, or the Barnes. A flick of their fingers could crush you.]

[I thought I was bold, but you're outright mad. Ah well, madness be damned. If you don't act, Maxie's truly gone for good.]

Brielle gripped the steering wheel and floored the gas pedal.

Chapter 483

In the grand lobby of the hotel, the Dorsey clan had just met up with the Rowland folks.

Truth be told, this wasn't a gathering of three families. After all, when you were discussing nuptials, it was not exactly a group

huddle situation.

The Dorseys and the Rowlands had already planned an early meeting here, and the Barnes clan happened to have booked the

room next door, so all three ended up bumping into each other in the hallway.

After exchanging pleasantries, the Dorseys and the Rowlands headed to the adjacent private dining room.

Alivia stood amidst the crowd, sneaking a glance at Max.

Tonight's main event wasn't about Spencer and Sophia. It was about her and Max. She had everything planned down to a T.

With Max having forgotten all about Brielle, this was the perfect opportunity to strike. The engagement date had to be set tonight.

As for Spencer and Sophia, they were merely her backdrop. She was quite accustomed to using others as her stage setting.

Besides, Spencer would stir the pot soon enough.

Everything would unfold according to plan.

Inside the dining room.

Max was poker-faced, while Spencer and Sophia sat at a considerable distance from each other, hardly looking like a couple

about to get engaged.

Once the Dorsey party settled in, the Rowland party followed suit. Spencer and Sophia were arranged to sit together. If he

couldn't marry Brielle, then who he married didn't matter. It wouldn't stop him from pursuing her. With the elders present, he

simply watched them clinking glasses, eagerly anticipating the upcoming drama.

Sacrificing his own trivial marriage to ensure Brielle and Max would never be, seemed like a fair trade to Spencer. Otherwise, he

wouldn't have obediently shown up tonight.

Spencer's gaze involuntarily drifted to Max, who held a cup of tea between his fingers. As he was still nursing his wounds, no

one urged him to drink.

The affair with Ryan was known by few outside the families; it was said that Ryan was exiled for breaking the Dorsey's family

rules. So, no one was aware of Max's injuries, but seeing him. with tea, no one came up to offer him a drink either.

Max held his cup, his gaze suddenly lifting to meet Spencer's in mid-air. Spencer stiffened, feeling uncomfortably transparent.

He quickly averted his eyes, his expression turning pale as he looked away.

The toasting went on for several rounds, both families appearing quite content. Tessa's father, Austin, stood up and respectfully

toasted Michael.

Half an hour later, the engagement date was set for the following Friday. The meal proceeded amicably, everything seeming to

go smoothly.

Meanwhile, next door, the atmosphere was equally lively, with all members of the Barnes family present.

Alivia, sitting beside Kenzo, was the center of attention. Kenzo himself hadn't eaten much, quietly listening to the elders'

conversation.

Both Alivia and Kenzo shone brightly among their peers, whether from the side branches or the Barnes' core family. As a young

woman, Alivia was especially the pride of her lineage. Accustomed to being the belle of the ball, she wore a modest smile,

basking in the

adoration of everyone around her.

Others looked on with envy, many wishing they could trade places with Alivia and experience the life she led.

The mood was harmonious until someone broached the topic.

“Did you hear that the Dorseys and the Rowlands are discussing Spencer and Sophia’s engagement next door?”

“Spencer’s nearly onto his second fiancée, yet Max still hasn’t popped the question to Alivia. After all these years, there’s been

constant talk of their imminent engagement, but no sign of it yet.”

“Could it be that Max has no intention of marrying at all?”

“What about Alivia then?”

The chatter grew louder. Some even boldly asked Alivia herself.

“Alivia, aren’t they arranging Spencer’s engagement next door? As the elder, why has Max delayed his engagement for so long?

When are you two going to marry?”

Alivia’s face stiffened, but she quickly regained her composure. Now that Max had completely forgotten Brielle, it was time to

schedule their own wedding.

Her lips curved into a smile. “It should be very soon, depending on how Max wants to arrange it.”

“How soon? You’ve been saying that for years. Max has never acknowledged any fiancée; it’s always been you chasing after

him.”

The speaker was a young college girl from one of the side branches, always overshadowed by Alivia and clearly resentful.

“If Max really liked you, he would’ve proposed by now. It wouldn’t be dragging on like this. I think he just doesn’t want to marry

you.”

The warm atmosphere chilled in an instant. The outspoken girl realized she might have gone too far and pursed her lips.

Thinking of Brielle's exit from the picture, Alivia smiled icily, confident. "If Max isn't going to marry me, then who will he marry?"

Chapter 484

The girl was startled by Alivia's imposing presence, sweat beads quickly forming on her forehead. Having made a sarcastic

remark towards Alivia in such a setting, she knew her days ahead would be anything but easy.

A flicker of amusement crossed Alivia's eyes – such impulsive fools were destined to be mere cannon fodder. She rose

gracefully, cradling a cup of water in her hands. "Grandpa, uncles, Max was injured recently and isn't in the best of health, so

he's not really up for moving around much. He's only here tonight to support Michael, so he won't be joining in the toasts. He just

messaged me to come over, so I'll go and take this cup of water to them. You all enjoy your meal," she said with thoughtful

consideration.

Each word subtly hinted at her close relationship with Max.

A glint of satisfaction shone in Jose's eyes as he chuckled, "You're not even married into the family yet, and already you're

talking for them. Go ahead, and remind him to take it easy." Given his close relationship with Michael, Jose was well aware of

Max's injury.

After stepping out of the room, Alivia smiled and paused to send a message to Austin. She and Tessa were friends, or at least

that was what it seemed to others. And Austin, being Tessa's father, had always shown his fondness for her in subtle ways.

The Rowland family, one of the four major families in Beaconsfield, owed much of their stability to the early support from the

Clements family. Thanks to Andrew's friendship with both Max and Kenzo, the Rowlands had indeed gained significant

advantages.

On the surface, they were on equal footing with the other families, but in reality, the Rowlands were a step below the rest. Now, it

was time to play this chess piece.

After sending the message, Alivia walked back through the door.

“Grandpa Jaxon, Grandpa Michael, I’m here on behalf of the elders to offer a toast to Spencer and Sophia,” she said, holding a

glass of light wine with a beaming smile as she approached Sophia.

“Sophia, congratulations.”

Sophia’s lips twitched into a feigned look of delighted surprise. “Thank you, Alivia.”

Alivia’s gaze then shifted to Spencer, who, understanding the cue, looked eager to jump in.

Sure enough, Austin was the first to speak up. “Ms. Alivia, you have become the head of the research institute at such a young

age. I hear the location is set. Is the government going to back it up next?”

Alivia’s face showed a touch of modesty as she gracefully made her way to Max’s side, replying to Austin’s query.

“The government funding is just a part of it. The most significant contribution still comes from Infinity Brilliance. They’ve invested

billions to fully support the institute’s growth. Talent

from our international branches will gradually be transferred here, and my mentor will be guiding me throughout.”

Among the younger generation, who wouldn’t want to cling to Alivia now? It was a golden ticket into the institute, and coming out

with its stamp was a matter of great prestige. The institute’s value was internationally recognized, and even young people from

other countries were vying for a chance to get in.

As the two bantered, Michael listened with growing approval of Alivia. “Alivia, once Max is healed up, I’ll have him come over to

ask for your hand,” he declared.

A blush of demure femininity finally graced Alivia’s cheeks as she glanced down at Max. Max held his teacup, appearing

indifferent, as if the surroundings had nothing to do with him.

As the woman, Alivia was expected to show some reserve, so she turned to Austin.

Austin immediately raised his glass. "Michael, why not let the Dorsey family celebrate a double joy tonight?"

Chapter 485

Michael's eyes crinkled with mirth, the very idea tickling him pink. The place was buzzing with energy, and since everyone from

the inner circle was gathered, why not have Max pop next door and toast to the crowd? They could even hammer out the details

of the wedding.

With the three major families witnessing the union, they'd be tied together, sailing on the same ship, so to speak.

A glint of amusement flashed through Alivia's eyes. With Max's memory a blank slate, Michael fanning the flames, and the

festive atmosphere, the odds were in her favor that he'd

say yes.

After all, he had said before that he'd marry her if there were no other contenders for his heart. And now, wasn't his heart free of

any other shadows?

Hope sparkled in her eyes as she looked at Max.

Realizing perhaps he should consult Max first, Michael clapped him on the shoulder. "Max, what do you think? Spencer's already

locked down his date, and you being the elder, it wouldn't make sense for him to beat you to the punch. I say you get engaged

before him—Spencer's set for next Friday; how about we pencil you in for next Monday? We've still got time to make an

announcement."

Spencer, sitting nearby, practically glowed with excitement. If Max and Alivia got engaged, Brielle would be out of the picture for

good.

Alivia saw that the stage was set and spoke softly. "Max, what about getting engaged next Monday? If you're not keen, we can

pick another date. I won't pressure you—I've waited all these years, and a little longer won't make a difference."

She let her deep affection show while letting Michael see just how much Max meant to her. With her stature and status, having

waited all these years, there was no one more fitting for

Max in the world than her.

Her goal for the evening was to leverage Max's amnesia to rush the engagement. This way, it would be too late to change

anything, even if he regained his memories. Max was a man of his word. Having made a promise in front of so many, he wouldn't

back down or cause her any embarrassment.

Alivia smiled as Spencer chimed in. "Grandpa, you're right. Uncle Max is my elder, so it's only proper for him to get engaged

before me. It wouldn't sit right with me otherwise. Plus, we've all seen how Ms. Alivia feels about Uncle Max over the years. I

reckon there's no need to delay their engagement any further. That way, I can focus on my plans with Sophia."

Michael's excitement grew with each word. Max's marriage had been his greatest concern over the years. If the two could finally

settle down, his heaviest burden would be lifted.

With that, all eyes turned to Max, awaiting his response.

Max rubbed his temples, a look of quiet exasperation on his face, probably a headache brewing. Just as he was about to speak,

the door to the private room swung open. Everyone expected members of the Barnes family to join, which would be perfect for

exchanging toasts and fostering closer ties.

But it wasn't a Barnes who entered—it was Brielle. Behind her stood Patrick, his face a mix of frustration and resignation, as if he

tried to stop her but failed.

Brielle paused at the doorway, her gaze sweeping over each person in the room, finally resting on Max. Her voice was slow and

resolute, "He won't agree."

Chapter 486

Alivia arched an eyebrow, at first thinking she must have seen wrong. Brielle was here?

But of what use was her arrival? Max had long since forgotten her. Brielle's courageous venture here was nothing short of a self-

inflicted humiliation.

A smirk played at the corners of Alivia's lips as she feigned ignorance. "I'm sorry, who are you?"

Given the recent media frenzy involving Dorsey International, everyone in the room knew Brielle. They had all heard something

about it. But why was Brielle showing up at this critical juncture? And what did that statement mean? Those in the dark wore

puzzled looks in their

eyes.

Max held a teacup in his hand, his gaze drifting past the crowd to settle on her. She stood alone, but her presence rivaled

anyone in the room. With a slight smile on his lips, Max's fingertips grazed the rim of his cup, silently sating it, wordless.

Alivia, on the other hand, almost laughed out loud. How foolish was Brielle to show up now?

The Dorsey and Rowland clans occupied the room, Max had lost his memory, and not a soul was on Brielle's side. Yet here she

was, marching in alone, the epitome of foolishness, just like the expendable girl from moments before. It seemed Alivia wouldn't

need to employ any more schemes; Brielle was about to be thoroughly ousted today.

"I remember now, I've seen you at Dorsey International. You're Ms. Haywood, right? But hasn't Max already let you go? If you

disagree with that decision, you might consider filing a labor dispute. There's really no need to show up here now."

Brielle lifted her gaze, fixing Alivia with an unflinching stare. "Ms. Alivia, my presence here has nothing to do with whether or not

I'm a director at Dorsey International. I'm here strictly on a personal matter. Otherwise, my boyfriend might end up engaged to

someone else."

The mirth in Alivia's eyes deepened, her disdain internal. Boyfriend? Was that what Brielle told herself? Sadly, Max had never

seen her as a girlfriend, merely a fling to stave off loneliness, never a public affair. And here she was, shamelessly asserting they

were an item. How laughable.

So eager, so lowly.

Alivia's lips twisted into a knowing smile. She was well aware of who Brielle was referring to, yet her gaze deliberately sought out

Spencer.

"Spencer, is this your girlfriend?"

Alivia and Spencer had already conspired about tonight's events, ostensibly for the Dorsey and Rowland families but truly for her

and Max. Their engagement was to be settled this evening, yet neither had anticipated Brielle's brazen arrival.

In their eyes, Brielle was no different from an ant. An ant daring to show up uninvited was

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truly a death wish. It was a wonder who had given her the courage.

Spencer quickly stood. "Brielle, are you here for me?"

Before she could reply, he turned to Michael. 'Grandpa, I'm sorry. I should have handled this better.'

With Spencer's admission and Brielle's earlier declaration, the crowd was convinced she was there for Spencer. At that moment,

Spencer even stood and approached Brielle. "Bri, let's not make a scene. We can talk about this in private."

Spencer truly believed Brielle had come for him, especially since he had just asked her if she would marry him that morning.

Now that Brielle had shown up so eagerly, wasn't it clear she was considering their relationship?

Spencer was ecstatic, thinking Brielle had finally come around. Max was bound to leave her sooner or later—perhaps even

tonight, as his engagement to Alivia was confirmed. Brielle was destined to be cast aside. Seeking refuge in his arms was her

best choice.

His gaze softened. Brielle had come all this way just to stop his engagement to Sophia. It seemed he'd have to treat her better

from now on. He even swore in his heart never to let her down again, to cut ties with other women and build a proper life with

her.

He reached out to take her hand, but Brielle walked right past him, heading straight for Max. "My boyfriend is Max.

Her tone was calm, composed, and resounding. She didn't look at anyone else. The mockery and disdain of others couldn't stir

the waters of her resolve. She was here for Max, and only his opinion mattered.

Brielle's affection was always simple and pure. Even if barriers of time and distance, storms and mountains stood between them,

she would fight for what she wanted. She was confident enough to overcome any obstacle. But if he didn't return her feelings,

she probably wouldn't even have the strength to take a step.

If she didn't speak up tonight, she would lose her chance with Max forever. She had to try, to avoid a lifetime of regret.

"Have you lost your mind?"

Spencer stood behind her, utterly baffled, as Brielle walked past him without hesitation to approach another. He was stunned.

Chapter 487

The moment Brielle declared Max as her boyfriend in front of the gathered crowd, it felt like a knife twisted in Spencer's heart,

draining all color from his face.

She had to be out of her mind, stirring up such drama. Didn't she realize the consequences of her words? Spencer doubted she

could even leave this room tonight.

Yet, after her bold claim, Brielle strode up to Max, her gaze unwavering as she approached him. She lifted her wrist, revealing a

rosary bracelet that gleamed against her skin for all to see. Even Michael's eyelids twitched at the sight.

But Brielle didn't look at anyone else as she extended her wrist towards Max. "You put this on me yourself. If you're truly set on

getting engaged to her, then you take it off," she said.

If he did just that, she wouldn't say another word. She'd walk out of here, spine straight, step by step, as if she'd never come

tonight.

Why should she feel ashamed? She had less to lose than anyone here – less heritage, fewer connections. If she didn't even

have the courage to speak up now, she'd already lost in every possible way.

Alivia's eyes flashed coldly at the sight of the rosary. She had suspected that Max had given it to Brielle, but seeing it now still

jarred her to the bone. Her heart sneered, but her face feigned surprise. "My rosary went missing recently. It seems Ms. Brielle

found it. But why ask Max about it now?"

Her feigned confusion convinced everyone. Alivia had lost her rosary, and Max wouldn't give his rosary to just any woman.

Brielle must have found it by chance, and now she was here, making a scene over a delusion.

The eyes in the room shifted, a mosaic of changing expressions.

Among the Rowland family, some reveled in the drama while others enjoyed the spectacle. But on the Dorsey side, the faces

were far more complex. Michael coughed lightly. "Well, if it's lost and found, it should be returned to its rightful owner. Alivia, be

more careful next

time. We wouldn't want someone to take advantage of the situation."

He then turned to Max. "Max, you can discuss Ms. Brielle's dismissal later. For tonight, let's not mix business with pleasure.

Patrick, would you escort Ms. Brielle out?"

Alivia sneered. What could hurt more than your beloved cutting you deep? She wanted Brielle not just out of the picture but

utterly humiliated.

Alivia looked tenderly at her own bare wrist. "Max, maybe you should take it off, just to be sure."

Max's breath hitched slightly at her words, his fingertips inching towards Brielle's wrist.

Brielle's heart skipped, and she couldn't help but press her other hand over his cool, seemingly emotionless fingers.

Was he really going to remove the rosary? To take it off himself and hand it to another

—

woman would that be the perfect ending?

Brielle's eyes lowered, the rims reddening despite her calm demeanor. "Are you sure you want to take it?" Her voice was steady though, betraying no signs of weakness.

Behind Brielle, Alivia's soft laughter filled the air. She didn't need to say a word; she had already won decisively. She had always

been right to dismiss Brielle. The woman had foolishly shown up unprepared, her dignity at the mercy of others. It was no

wonder she was looked down upon.

Alivia thought people like Brielle deserved such ends. Her eyes twinkled with mirth. Her heart felt as light as a balloon, especially

as Max's hand moved toward Brielle's wrist, her sense of triumph almost tangible.

Finally, the end was near.

She had been back in the country for less than two weeks, and without any effort on her part, Brielle was already on her way out.

What could an orphan, abandoned by her parents since childhood, possibly stir up now?

"Max, take it off," Alivia said softly, her voice laced with a smile.

Spencer, watching from the sidelines, felt a surge of satisfaction. Brielle rejected him, and here she was, groveling before

another man. She had no backbone. She deserved this!

Chapter 488

All eyes turned to Max.

Max had been keeping a low profile all evening as if he were uninterested in participating in the proceedings. It wasn't until this

moment that he seemed to come to life, his fingertips grazing the rosary beads he wore.

Everyone thought he would remove the rosary without hesitation. Even Michael had started to speak up, "Patrick, please escort

the lady out. This is no place for outsiders to cause a scene."

Brielle stood tall, her back straight. Even upon hearing Michael's words, she just stared steadily at Max.

"Max, think carefully. If you really..."

Before she could finish, Max interrupted her, "Dad, the night I went to the Dorsey family's ancestral home, I had intended to

introduce her to you. It's not too late now."

This out-of-the-blue statement drew all eyes to him.

His fingers still lingered on the rosary, gently caressing it, and then he leaned forward slightly, interlocking his fingers with

Brielle's.

Their fingers intertwined.

"This is my girlfriend, Brielle." The statement landed heavily in the room as if it could burst eardrums.

Alivia felt like she had been struck by lightning, and the thunder still hovered overhead.

Girlfriend. Brielle.

Each word was clear, but how could she not understand their meaning?

All her smugness vanished. Her soul seemed to momentarily leave her body, repeatedly battered and kneaded. His words hit her

heart, causing her bones to ache.

She was so rigid, she didn't even know how to react. She could taste blood in her mouth. Now that Max had acknowledged his

relationship with Brielle, every word Alivia had spat out had turned into a slap, leaving her battered and bruised.

The last trace of color drained from Alivia's face, still in shock.

She couldn't even tell whether Max had never lost his memory or had just remembered everything upon seeing Brielle. Her

heartbeat was thunderous, and she felt like she couldn't

catch her breath.

Embarrassment, anger she had never been so humiliated in all her life. All this had been given to her by the man she loved

most.

She tried to calm herself, but her trembling fingers betrayed the turmoil within.

Brielle, that bitch!

She wished she could crawl into a hole and disappear. Such humiliation was agonizing.

The others in the room also thought they were hallucinating. How could they see Maz holding Brielle's hand and hear him call

her his girlfriend?

It was absurd. As absurd as a farce.

Even Michael was briefly stunned, his mind racing. The night he went to the Dorsey family's old mansion? Wasn't that the night

Max had his accident?

Michael still didn't understand why Max had suddenly gone there that night, as he usually wouldn't return without a specific call

from him. It turned out it was because of Brielle.

Michael's presence was commanding, and he wasn't flustered by Max's announcement. "Max, there are some things that can be

done in private; there's no need to bring them out into the open. Just like what your brothers do on the outside, I've always

turned a blind eye," he implied.

In other words, it was fine to keep a lover in the shadows, but don't flaunt it in front of him, or he wouldn't be polite.

Max pushed the cup of tea towards Brielle. She really did need a cup of tea to calm her nerves. In fact, she had been prepared

for the worst. It wouldn't have been surprising if these people toyed with her, and she even lost her life. But no matter how tragic

the outcome, it didn't matter. She would have been sad if Max had truly forgotten everything, leaving only her to remember in the

days to come. How unfair.

Thankfully.

She picked up the tea, sweetness mixed with a tinge of sorrow in her heart. Max had never let her down. He was always the

best.

"Dad, you should be happy. The Dorsey family will indeed have double happiness tonight. Spencer's marriage is settled, and

mine is not far off. Next Monday is a good day. Let's set it then."

Was all this fuss about picking an engagement date for him and Brielle?

Michael almost laughed in exasperation but knew this was his son's way, direct enough to make one's blood boil. "What about

Alivia?"

Michael mentioned Alivia, and all eyes turned to her.

Alivia hung her head, even with her deep schemes and pride, as if even her arrogant spirit had bent.

But this was not her most embarrassing moment. What was more humiliating was yet to come.

Chapter 489

"I told her first thing in the morning that I had a thing for Brielle, and she wished me well."

The words fell from the lips of the man Alivia adored, and with them, he effortlessly cast her into the abyss. His tenderness for

Brielle was matched only by his cold-heartedness towards Alivia.

Alivia felt as though countless daggers had pierced her heart. It turned out that Brielle wasn't the one being figuratively

slaughtered; it was her.

She wanted to laugh and cry, her fingertips quivering more and more violently. Max was cruel, stripping her of her dignity without

a second thought, laying down the red carpet for Brielle.

Alivia's breath grew hot, her gaze bloodshot.

Her mind thundered with the noise of her shattered pride. In her twenty-something years of life, she had never felt such

humiliation. Those looks were like bone-picking knives, threatening to peel away the facade she had so carefully crafted. Her

hand, hanging by her side, clenched so tightly that her nails dug into her palm, drawing blood.

The thought of her earlier pretense, acting as if she didn't recognize Brielle, made her wonder whether she looked like a fool in

Max's eyes? The truth hit her; it wasn't Brielle who was

foolish. It was her.

The beloved always had an air of invincibility, and that was the confidence that drove Brielle to show up tonight.

Alivia might have truly lost her mind if not for the last shred of reason holding her together. She feared that if she stayed even a

second longer, her tears would spill uncontrollably.

She had never cried before and always believed that what she wanted, she would have, but she had never imagined her pride

would be crushed by the man she loved, without the slightest mercy.

At that moment, the door to the private room was knocked upon. Kenzo walked in, a smile gracing his face. "The elders want

Alivia to join them for a toast. Have you all finished your drinks? Sorry, Michael, Mr. Jaxon, Alivia had a couple too many next

door. Perhaps she's spoken out of turn?"

He slowly approached Alivia, reaching out to touch her cheek. "You're definitely drunk. Let me take you home."

After saying that, he turned to Brielle and Max. "Brielle, Max, I'm gonna take Alivia off your hands now. Don't take her words to

heart. She actually did lose her rosary, and I guess seeing Brielle with it must have upset her after a few drinks."

Kenzo's intervention was his way of defusing the situation. If left unchecked, the night would end in discomfort for all, and

perhaps even the Barnes family would be dragged into the fray.

Blaming it on the alcohol was the best possible excuse.

Supporting Alivia, Kenzo felt her whole body trembling, a sign of her struggle to contain her humiliation and rage. He sighed and

gently patted her back, a gesture of comfort.

With Kenzo's arrival, Brielle lowered her eyes. She knew all too well that this was Kenzo calling in a favor.

Alivia was his sister, and he wouldn't stand by and watch her be disgraced. That's why he'd said what he did, and Brielle,

remembering the past injuries Kenzo sustained on her behalf, felt compelled to comply. Even though she resented Alivia, even

though the jail incident had left her with a grudge, she couldn't kick up a fuss right now.

She bit her lip, swallowing the words she wanted to say.

Kenzo nodded in thanks and began to lead Alivia away, but at that moment, Michael spoke up. "Max, you and Boatman take

Alivia home. Tonight belongs to Spencer and Sophia. Let's not steal their thunder or give anyone a reason to gossip,"

The patriarch proved his wisdom, not only avoiding confrontation but also expertly shifting the focus, preventing Max from saying

anything further. Not forcing Brielle out and not tearing the couple apart publicly was the greatest concession Michael was willing

to make.

Chapter 490

Max was keenly aware that if this continued, Brielle's situation would become dangerous once Michael turned his back. Max

didn't refuse, slowly stood up, and gently took Brielle's hand, without any hint of shame. "Brielle doesn't really know anyone here,

and she's quite reserved. Dad, we're going to head out."

Reserved?

Those in attendance nearly choked on their own disbelief. The girl who had the guts to walk in here solo, was reserved?

But Michael just gave Austin a casual glance, his smile unfading. "In that case, let's consider Spencer and Sophia's engagement

settled. We'll send someone to arrange the venue." It was a classic deflection, shifting the spotlight back to the evening's

protagonists.

The others quickly jumped on the bandwagon, as if Brielle was but a brief interlude, quickly forgotten. But everyone knew that

wasn't the case.

Max had rejected a strategic alliance with the Barnes family, choosing instead Spencer's ex-fiancée. A real-life fairy tale!

No matter how turbulent the thoughts of those present, they had no choice but to suppress them and see the play through to its

end.

The original leads of this drama, Spencer and Sophia, looked anything but the star-crossed lovers; one was as pale as a ghost,

and the other wore a smile not reaching their eyes, neither sparing a glance for the other. They were preoccupied with their own

thoughts.

Meanwhile, Brielle and Max had already stepped out.

Feeling the warmth of his fingers, Brielle walked as if on air, as though stepping on clouds of cotton candy. In truth, from the

moment Max intertwined his fingers with hers, she was out of sorts. It wasn't until they left the banquet hall and encountered the

Barnes siblings outside that her gaze flickered.

Alivia, clinging to Kenzo, her face a mask of contorted humiliation, felt the urge to bite down on the shoulder before her, hoping

the pain would bring some clarity.

She had thought her plan foolproof, yet it had become her most embarrassing moment. She tried to quell the shaking of her

body, to no avail. Without turning, she knew that Brielle and Max were behind her. She had to compose herself quickly, to figure

out what to do next.

She inevitably lost some of Max's favor, and now that Michael knew of Max's relationship with Brielle, they would only become

more conspicuous. Alivia would be the laughing stock.

Alivia trembled even more, struggling to contain her rage.

Then, something happened that pushed her over the edge.

A soft thud, like something hitting the wall, reached her ears. She looked up, her eyes

bloodshot, but a hand covered her vision. It was her brother's.

Kenzo's hand over Alivia's eyes spared her the sight of Max pinning Brielle against the wall by the banquet hall, kissing her with

abandon.

Passersby occasionally strolled through the hallway. The Barnes family could emerge at any moment, and members of the

Dorsey and Rowland families might appear. But Max seemed oblivious to all, his hand cradling the back of Brielle's head, his lips

claiming hers, a siege of passion.

Brielle, flushed and breathless, had lost her earlier poise. Now, shy and unsure, she cautiously placed her hands on his waist,

timidly grasping the hem of his shirt like a child. They were the embodiment of every clichéd couple.

Alivia's eyes were covered, but she could still make out Max's movements through the gaps. Voiceless and strengthless, she

wanted to scream, to tear them apart, but all she felt were tears streaming down her face.

The elevator arrived, and she was guided into it, still blindfolded. Her world seemed to crumble, as Max kissed Brielle before her

very eyes.

It was a deep kiss.

Alivia's tears fell harder, and her hatred numbed to the point of madness.

Kenzo, his expression inscrutable, watched through the slowly closing elevator doors as Brielle's lips were tenderly captured.

Her eyes were glazed with desire, her cheeks flushed with a bloom of crimson, like a winter plum blossoming amidst the snow,

so pure, yet so temptingly dangerous.

What man could remain calm before such a sight?

As the elevator doors closed, Kenzo averted his gaze, but the image of Brielle's expression lingered. It was an image that

enticed one to tarnish and shatter.