

Master 541

Chapter 541

It seemed Michael never intended to let Brielle into the esteemed Dorsey family.

If Brielle didn't agree to his terms tonight, Michael could freely go after her without restraint, since she would've refused first.

If she agreed, it was a task doomed to fail from the start. Obsessed with achieving the impossible, Brielle would inevitably

neglect Max's feelings. With their time together dwindling, conflicts would naturally arise.

And in the end, even if Brielle managed to accomplish this Herculean task, Stellar Stage Entertainment would fall entirely into the

hands of Alivia. Michael had made it clear he wouldn't let Alivia suffer, so anything Brielle fought tooth and nail for would just end

up in Alivia's hands, easing the bitterness in her heart.

The butler, listening from the sidelines, slowly lowered his lashes in contemplation of Michael's machinations, which certainly

didn't end there.

The six-month timeline was, in fact, a countdown to Brielle's downfall. Michael would not allow a woman who climbed the ladder

through her looks to be by his most accomplished son's side.

Picking up a fountain pen, Michael wrote down a word on a piece of paper, then decisively crossed it out with two swift strokes.

"If she happens to get pregnant with Max's child during this ordeal, it'll be a double tragedy. I won't acknowledge her or the child.

As for Max, I have my ways to deal with him." His tone was casual, as if the lives of a woman and a child were no more than a

disposable piece of

paper.

Once so proud, Everett had been broken and now meekly shadowed Victoria. His dignity was stripped to the point of reporting

even the frequency of their sexual encounters, living like a mere tool.

If this was Michael's approach with a man, how much more ruthless would he be with a woman trying to pull down his son?

Concerned that Michael's tactics might lead to a fallout with Max, the butler ventured a word of caution. "But, sir, considering

Max's temperament-"

"I have an ace up my sleeve. Max couldn't possibly remain enamored with Brielle for more than six months."

No one knew what this ace was, but Michael's confidence seemed to indicate he was holding a winning hand. With that, the

butler said no more.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the city, in Premier Palace.

Brielle and Max had just entered the grand hall. Wesley, with cheeks flushed with excitement, hurried over. "Sir, Ms. Brielle,

dinner will be ready in ten minutes."

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Max released Brielle's hand and headed upstairs. "I'm going to take a shower" He felt the lingering scent of tobacco on his

clothes from smoking earlier that evening.

Brielle nodded, smiling, and picked up the partially knitted scarf, continuing her work.

Wesley, seeing the couple reconciled, quickly instructed the staff to finish hanging the decorations throughout Premier Palace. In

a short time, the yard was adorned with dozens of fairy lights.

Brielle looked around at the vibrant colors filling the yard, and her face lit up with joy. Who would have thought that one day,

Premier Palace would look like this?

Standing behind her, Wesley spoke with a touch of wonder in his voice. "This is the first time Premier Palace has been filled with

such life and color. Ms. Brielle, I am truly grateful for your presence in the master's life. You're his finest choice."

Because she'd changed him.

But Brielle thought that wasn't quite right; it wasn't that she was Max's best choice, but rather that the best man had chosen her.

She headed upstairs, pushed open the bedroom door, and found Max, a towel wrapped around his waist, emerging from the

steamy bathroom. His tall frame was perfectly proportioned; droplets of water traced paths down his shoulders..

However, amidst the mist, Brielle saw dark, purplish marks on his skin.

Her heart skipped a beat, her mind racing back to the day she found lipstick on his shirt.

collar. This was different, though. That could have been an accident, but how she explain these marks?

Her spirits plummeted as she considered leaving before Max noticed her.

could

She needed to stay calm; Max wouldn't betray her. But what was really going on? No wonder he'd been acting so strange at the

Dorsey family gathering earlier that night when she tried to: get close.

Brielle's complexion paled as her thoughts spun out of control.

Unaware of Brielle at the door, Max dried his hair and walked toward the bed. His back was also marred with bruises. Brielle felt

as if she'd been punched in the heart.

Max tossed the towel aside and picked up the hairdryer, his peripheral vision finally catching sight of her. "Brielle?"

Her face was strained, but she managed a weak smile. "Tonight's dinner is quite the feast. I heard the kitchen got a king crab

shipped in from abroad first thing this morning. Just that one dish costs a fortune, and the crab is so huge they barely found a pot

to fit it."

She was deliberately changing the subject, her gaze carefully avoiding his body.

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Max still had the hairdryer in his hand when he noticed the troubled look on her face, causing a pang in his chest. He quickly set

down the hairdryer and approached her. "It's not what you.

think."

His fingertips gently lifted her chin, tilting her face up as he softly explained. "Andrew came looking for a fight."

Brielle's eyes narrowed instantly, and her sadness evaporated, replaced by a surge of anger, The last time he had a bruise on

his cheek was from Andrew, and now Andrew had the nerve to get physical again. What was his deal?

Seeing her expression returned to normal, Max breathed a sigh of relief. "I let some info leak online. Tessa got so wound up she

ended up back in the ER, and Andrew lost it."

"Isn't that what she deserves?" Brielle's tone was bitter, her fists clenched tight.

Max couldn't help but chuckle and handed her the hairdryer. "Yeah, she had it coming."

Brielle plugged the hairdryer into the socket, grabbed his hair with her left hand, and with the hairdryer in her right, she diligently

went about drying his hair. "You didn't fight back?"

"I did. He's probably still in the hospital."

"Good for you."

Brielle felt a lot of her anger dissipate. "Don't go easy on him. This mess isn't our fault. When Tessa and I fell into the water, she

was the one who pushed me first while my guard was

down."

"I figured as much."

Max closed his eyes, enjoying the sensation of Brielle's fingers weaving through his hair. There was always a faint scent about

her, permeating the air and seeping into his pores, impossible to ignore..

Unable to resist, he wrapped his arms around her waist and slowly trailed his hands upward. Brielle squirmed as he found a

ticklish spot, trying to suppress a laugh. "Stop it."

"You were mad at me just now, weren't you?" She must have misunderstood something again.

Brielle quickly straightened up, feeling guilty. "Then go ahead, touch."

Her hands continued drying his hair until it was almost done, but his next move left her frozen in place. His fingers slipped under

the hem of her shirt, and he looked up at her. "Did he touch you?"

It seemed he had guessed who had taken her away that evening. Brielle felt a heaviness in her heart, sensing that Max was

more dangerous now than ever before. It was as if a positive answer would seal Spencer's fate. How would that be any different

from Michael?

15:15

"No, it's over between him and me

"But he's not giving up, is he?"

He should be giving up now."

With his hair fully dry, she wrapped the hairdryer cord and placed it in the nearby storage box Max embraced her from behind,

enveloping her completely. "Next time, I won't be so lenient with him.

Brielle sensed a lethal intent in his words.

Was she supposed to urge Max not to act on it? No way. She was no saint. Ryan and William had been eyeing him like a piece

of meat, waiting for a chance to take Max down, without hesitation. If she now asked Max to hold back, it was akin to cruelly

defanging a tiger.

She was selfish.

"Alright, then, don't hold back."

Max seemed surprised by her response, chuckled lightly, and buried his head into the nape of her neck. The warmth of his

breath tickled Brielle, and she couldn't help but turn her head to dodge it. "Let's go downstairs for dinner, that king crab is huge."

Brielle's eyes light up with anticipation. Max's heart softened, and he led her downstairs. Wesley had already started setting the

table and couldn't hide the smile in his eyes when they arrived. "Ms. Brielle, I've decanted the wine. You and the gentleman can

enjoy a glass tonight. There'll be fireworks to watch from upstairs, and it's supposed to snow."

Brielle realized Wesley really knew how to dial up the romance; he even prepared candles for the occasion. She felt a touch

embarrassed..

With everything set by Wesley, he and the staff discreetly retreated.

Brielle and Max had been together long enough, and though they had had sex numerous times, she still felt shy in front of him,

especially since this was their first candlelit dinner.

She sat down and sneakily glanced at Max across the table. Max served her a bowl of soup. "Aren't you hungry?"

He was so gentle that it made Brielle feel as if she were already tipsy without even having a sip of wine. Just as she was about to

speak, Max's cellphone rang.

He frowned slightly, stood up, and walked to the side to answer. "Mother."

"Max, have you had dinner? If you're done, could you come and keep me company?"

"Not yet."

"Where are you having dinner? I called Michael, and he said you left a while ago. Why aren't you at home for the New Year's

Eve dinner? There are many distant relatives there tonight,

and you know what they're thinking."

"If you had called there, then you should know that I had taken Brielle to meet the Dorsey family."

At that, Martha's expression darkened, a flicker of madness crossing her eyes. "Now you're completely disregarding my health.

Didn't the doctor say I can't handle stress?"

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"I'm just guessing you would've heard about it, that's all."

Martha clamped her mouth shut, her hand gripping the mug so tightly it nearly shattered. Of course, she was aware of Michael's

request to Brielle, but she couldn't bear it.

A flash of defiance crossed her eyes. "Max, does it have to be her?"

The defiance quickly faded, and her tone became indifferent. "No matter what happens in the future, you'll always be with her,

right?"

"Yes."

The call ended abruptly. Max glanced at his phone before returning to the dinner table. His appetite had somewhat diminished,

but he still offered Brielle a piece of crab. "Here, eat up. You must be starving."

Brielle sensed his mood had darkened. She knew who had called and felt a twinge in her heart.

No wonder even Tiffanie had been blaming her tonight. Being with Max seemed to isolate him from everyone else. She had

nothing to begin with, so there was nothing for her to lose. This relationship had always been a greater sacrifice for him from the

start. She didn't even know what she could offer to make up for all that he had lost.

She told herself that maybe Max didn't care much for kinship or friendship, but if he truly didn't care, he wouldn't have let Andrew

punch him; if he didn't care, he wouldn't have made such an effort to send Martha abroad and ensure she was well looked after.

Brielle couldn't lie to herself; Max was quite emotionally reserved, but seemed even more emotionally impoverished because of

her presence.

The once flavorful meal now tasted bland. She resolved to treat Max better, so well that she might compensate for everything he

was missing. She had to be better for him. That was her

silent vow.

After finishing their meal, they didn't bother going up to the roof to watch the night's fireworks. She picked up the unfinished scarf

and continued knitting. Just as she said she would do when she texted him. She knitted in his arms.

By the large floor-to-ceiling window, he held a book in one hand, the other resting gently on the back of her head.

Brielle knitted a few stitches, glanced at the cover, and knew what he was reading. It's a book. by Borges.

Her hands paused for a moment as she watched him, his gaze lowered, reading intently. His long lashes cast a deep shadow

over his eyelids, and his jawline was even more perfect in this light.

She thought to herself that, no matter what the future held, she would always remember this moment. That night, they went to

bed without making love, simply cuddling together as they

ell asleep

#she awoke, her phone was flooded with messages wishing her a Happy New Year. Some were from Mason, others from

Aubree and Tiffanie.

Mason had sent two messages—one with New Year's greetings and another about the Rowland family's dealings abroad.

The Rowland family was convinced. They were ready to drop a whopping twenty billion on that piece of land. Once the

government's seal was on it, the land would be theirs.

many had

Brielle's lips curled into a smile. Cash flow was the lifeblood of a company, and gone bankrupt due to liquidity issues. That twenty

billion would hit the Rowland family where it hurt, keeping them from scheming against her.

She was about to reply when Mason sent another message. The overseas process was much simpler than back home, and in

about a week, the land's fate would be announced.

Brielle replied with a single word, [Good.]

She responded to the other New Year's wishes, but one message took her by surprise. It was from Kenzo, and it was just a

picture of fireworks.

Beaconsfield had a grand fireworks display on New Year's Eve, a highlight for many each year. In Brielle's heart, she had already

seen the most beautiful fireworks with Max, so the previous night's display held no interest for her.

Kenzo's picture was quite artistic, clearly taken from a well-thought-out angle. [Beautiful photo. Happy new year, Kenzo.]

Kenzo didn't respond. Brielle figured the photo was likely sent to a group and didn't dwell on it

Her peaceful days continued until she went to Dorsey International for the last time to hand over her duties, where she

encountered Sydney dressed exactly like her. The rest of the department seemed surprised to see her back, their words stuck in

their throats. And Sydney, clutching a pile of documents, nodded slightly at her before heading to the elevator. Sydney used to

be lively, but now she affected an aloof demeanor.

Once Sydney left, her colleagues started buzzing with gossip.

"Ms. Haywood, you saw it, right? She's been copying you lately, from how you dress to the way you talk. And she's always

hanging around the top floor."

"She insists on delivering any documents that need to go up there."

"Every outfit you've worn, she's bought the same."

The feeling of being mimicked behind your back was downright uncomfortable, especially when the imitator kept showing up

around Max.

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But Brielle was no longer the director, and it had been her who had initially promoted Sydney. Until the new director arrived,

Sydney was the most influential person in the department.

The new director was none other than Spencer, who was rumored to be canoodling with Sydney. Naturally, he wouldn't fire his

own flame.

Brielle felt a knot of disgust in her stomach, but she had to hurry over to Stellar Stage Entertainment to check on the situation.

So, after offering some brief words of comfort to her colleagues, she prepared to leave the office.

Just then, Sydney returned, her previous timidity and respect toward Brielle replaced with scorn.

"Brielle, I heard you got canned

because you socked Mr. Dorsey. How could you be so dumb? You didn't seriously think that just because Mr. Dorsey fancied

you, you could get away with murder, did you?"

Sydney had completely changed her tune, and remembering the humiliation she suffered at the hands of Alivia, she felt sick.

Alivia had been harsh because of Brielle, so naturally, Sydney directed her anger at Brielle.

"Brielle, have you finished handing over your last project? If so, please make yourself scarce. We've got work to do here, and

there's no time to entertain the likes of you." She emphasized the words "the likes of you" with a sneer and turned toward her

office.

Brielle noticed that Sydney wasn't at her usual workstation but in the director's office instead. Her brows furrowed, her gaze

landing on Sydney's back.

Feeling Brielle's stare, Sydney's posture grew even more triumphant. "You know, I should thank you for promoting me. Little did

you know, Mr. Dorsey has been pursuing me. If you wouldn't mind, tell Mr. Dorsey to stop hounding me. And all those times he

bothered you were only because you looked a bit like me. Don't go getting any wild ideas."

Sydney wasn't afraid of Brielle anymore

after all, Brielle was no longer in charge.

Brielle couldn't help but laugh. "You badmouth me, yet you imitate me. Don't you find yourself contradictory? Deep down, you

must really want to be me." Her tone was indifferent as she passed a few documents to a colleague.

Sydney was stung by the remark, her face darkening. It was one thing to imitate someone's style, quite another to have it pointed

out so bluntly, and it felt like a blow to her pride. Her fists clenched, her breath quivering. Compared to Brielle's calm demeanor,

she felt utterly defeated.

A cold look passed through Sydney's eyes, and she thought of the possibility that Brielle might still be ensnaring the CEO. It

made her stomach churn.

But it didn't matter. As long as she kept wearing these clothes and made frequent visits to the CEO's side, Max would soon

forget Brielle and fall for her. After all, Brielle wouldn't be at Dorsey International anymore, and a fleeting fancy would fade with

distance.

Her lips curled into a smirk. "Don't get too comfortable, Brielle. You'll have your share of tears."

Brielle watched Sydney's overconfident departure and just chuckled to herself. "Every time someone tells me that, they end up

being the one with bad luck."

"You!" Sydney couldn't outwit Brielle with words. Fuming, she stormed into her office and slammed the door shut.

Shaking her head with a wry smile, Brielle finished up her paperwork and left Dorsey International. She didn't bother to plead her

case to Max or ask him to fire Sydney.

However, as she was getting into her car, she ran into Sydney's boyfriend – the same one from before, dressed simply and

waiting outside the building. He was probably there for Sydney, his lovestruck expression betraying no knowledge of her behind–

the–scenes machinations.

Brielle had no interest in meddling in other people's dramas. She started her car and set the navigation for Stellar Stage

Entertainment.

The entertainment company was a good hour's drive from Dorsey International and equally distant from Premier Palace.

Michael's decision to place her at Stellar Stage Entertainment was clearly a strategic move. If she focused her energy on this

new company, meetings with Max would inevitably dwindle.

On her drive over, Stellar Stage Entertainment had already been notified of their incoming new director. However, the

atmosphere among the staff lacked any sign of welcome. Changing directors was a regular occurrence, and the previous one,

Ryan, had colluded with the higher-ups to exploit the talent even more. So the news of a new director only made the young

employees more scared, fearing someone worse than Ryan might arrive.

A boy in a baseball cap stood in front of a marble table while a portly man in his fifties sat in the office chair.

The young man standing had a clean, refreshing aura, like a spring in a mountain brook. Even those accustomed to beauty

couldn't help but be drawn to his presence.

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"Ricardo, think it through, man. The boss has had his eye on you for ages. Ryan was keen on shipping you out before, but you

wouldn't have it. Now that Ryan's gone, there's a new guy in charge, worse than Ryan ever was. Who knows what he'll do to

you? If you don't listen to me this time, no one will cover for you when the new CEO shows up."

Ricardo's brow furrowed, and he sidestepped the hand reaching out to him. "Director Keagan, keep it professional, please."

Keagan was livid. Ricardo was a looker, no doubt about it, and over the years, he had managed to break him in, or so he

thought. Ricardo's little sister was sick at home, and in all three years, the company hadn't paid him a dime. Since joining Stellar

Stage Entertainment at sixteen, now at nineteen, he hadn't released a single work. Plenty of female executives, and some male

ones, were all waiting for him to fold.

But Ricardo was tough as nails.

Keagan sneered, "You've got a twenty-year contract with us, with seventeen years left. By the time you walk out of here, you'll

be thirty-five—way past the prime age for an entertainer. Do you really want to keep this deadlock with me? If you defy me, all I'll

need is a little pill, and once the new CEO arrives, you'll be in his bed before you know it."

Disgust flitted across Ricardo's eyes. His fist clenched by his side. He'd been through this before, fending off those creeps,

almost beating them senseless. After that, Keagan never tried to force him again.

"Director Keagan, do what you will. I can't control my fists, and I don't know what I'll do to that trash. With that, Ricardo flung the

door open and strode out.

Stepping out of the building, his eyes reddened, and his nose tingled with the beginnings of tears. He was only nineteen, after all.

Three years' wages added up to less than ten grand, and he'd been moonlighting just to keep his sister fed.

He trusted the wrong people and signed a twenty-year contract, only for them to show their true colors.

Glancing at the news on the lobby TV, where Dorsey International was thriving, acquiring more land and making more money,

Ricardo snorted. Stellar Stage Entertainment was like a neglected piece of land that Dorsey International had forgotten. He'd

once thought his luck would change when someone from the Dorsey family took over. Instead, Ryan's tactics were as ruthless as

the higher-ups, and many female artists had suffered.

Max, the untouchable CEO of Dorsey International, seemed a world away from the grimy, twisted world of Stellar Stage

Entertainment.

Ricardo's eyes welled up again. Perhaps he'd been wrong to judge Max by his cover, for the wealthy were experts at dressing up

rotten cores to look as splendid as Christmas trees.

He walked on with determined steps.

Brielle pushed open the revolving glass door and collided head-on with the young man. He was solid as steel, making her nose

throb, and she pressed it, half-expecting blood

Ricardo glanced at her, recognizing her face from somewhere 'Sorry, are you okay?'

Brielle frowned at him, feeling a heat in her eyes. Once the urge to cry subsided, she waved it off. I'm fine"

Ricardo, feeling guilty, insisted, "Are you bleeding? Let me see."

As Brielle reluctantly lowered her hand, tears welled up, and Ricardo was at a loss for words. She was stunning. Stellar Stage

Entertainment had many female artists, but none were as beautiful as her. And her face seemed familiar, though he couldn't

place where he'd seen it.

Brielle e gave him a once-over. Clean-cut, was he an artist? But his clothes were far from flashy. Not just plain, but bordering on

shabby. His bleached jeans sported several patches, and his jacket wasn't nearly warm enough for the cold.

"Are you with Stellar Stage Entertainment?" Her tone—was indifferent, back to normal.

Ricardo's face flushed with embarrassment, a bit flustered, "Sort of."

Brielle breathed a sigh of relief. "Good. Then, take me to management. I want to have a look around."

Ricardo was taken aback. Who was she, exactly?

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Although Ricardo was puzzled, he didn't let it show. After a moment of hesitation, he said,

"Okay."

Following behind Ricardo, Brielle entered the elevator. Just then, her phone rang; it was Max, his voice tender and soothing.

"Have you arrived?"

Brielle smiled, Just got here, about to meet with the management team."

"If you're unsure about anything, just ask me."

"Will do. Focus on your work; don't worry about me."

After hanging up, Brielle watched the elevator numbers climb steadily.

Through the reflective elevator walls, Ricardo observed her. She didn't seem like an artist; she had an air of authority about her.

The elevator reached their floor, and Ricardo led Brielle to the partially open door of Keagan's office. The office door was ajar,

and some rather embarrassing noises came from inside.

Ricardo felt a wave of awkwardness and wished he could disappear into a crack in the floor. He glanced at Brielle. "Maybe we

should come back later?"

Brielle glanced at her phone. It was ten in the morning, work hours. What on earth were the higher-ups doing? "Is that Stellar

Stage Entertainment's top brass in there?"

Ricardo nodded, "The Director."

As the sounds from inside grew louder, Ricardo wished he could barge in and knock some sense into Keagan, that bastard.

But he dared not. After all, Keagan was the Director of Stellar Stage Entertainment, and Ricardo's power only extended to

protecting himself. If he pushed Keagan too far, his sister could become a target.

Before Ricardo could react further, Brielle kicked the door open with a loud bang.

Keagan, who had someone pinned to the desk, was startled and instantly deflated. He looked up to see Brielle, and his eyes lit

up. Hastily zipping up his pants, he instructed the other woman to leave.

The woman shivered, clutching her clothes as she scurried out.

Ricardo was stunned and quickly pulled Brielle behind him. "Director Keagan, apologies for interrupting. We'll be on our way

now."

At nineteen, Ricardo stood nearly six feet tall, shielding Brielle almost completely. But Keagan's lecherous gaze seemed to

pierce right through Ricardo to settle on Brielle. "Ricardo, bringing a new artist to sign? Not bad. The company didn't waste time

training you—bringing in fresh talent, too."

Keagan's smile was full of satisfaction as he stood up and approached Brielle.

Ricardo stood his ground, "Director Keagan, she's just lost."

A sharp glint crossed Keagan's eyes; it seemed he had been too lenient with Ricardo, who now dared to talk back. "The

company doesn't feed you for nothing. Move aside now, or I'll have others come in and force-feed you some 'medicine. Then

you can entertain our new CEO. Your sister's been sick for three years, right? Wonder if she's even still alive."

Rage flashed in Ricardo's eyes, and he clenched his fists, "Keagan, I've tolerated you for too long."

Hearing his name spoken so boldly, Keagan raised his hand, but Brielle intercepted it. She stepped out from behind Ricardo,

grabbed Keagan's incoming hand, and threw it aside.

Keagan was staggered by the force and stumbled back into his desk, his face instantly paling. "You bitch! What do you think

you're doing? I was being nice because you're pretty. If I call the security guards now, you won't get out of here in one piece!"

Ricardo looked worriedly at Brielle. "The guards here are professionally trained. I don't know what you came for today, but we

should leave. I'll take you out the back door!"

"You trying to leave? Ricardo, do you want to forget about your twenty-year contract? I could sue you, and you'd owe the

company thirty million. How would you pay for that? Once you're in jail, who will take care of your sister?"

Ricardo felt a blockage in his chest, his legs rooted to the spot.

A smug look crossed Keagan's face. "If you know what's good for you, you'll bring that woman over to me. Such a pretty face,

offering her to others would secure the company's resources for the entire year."

Ricardo's fists tightened, loathing the man before him but feeling utterly powerless to stop him.

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However, Keagan hadn't anticipated that Brielle would actually approach him. His eyes sparkled with delight, and he shot

Ricardo a smug look. "The new blood gets it way more than you, sweetheart. Come here, stick with me, and I guarantee you'll

live a life of luxury."

Brielle's lips pressed into a tight line, but instead of approaching him, she breezed past and plopped down in the director's chair

behind him. Keagan was dumbstruck, frozen in place.

Ricardo, who'd been watching Brielle, felt a pang of disappointment. She was beautiful, with an air of elegance about her. It

seemed like she was about to give in to a guy like Keagan, which left Ricardo feeling like an outsider. He'd even considered

walking away, but when he saw where Brielle had seated herself, he paused.

Brielle's lips curled into a smile as she placed her documents on the desk. "Here are my credentials. As of today, I'm the

President of Stellar Stage Entertainment. We're having an executive meeting in thirty minutes. Anyone who's late is out on their

ear."

Keagan thought he was hallucinating. His brow furrowed. "What did you just say?"

Brielle's eyes were sharp as razors, cutting through him. "What, you need me to repeat myself?"

"That's impossible!" Keagan's voice rose to a near shriek. Why would Dorsey International let some young woman take the

reins?

It couldn't be! This woman didn't even look twenty-five. There was no way she could be the new President.

A sneer spread across his face as he reached out towards her. "You must know you can't escape today, so you're playing

pretend as our boss, huh? Well, you miscalculated. Even if Dorsey International were desperate, they'd never let some green girl

run the show. Ryan was the last person they sent, and he was from the Dorsey family. And you? Who do you think you are?"

Brielle's brows knitted together in disgust, swatting away his hand. "My name is Brielle. Before coming here, I was the Director of

Mergers and Acquisitions at Dorsey International. I've facilitated dozens of acquisitions. So, you didn't even bother to find out

whether the new appointee was a man or a woman?"

Keagan stiffened, quickly booting up his computer. When he saw the appointment letter, his face drained of color, and his lips

started to quiver.

Brielle had no time for his disbelief. "Set up the meeting. I want to meet each department head immediately."

Keagan stared at the computer screen as if he could bore a hole through it. No matter how many times he read it, it confirmed

that a woman named Brielle was the incoming President.

His face turned ashen, his lips pursed tightly. Could this woman be some high-level executive's kept mistress from Dorsey

International? With that thought, his gaze turned scornful toward Brielle. Was a mere lover acting high and mighty here? Once

the others arrived, she'd learn who really had the power at Stellar Stage Entertainment! He snorted contemptuously and fired off

an email to the other executives.

Brielle surveyed the office layout, which seemed to suit her just fine, and her smile broadened "Have someone disinfect

everything in here. From now on, this is my office. And don't forget to change the nameplate on the door."

The nerve!

Keagan clenched his fists. "Even if you are the President, you have no right to take my office. I've been here for over a decade."

"Over a decade? Maybe it's time to retire and let the younger generation take over. Dorsey International is very disappointed with

the company's performance. It seems you're no longer fit for the position, Mr. Keagan."

"You!"

Brielle stood tall. "You do realize, don't you? Any President sent by Dorsey International has veto power over everyone."

Keagan fell silent, a lump of frustration stuck in his chest, his lips trembling. After taking a deep breath, he conceded,

"Understood, Ms. Haywood. I'll have someone clean up immediately."

Remembering Keagan's earlier antics with a woman in the office, Brielle frowned. "Make sure they disinfect every tile."

Keagan was livid. Once he figured out whose sugar baby Brielle was, he'd make sure to give that man a piece of his mind.

Fuming, he marched toward the door, casting an icy glance at Ricardo, who was still standing there. "I thought she was some

talent you brought in, but it turns out she's the big shot you've latched onto. Just you wait!"

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Ricardo was still trying to wrap his head around what had just happened when the office door slammed shut with a bang, jolting

him back to reality.

The new CEO? A woman, and so young? And stunningly beautiful at that.

His cheeks flushed with the thought, and he couldn't bring himself to look directly at Belle.

Spread out on Brielle's desk was a pile of files, all about the talent at Stellar Stage Entertainment. The deeper she dug, the more

furrowed her brow became. So many talents. had been with the company for five or six years without landing a single gig or

even sniffing paycheck. These weren't contracts; they were downright indentures.

She wasn't exactly versed in the ins and outs of showbiz, but she knew enough to understand that these aspiring artists needed

exposure. Yet, all the opportunities were hogged by those willing to play by the higher-ups' rules, most of whom were coerced

into compromising their dignity due to the oppressive contracts.

Massaging her temples, she suddenly remembered the young man standing at her door. "What's your name?"

Ricardo's face turned a deeper shade of red. At nineteen, being in the presence of such a stunning woman left him quite

flustered. "Ricardo."

"An actor?"

"Yes."

“Been in any plays or films?”

Ricardo cast his eyes down, a shadow of disappointment flickering through them. “No.”

Brielle quickly found Ricardo’s file. He was barely nineteen, had signed with Stellar Stage since he was sixteen, and did not have

a single role to his name. The thought made her blood boil.

She had heard the company was shady, but this was beyond anything she had imagined. There were others in their twenties

who had been with the company for years with nothing to show for it.

Taking a deep breath, she said, “I understand. I’ll make sure things start to change around here. While I’m in charge, I’ll see to it

that we do better. I’ll have finance increase the base salary for all talent. Let’s say a minimum of seven thousand. If they’re part

of a TV series, they take home seventy percent of the earnings. I heard your sister’s been unwell. How is she doing now?”

She didn’t look up at Ricardo as she spoke. Instead, she focused on the contracts in her hands. After a minute of silence, Brielle

glanced up, only to be taken aback.

Ricardo was on the brink of tears, which soon began to cascade down his cheeks. Brielle had

seen men cry before Spencer’s recent sobbing had been particularly unsettling, even annoying. But Ricardo was so young, so

innocent-looking His tears were unexpectedly heart-wrenching.

She remembered her own days of poverty, too poor to afford a proper meal, but at least she had Mark to help her out. Apart from

his sister, this young man seemed to be entirely alone in

the world

Just then, a video call from Max came through, catching Brielle off guard—it was the first time she’d seen him initiate a video chat.

She quickly hit the answer button and saw Max, impeccably dressed as always, probably just out of a meeting. A hand, likely

Patrick’s, was tidying up documents beside him. He leaned back slightly, the sunlight streaming in from behind him.

Before Brielle could even compliment the scene, she heard the rapid footsteps of Ricardo approaching. He enveloped her in an

unexpected hug. Caught off guard and unsure how to react to Ricardo's weeping embrace, she felt a strange maternal instinct

kick in. Then she remembered Max was still on the line, and in a panic, she pushed Ricardo away.

The call had already ended. Brielle hurried to send a message explaining the situation, but Max beat her to it with a single, wry

remark. [Looks like Ms. Haywood is having quite a time.] On the other end, Max had hung up the call, breathing heavily to keep

from losing his composure. He had taken extra care with his appearance before the call, a novelty for him, even requiring some

guidance from Patrick. He hadn't expected to witness such a scene.

The boy was young and full of life, and in a company like theirs, attractive young men were not in short supply. They were all too

eager to throw themselves at her. She must've been thrilled.

The more

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ex thought about it. The more his mouth purkereri as if he had just bitten into a

handful of nour lemons

#took a Herculean effort not to swing by Stellar Stage Entertainment outside of work ours He closed his eyes and regulated his

breathing in short, controtted bursts it's fine." he thought. He was still Brielle's favorite, even if her fondness wasn't exactly

profound.

Patrick, observing Max's furrowed brow, couldn't help but interject. "Mr. Dorsey, Mr. Michael called. He said that Spencer's

wedding is set for two days from now, but you can't bring Ms. Belle along. If you do, you may as well not attend yourself"

Michael's stance was crystal clear, he would not acknowledge Brielle as his daughter-in-law within the next six months. As for

what happens after that, it would depend on Brielle's achievements.

Currently, Brielle was tied up with the mess at Stellar Stage Entertainment. If she wanted to make a name for herself, she'd have

to hustle, which meant spending even less time with Max. Max was a busy man, entangled in a web of commitments. Throw in

the overseas acquisitions, and he was bound to be even busier than before. Any slight misunderstanding could become a thorn

in their relationship.

Max's eyes fluttered open. "Then I'm not going."

Patrick, surprised by Max's curt reply, paused before adding another piece of news. "Ms. Martha has been calling repeatedly,

insisting you meet with her today, no matter what."

It was undoubtedly about Brielle again. For the first time, Max felt the gnawing irritation known as annoyance. "Keep me updated

on her condition," he said, signaling he had no intention of visiting.

Patrick hesitated, then nodded slowly. "Alright."

After Patrick left, Max leaned back in his chair, his eyelids heavy with fatigue. He was well aware of his father's intentions: to

exhaust him with pressure from all sides so that his feelings for Brielle would wane.

To Michael, their affection seemed superficial, akin to a common cold that would vanish quietly without much intervention.

Did Max even understand what love was? He didn't know.

Michael knew his son better than anyone else. He had purposely thrown Brielle into the entertainment industry, a place teeming

with handsome men, convinced that she would eventually be seduced by beauty and power. Even if she was faithful to Max now,

what about the future?

With no clear vision of what lay ahead and faced with such a merciless reality, how much confidence could they possibly have?

Max rubbed his temples, then heard his office door open. Someone walked in without knocking

“Mr. Dorsey.” Sydney mimicked Brielle’s tone deliberately, her voice calm and steady. “These are the documents you’ll need for

this afternoon.” She placed them on the desk, her gaze lingering greedily on Max.

Max’s expression darkened. “Out.

Sydney blanched, but her eyes still clung to him with a mixture of defiance and desire.

Max didn’t even glance at her, his attention fixed on the papers. Sydney clenched her teeth. “Ms. Haywood stopped by the office

this morning to wrap up her work. I thought Mr. Spencer would be returning, so I called him, but he didn’t pick up. In my haste, I

forgot to knock.”

She kept her tone light, wearing a subtle fragrance that she hoped would appeal to him. The money she had siphoned from

Spencer was enough for a comfortable life, but Alivia’s arrival shattered all her pride. Money wasn’t enough; power was

essential. Someday, she would crush Alivia and her haughty demeanor.

She had to win over Max. He liked her type, didn’t he? She could play the part. As long as Brielle stayed away from Dorsey

International, Max’s attention would eventually turn to her.

“I said, out.” Max had no interest in deciphering her thoughts, unwilling to waste his time.

Sydney took a deep breath, her smile strained. “I’ll leave right after I say this. I found something in Ms. Haywood’s office,

something I was going to toss, but then I thought I should bring it to you.”

She pulled out a black rosary, her voice earnest. “I don’t know if this belongs to Ms. Haywood or you, sir. The janitor almost threw

it away, but luckily, I found it.”

Max’s pupils shrank, and his grip on the documents tightened..

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‘ this isn’t your doing, I’m going to call Ms. Haywood to come back.”

Max remained silent, his gaze fixed on the string of black beads as if in a trance. The gift he had given her with such gravity was

casually tossed in the office drawer, forgotten even as

she walked away

His voice sunk, heavy with unspoken emotion. "Put it down, and leave."

Sydney caught the flicker of emotion in Max's stoic face, and her lips curved into a sly smile.

"By the way, when Ms. Haywood left today, she had a few words for me. She was the one who mentored me. She told me about

Mr. Spencer becoming the new director, and that he would like the outfit I'm wearing now. There's been a lot of misunderstanding

in the department about me, and people think I'm intentionally copying Ms. Haywood. But I'm not. I just wanted to catch Mr.

Spencer's eye. Ms. Haywood is even willing to help me out. I'll have to come up to the executive floor regularly. I'm not sure how

you feel about Ms. Haywood since she hit Mr. Spencer. I'm worried you might have some reservations about me as well, so I

wanted to explain.

"Mr. Dorsey, I'll leave you now."

Her words were carefully crafted, leaving no room for doubt.

Max's focus remained on the rosary, his brows knitted with aggravation. Today was probably the worst day he'd had all year.

Once the office door closed behind her, Sydney took a deep breath. The triumphant grin on her face said it all she had

succeeded. She ran her fingers through her hair and headed back to her department. Upon seeing the woman already waiting

there, her smile faded, replaced by a look of genuine worry. "Ms. Alivia."

Alivia was seated in the director's chair, her eyes flickering with disdain as Sydney entered. "How did things go with the task I

assigned you?"

Sydney loathed Alivia but was under her thumb.

"I repeated your instructions word for word, Ms. Alivia."

Alivia nodded. "Good job. But I advise you not to get any funny ideas. You know I can crush you as easily as stepping on an ant."

Michael had already informed her that Brielle had been transferred to another company with chaotic management that would

divide her attention. And if Brielle succeeded, that company would become part of Alivia's wedding gift. The thought of using

Brielle's hard work as a wedding gift was indeed satisfying to Alivia.

Michael had hinted it was a good time for some subtle sabotage.

The humiliating memory of that night in the private room was clear in her mind; she couldn't

Снапти 500

afford another rash mistake. She needed to play it slow and steady.

Last night, she had sought out Spencer, convincing him to sneak into Brielle's home at Pearl Estate to steal the rosary, but for

some reason, Spencer seemed utterly defeated, a shell of

his former self.

Alivia had to expend a lot of energy to persuade him, and his current state was repulsive to her. Spencer reeked of smoke and

alcohol. It was like he'd crawled out of a dumpster. His appearance was unkempt, his eyes murky, mumbling, "She won't come

back, never will. Nothing matters anymore."

As a former ally, Alivia knew exactly what this meant. Spencer had lost his will to fight, and had given up any hope of winning

Brielle back – a total waste, just as he had always been.

—

Disgust flashed in Alivia's eyes, but this 'waste' had done one useful thing he had managed to steal Brielle's rosary.

Just as Michael had said, how strong could their love possibly be? The seeds of doubt were sown, and neither was the type to

clarify misunderstandings. Over time, this would lead to what psychologists call the 'broken windows theory. If one window broke

and no one fixed it, soon enough, other windows would inexplicably shatter. One misunderstanding would. lead to another, and

before you know it, when all windows would break, could they withstand the cold winds that blow through?

Brielle was someone who, when in love, was bold and unabashed, and when she hated, she was decisive and ruthless, unwilling

to suffer fools gladly. On the other hand, Max was
suffer fools gl accustomed to action rather than explanation.

The smirk in Alivia's eyes deepened. She had to let Max find out that Brielle didn't value the rosary as he
did. His treasure was

trivial to her.

There would be many more such instances to come, and it remained to be seen how much Max could
endure.