

## Master 561

### Chapter 561

Brielle quickly spooned a mouthful of warm oatmeal to him, “Mr. Dorsey, you're really kind. I swear I won't do it again. No matter how busy I am, I'll make sure to call and update you on my whereabouts. Come on, eat up please.”

Max had always known there was a cheeky streak in Brielle—how else could she have ended up straddling his hips that first time they got together, daring to kiss him even after he woke up?

But to the outside world, she was the epitome of cool poise, only ever letting her guard down with him.

Only for him. He was special.

With that thought, the last bit of his broodiness vanished. He took the bowl of oatmeal and spoon from her, bringing it to her lips instead, “Thought you had a stomachache? You eat first.” Brielle was truly famished and felt the acid in her stomach, so she didn't put up a fight. She quickly ate half the bowl and followed it with the bowl of soup, finally feeling some warmth in her belly.

Seeing her color improve, Max breathed a sigh of relief. When he'd come back and found her sitting alone on the floor, it had pained him like a needle to the heart.

He took his time eating a modest portion of the oatmeal until he felt a slight fullness in his stomach, then had the dishes cleared away.

Wesley, noticing Max's mood had lightened from the evening's gloom, let out a sigh of relief. Now, everyone could sleep peacefully.

After resting on the bed for half an hour and feeling no more discomfort in her stomach, Brielle pulled Max towards the bathroom to freshen up. Once she was clean and back in bed, she had intended to do something more to cheer him up, but she was simply too exhausted. The few hours of sleep at the orphanage were not enough to erase the weariness from her body.

As soon as her head hit the pillow and she caught Max's scent, her eyelids

started to droop, and she couldn't resist wrapping her arms around his waist.

"Max, I'm off to sleep," she murmured, her voice heavy with tiredness.

"Mmm," Max hummed, picking up a folder of acquisition documents to continue reading.

The room was quiet, save for the soft sound of his fingers flipping through

papers, and the dim light of the bedside lamp was the only illumination. Just as Max was about to turn the page, he felt a movement beside him, followed by a kiss on his lips.

"I'm really off to sleep now."

A smile curled on his lips, suppressing the deep laughter in his eyes, "Sleep well."

Content that he was appeased, Brielle drifted off into a satisfied slumber.

Meanwhile, at the Rowland family estate, Tessa lay in bed coughing while Alivia handed her a tissue. "How did you get like this in just a few days?"

Alivia knew the reason behind Tessa's condition: a recent fall into the water and a fainting spell due to online backlash. Her generally fragile health had just begun to improve this year, only to relapse dramatically.

A flicker of hatred passed through Tessa's eyes. In her dreams, she replayed the humiliating scene of her fumbling at the piano, an embarrassment she had never before experienced, now festering in her heart. "It's all because of that bitch! If it weren't for her, I wouldn't be in this state."

Chapter 562

Alivia had connections that seemed to reach into every corner of the glittering world of Hollywood. Her brother, Kenzo, was the hottest screenwriter of the past few years, having penned scripts that were practically worth their weight in gold. Nearly every big-name director in the industry had sought his collaboration, making the Barnes family a force to be reckoned with in the entertainment

circles. Naturally, that extensive network of contacts spilled into Alivia's lap. Brielle, an orphan with no resources to speak of, managed to get a little bit of favor from May, but what else could she hope for?

Alivia's eyes were filled with disdain as she said, "I won't let those famous directors work with her. Consider it me getting back at her for you."

Her words sounded sweet but were self-serving at their core, Tessa's expression remained sour. This was far from enough for her. She wanted to see Brielle trampled into the mud, wanted to pierce her heart so deeply that she'd wish for death.

"Alivia, what can I do to make her suffer?" Tessa asked, her voice heavy with malice.

Alivia patted her back soothingly while her words wove a web of temptation.

"Remember what I told you last time? If you can't beat Brielle directly, then hit her through someone else. Aubree is the perfect target. If something happened to her, Brielle would be devastated. She wouldn't be able to live in peace, ever. And you, my dear, can easily manipulate Aubree, can't you?"

A cold smirk appeared on Tessa's face, her hand balling into a fist at her side.

"Since my health started declining, Andrew has stayed at the Rowland mansion and hasn't gone back. Aubree must be feeling the strain by now. You're right. I'll start by targeting Aubree. That will hurt Brielle the most, and Andrew won't do anything to me for it. After all, he and Aubree deserve what's coming!"

Inside, Alivia laughed triumphantly. Exactly, that was the plan. Brielle's remaining friends would suffer because of her, and then what time would she have left to whisper sweet nothings with Max?

"Take care of yourself first, your health is important," Alivia cooed.

“How can I relax? The gossip in the group chats, the insults flying on the internet — I can barely step outside my door! I've never been this humiliated. Everything I've endured, Brielle will experience it too!”

Tessa began to cough violently, nearly hacking up blood. Alivia quickly summoned the doctor, and the Rowland mansion was thrown into disarray.

After examining Tessa, the doctor advised, “Ms. Tessa, you mustn't get worked up. Your emotional state is delicate; you need rest.”

Tessa gripped her fists tightly, staring at the ceiling with bitter resentment.

Austin sighed wearily, and Jaxon furrowed his brows in concern. They all knew this mess was Brielle's doing, and not a soul in the Rowland family had a shred of affection for her. They were all waiting for her to break up with Max so they could openly confront her. Without Max, she would be nothing.

Austin held Tessa's hand. “Calm down. Tessa. Brielle will get her comeuppance in time.”

Tessa took a deep breath, trying to compose herself, then asked, “Dad, where's Andrew?”

“He stepped out for a smoke when Alivia arrived. He's been up all night worrying about you, Don't make us worry, too.”

Tessa felt slightly better, exchanging a knowing look with Alivia. She understood what she needed to do. To strike at Brielle's heart, she had to trample Aubree first.

A twisted smile formed on her lips. “I'm feeling better. Call Andrew in and have someone escort Alivia home. It's late, and there's no need for her to worry about me anymore. I want to talk to Andrew alone.”

Austin sighed, then patted Tessa's head. “Alright. I'll call him in.”

When Andrew entered the room, it was empty of everyone else. He himself had spent a day in the clinic after another fight with Max. His waist and legs were still

marked with bruises.

“How are you feeling, Tessa?”

Chapter 563

Andrew's body tensed up. This was the moment he'd been anticipating for so long. He and Tessa had known each other for years but had never shared a bed. He was a man, after all, with desires—strong ones at that. If he lay beside Tessa, there was no telling what might happen. Tessa, though, was frail, and the doctors had warned him that in matters of physical intimacy, he couldn't just have his way.

He was aware of his own vigor. Sometimes, even Aubree would struggle to keep up and occasionally snap at him with a slap. Tessa was far more delicate.

He stood up and pointed to the couch beside them.

“I'll crash on the couch,” he said.

Tessa, mindful of her own fragility and not wanting to overexert herself to the point of passing out—which would only benefit others—nodded in agreement.

In the middle of the night, Andrew awoke feeling like he was burning up, probably because he had thought of Aubree before bed. Now, he was missing her. He got up, stepped out onto the balcony, lit a cigarette, and started smoking as he gazed at the dimly lit surroundings.

By the time he finished his cigarette, his restlessness had subsided somewhat. What was Aubree doing right now? She hadn't called him lately. His Adam's

apple bobbed as he closed his eyes, the corners tinged with a crimson hue as if poisoned by some exotic flower.

Suddenly, a pair of arms wrapped around his waist from behind. Tessa embraced him from the back. "Can't sleep, Andrew? Are you thinking of someone else?" she asked.

Andrew stiffened, only then realizing the cigarette was nearly burning his fingers. He was indeed thinking of Aubree, but he would never admit it. Aubree was just a

comfort for his lonely body, never meant to consume more of his time.

Tessa's hands slipped under his shirt, resting against his solid chest. "Is it because you can't get used to sharing a

room with me?" she queried, her voice tinged with a mix of curiosity and slight hurt.

Was it so unbearable for him to share a room with her when he had always slept in Aubree's bed before? That bitch!

"It's just insomnia; it happens to me sometimes," he offered as an explanation. Tessa wanted to ask if he ever had insomnia when he was in Aubree's bed, but posing such a question seemed too cheap. It was one thing to know and quite another to confront it.

"I guess taking care of me these past days has worn you out. I'm sorry, and I do hope to get better soon." Tessa always presented herself with grace in front of Andrew. It was this demeanor that convinced Andrew she wouldn't stir trouble intentionally, which is why he believed her fall into the water was due to Brielle,

leading him to punch Max.

## Chapter 564

Andrew couldn't fathom why he disagreed. Perhaps it was just the thought of Aubree getting married, and giving another man those looks she had given him. It made him feel unbearable.

Tessa's heart sank completely. Just then, Andrew's phone started ringing. She beat him to it, noticing that the caller was Aubree.

What a dramatic scene it was. One woman with whom he'd shared passionate nights; the other, someone he'd promised to look after for life. On this strange night, they were suddenly brought together.

Tessa hit the answer button, and a strange man's voice came through. "Hello, is this Aubree's brother? She's had a bit too much to drink. Could you come pick her up?"

In this

A sneer crossed Tessa's eyes. "Why don't you send the address to another friend on her phone, named Brielle? She'll come get her."

"Alright, I won't disturb you further."

After ending the call, Tessa managed a smile, holding her emotions in check.

"Aubree's plastered. You're not thinking of going now, are you? I've already had the bartender contact Brielle. Andrew, tomorrow's your birthday. Are you planning to stay here or go celebrate with someone else?"

Andrew's Adam's apple bobbed, a flicker of guilt for an inexplicable moment of hesitation. "I'll spend it out with you to ensure you're well. Didn't you love that clam chowder at that restaurant? I'll book it just for us, just the two of us."

ail

Tessa breathed a sigh of relief. In the past, Andrew had only spent his birthdays with her. Maybe he didn't really like Aubree, and that was fine. Her lips curved

into a small smile. "Yeah, I knew it. You still like me best."

Andrew didn't speak; he just held her and gently patted her back.

When Brielle's phone rang, she was already half-asleep, clinging tighter to Max.

She heard the ring, rubbed her eyes, and saw Max taking her phone and talking to the person on the other end. "Yeah, I got it. Someone will be there to pick her up."

After hanging up, Max met Brielle's gaze.

"Who was that?"

"Someone from the bar is calling to say Aubree's drunk at Tequila Sunset. Don't worry, the staff there are responsible."

At that, Brielle perked up. "How did she end up drunk?"

Max glanced at the clock on the wall. "It's past midnight. Today's Andrew's birthday, but Tessa's been unwell lately. I guess he hasn't been around much."

1/2

10:55

Brielle felt a mix of annoyance and concern for Aubree, so she reluctantly got up and started dressing. "I'm going to check on her."

Max followed suit, and as Brielle watched him dress, warmth flooded her heart. She couldn't resist giving him a quick kiss. "Are you driving me there? Don't you have a meeting early in the morning?"

Patrick had mentioned before going to bed that his meetings would start at five and go until noon, dealing with a critical phase in an overseas acquisition. His schedule was about to be turned upside down.

"I can't leave you alone."

Brielle felt a wave of affection. How could Max be so wonderful? What kind of luck had she stumbled upon to have him in her life?

Max grabbed his jacket, put it on, and noticed her daydreaming. His brow furrowed, "Stomach still hurting?"

"No, let's go."

Chapter 565



When she mentioned “a lifetime,” her voice caught, and she reached out, pulling Brielle’s hand over and then Max’s, stacking them together.

Brielle raised a hand to massage her temples. How much had Aubree actually had to drink?

“You’re plastered. I’ll drive you home.”

Aubree looked up at her with a nod. “Yeah, back to Andrew’s place. Dawn’s breaking, and it’s his birthday. I got ingredients to bake a cake.” Drunk as she was, she still remembered Andrew’s birthday.

Together, Brielle and Max supported her out of the bar.

Max was unaccustomed to being so close to another woman, feeling utterly uncomfortable. After settling Aubree in the car, Max went to drive, noticing the scent of booze on his coat.

Slumped against Brielle’s shoulder, Aubree’s face flushed. She mumbled incoherently, no one understood a word she said. Brielle was concerned Aubree might tumble to the floor with all her fidgeting, so one hand steadied Aubree’s head.

They pulled up to where Aubree lived, and Brielle fished out the keys to help her inside.

The doorman furrowed his brows upon seeing Aubree. “There she goes again, coming home late every night. She didn’t even go home for the holidays and was always out drinking. I really don’t know what her family taught her. A girl should have some self-respect and self-love. Last time, she was caught fooling around in a car right down there, and now the whole complex knows about it.”

Brielle’s face darkened as her gaze fell upon the doorman. Max glanced over as well. The doorman shivered, feeling the pressure, and dared not say another word.

Brielle had been to Aubree’s place before, but Aubree hardly stayed there anymore. She was mostly at Andrew’s place. She hadn’t expected Aubree to be

alone during the holidays, and suddenly felt guilty for not calling more often.

Once in the room, Aubree crashed on the couch and fell asleep.

Brielle looked at Max, sharing a moment of helplessness. "Max, why don't you wait for me downstairs?" The room was a mess with scattered bottles, jackets, and lingerie. It was unbearable to have him stand amidst the chaos. Max nodded and stepped out.

Brielle gently wiped Aubree's face with a warm towel.

Aubree opened her eyes and saw her, her eyes welling up. "Bri, never fall in love with someone." It had become her obsession. Loving the wrong person could be painful, but even loving the right one wasn't always sweet. Hatred and fear often stemmed from love.

Sighing, Brielle cleaned Aubree's cheeks, neck, and fingers. Aubree seemed more sober now,

staring at the ceiling as silent tears fell.

Brielle's heart ached at the sight, and then banging on the door jolted her — more like smashing. \*Heads up, Aubree! Open up. The boys are here to patronize your "business!"

"Out gallivanting all night again, huh? What, got picked up in a car again?"

"You're trash. Can't keep still without a man for a day."

Since the incident with Andrew became neighborhood gossip, a few men would come by her door each night to hurl abuse. The other neighbors knew, but the scandal was too big; they all assumed she was promiscuous. The women despised her. They thought their husband would be seduced by her, and would insult her on sight.

Chapter 566

Andrew was still reeling from the unexpected call when Max's voice came through the line. "Max?" Suspicion flickered through his mind. Could someone be playing a prank with Max's phone?

“Andrew, Aubree got plastered.”

Andrew pinched the bridge of his nose, feeling Tessa stir in his arms. He'd thought he'd awakened her and gently patted her back to soothe her.

“I'm aware, but didn't Brielle go to look after her? Tessa is feeling under the weather, and I need to stay here and take care of her.”

Tessa, now fully awake, snuggled closer. “Who's calling?”

“Max.”

Anger flared in Tessa's eyes at the mention of Aubree's name. Why was Max calling about that tramp? She fumed internally, thinking it was high time to talk to Andrew's mum about marrying Aubree off and out of their lives.

Max, picking up on Tessa's voice, understood the implications. It was late; they were obviously sharing a bed.

“If you're not fond of Aubree, I can arrange an overseas position for her. She can start fresh there,” Max suggested, his voice floating like mist.

Andrew's reaction was instantaneous, leaping out of bed as if scalded. “What do you mean?” His tone turned icy, his eyes blazing with anger.

But Max remained calm, unperturbed. “She's alone here, and with Brielle so busy, there's no one to look after her. Abroad, she can meet new people and make new friends.”

Andrew's temper flared. “Can you stop interfering? She's a Clements, for heaven's sake. Any move she makes needs parental approval. As her brother, I-” He cut himself off, painfully aware of the truth they both knew. Ever since that forbidden moment at eighteen, they were no longer just siblings.

Max hung up, ignoring Andrew's rage.

Andrew felt a fire within him, his temper boiling over. He grabbed his jacket, ready to storm out, but Tessa's arms wrapped around his waist, holding him back. “Stay with me, please? Andrew, I don't want you to leave because of Aubree. Would you really abandon me over her? I thought I was the one who

mattered most to you.”

Andrew stiffened, his features a mask of conflict. Tessa’s pleading eyes softened him. He pulled out his phone and fired off a message to Max. [Aubree stays in Beaconsfield. If you whisk her away without consent, this brotherhood is over.] Max didn't bother checking the message, settling down to watch as Brielle continued to care for Aubree. He didn't want Brielle to overextend herself; she was already swamped. Now she had to deal with a friend's troubles, troubles caused by another man’s actions.

Brielle tucked Aubree in, worried she might retch again. She glanced at Max, seated on the sofa, and sighed, “I'll stay here tonight. You should head back. You have a meeting in a couple of hours. I'll head straight to Premier Palace to change, then head off to the office. I need to check on the reforms we implemented and discuss resources with the directors. Plus, we need to front some cash.”

With the company’s finances in the red, she had to figure out how to engage with prominent directors.

#### Chapter 567

she was here, suffering the wrath of a wicked hangover, and these two decided to flaunt their love while she was out cold. Where was their conscience?

Clamping a hand over her mouth, she dashed for the bathroom and heaved a resounding “ugh” into the toilet.

Brielle arched an eyebrow. The timing of it all was a bit too perfect, as if Aubree was sickened by their display of affection.

Noticing Max's darkening expression, Brielle quickly softened her tone, “Go back, I'll take care of her. She was alone over the holidays, and I'm worried.”

Once Max had left, Brielle grabbed a bottle of mineral water and headed for the bathroom.

With reddened eyes from retching, Aubree caught sight of Brielle in the mirror and hastily turned on the faucet to rinse away the mess. Then, she brushed her

teeth with earnestness.

Once she was done, she covered her eyes with her hands. “Bri, do I look terrible?”

Brielle was at a loss for words. Everyone knew the unspoken moral standards, but once you were in the thick of it, was it really that simple to make the best decision? If emotions could be quantified and regulated, then the world wouldn't be full of stories about love and loss.

Besides, Aubree and Andrew had met first. Just when it came to matters of the heart, the concept of first-come—first-served was rarely applicable.

“You don't look terrible. Are you hungry? I can whip up some soup for you.”

Aubree shook her head, took the water Brielle offered, and gulped it down before pursing her lips. “Not hungry.”

She rubbed her eyes, feeling like a burden to Brielle, and cracked a weak smile.

“It's so late, you should sleep. The guest room's always ready, and no one's used it.”

Brielle's eyes caught the pile of melatonin on the shelf, her brow furrowing. “Have you been having a lot of trouble sleeping?”

Aubree quickly stashed the medication back into the cabinet, her movements a

tad frantic. “Not really, just keeping them on hand.”

Brielle wouldn't stop Aubree from loving Andrew, but it pained her to see Aubree harming her health like this. “Max called Andrew earlier, and he's with Tessa.”

Aubree stiffened, her face turning ashen. Knowing it herself was one thing, but hearing it from someone else was another.

She blinked her stinging eyes and mustered a faint smile. “Yeah, I heard Tessa's been under the weather. Andrew's always treated her like she's made of glass. He's bound to be by her side.”

However, all those times Aubree was sick, Andrew never once stayed with her.

Aubree was painfully aware that she was nothing more than a toy for him to play

with when he felt lonely, Sometimes, he would toy with her as casually as one relieves themselves — a zipper down, a zipper up, and it was over without ever asking how she felt, like that time outside her apartment building.

Andrew had done this too many times to count, so much that Aubree couldn't even remember them all.

## Chapter 568

Until the wee hours of six in the morning, the noise outside ceased, and Aubree must have finally settled down for some rest.

Brielle let out a sigh of relief, rubbing her weary eyes, planning to catch another half hour of sleep on the bed.

Awakening to the aroma of breakfast, she opened the door to find Aubree, apron—clad, setting the last dish on the table from the kitchen.

There were still faint traces of redness around her eyes, likely concealed with foundation. Her emotions, her entire sense of loss and pain, also seemed to be masked beneath that foundation. This act of keeping up appearances was a tactic Aubree often employed.

So, Brielle chose not to mention last night's ordeal but instead asked, "You're not working today?"

Aubree untied the apron from her waist, grabbed a bowl, and ladled some soup for Brielle.

"Got the axe three days ago, but I've saved enough over the years to get by. It's just that without a Job, I feel kind of useless."

She had always revolved her life around Andrew that even her work hadn't amounted to much. To please Andrew, Aubree had mastered the art of cooking and never expected that, in the end, she'd be cooking for Tessa. The mere thought made her heart ache.

She had received a text from Max and knew that Brielle had been swamped lately, so she hurriedly pushed the conversation forward. "I heard Michael's giving you a tough time, making you run an entertainment company?"

“Yeah.”

“Bri, do you think I have what it takes to be a celebrity?”

Brielle, about to sip her soup, paused at the question.

Objectively, Aubree’s looks could easily place her in the top ten among the beauties of Beaconsfield. She had a striking presence that would dominate any photo she was in.

Brielle pondered. She was now at the helm of an entertainment company, and Aubree was jobless. If Aubree broke into showbiz and made a name for herself, with the demanding schedule of a movie star and months spent on set, she'd naturally spend less time on Andrew.

Without something to occupy her, Aubree would inevitably dwell on Andrew.

Brielle felt this might be the best thing she could do for Aubree. So she nodded,

“Sure, send your resume over to Stellar Stage Entertainment. I'll have you train with the new batch of actors. You'll get coaching on expression and fitness management. The company’s undergoing some reforms, and I'm pretty tied up at the moment. Are you sure you want to take this on?”

“Absolutely! Who wouldn't love to be famous? Plus, I want to be your cash cow. If the company makes money, Michael will be over the moon.”

Brielle’s lips curved into a smile, returning to her soup.

Aubree’s cooking was impressive. Brielle knew who she had honed her skills for and refrained from complimenting her to avoid bringing up Andrew again.

After the meal, Brielle announced she was heading to the office. Once Aubree was alone, her smile faded, and she quietly moved to the kitchen to bake a birthday cake in solitude.

As Brielle got into her car, she sent Max a message.

(Still in a meeting?)

[Yep]

Max replied promptly as if he had been waiting for her to reach out. She smiled

again, but she didn't respond further, focusing on driving instead.

Once she arrived at the company and settled into her office, she was bombarded with an unending stream of tasks. She was so engrossed that messaging Max slipped her mind as she dealt with a dozen pressing emails..

Come noon, Keagan walked in.

"Ms. Haywood, HR has already handed out termination letters to those on their way out. Have you reviewed the contracts for the artists? Who's worth keeping?"

"Any of them willing to stay on their own accord?"

Visit [Novelxo.org](http://Novelxo.org) to read full content.

Keagan shook his head, a hint of mockery in his eyes. Those folks had been itching for a release from Stellar Stage Entertainment, and now, with Joh

the chance to break free, they'd likely run faster than rabbits. Why would they choose to stay?

There were some promising talents among them. If Brielle let them go, the company would suffer a significant loss.

With the company struggling to secure resources due to financial deficits, there was no money to invest in scripts or connections to negotiate with directors. The morning had passed, and the company hadn't secured a single screenplay.

Chapter 569

This kind of disgraceful practice was nothing new in the corporate world.

Celebrities were just numbers to be crunched, and artists, with no rights to speak of, were merely pawns in the game.

"There's no need for that. If there's nothing else, go ahead and do as I say,"

Brielle said with a nonchalant tone. She pondered for a moment before slightly



lifting her gaze. “If the company’s coffers are dry, then let's withhold all the executives’ Christmas bonuses this year. We'll save tens of millions that way. We can invest it in a new TV series, get a high—profile actor to lead, and cast our up—and—coming talents in supporting roles. Problem solved, right?”

“Brielle, you've gone too far! First, you cut down our staff, and now you want to take our Christmas bonuses too?!”

An executive's Christmas bonus could be in the millions, and many had been eagerly awaiting that moment.

Brielle scoffed, her sharp edge rivaling that of Max. “If you had actually contributed to the company over the years, I might have reconsidered. The funds from Dorsey International have dwindled to nearly nothing for talent investment, and as for where the rest went, you're more aware of that than I am. If you don’t like it, there's the door. In fact, I'm not too pleased with the current leadership as is:

“You!!” Keagan was livid, well aware that Brielle was playing her veto card, and couldn't care less about anyone's opinion.

Damn her! Where did she get this audacity?

He feared that if he said one more word, a resignation letter would really smack him right in the face. His complexion shifted from red to white, but eventually, he reined in his anger. “Ms. Haywood, don’t burn all your bridges. After all, we might cross paths in the future. Couldn't we still be friends?”

Brielle’s eyes, coldly clear, met his. “I never planned on being friends with any of you.”

Keagan was left speechless, trembling to the point he feared he might drop dead from rage right there. He turned on his heel and stormed out of the office, slamming the door behind him with a resounding thud.

Once he was out, the remaining executives quickly clustered around.

“What happened? Did she really say she’s firing all those people?”

“This is insane! Who does that? If everyone leaves, she'll be the last one standing in the company!”

Keagan snorted, stirring up their resentment towards Brielle. “Ms. Haywood said it's not enough to just fire people. All our Christmas bonuses are canceled, to be funneled into the TV series. If you're not on board, you might as well leave now.”

1/2

11:08

“What? Our Christmas bonuses?!” That was everyone's sweet slice of the pie she was messing with.

“How dare that... that woman! Together, our bonuses must total over ten million. What gives her the right?”

Keagan waved his hand resignedly. “Someone must be backing her. Just do as she says, or we'll be the ones to suffer.”

Keagan's shift in attitude was due to the task he had been burdened with. While his backers hadn't revealed their identities, their tone had made it clear he couldn't defy them. Besides, the money was good, too good to cut off his own cash flow. So, while he had ignited their rage, he had no personal stake in it and left them to their fury.

After Keagan departed, the others were left seething.

“That little hussy probably seduced Keagan, too.”

“Remember how Keagan treasured his office? How did she just take over and make him move out without a fuss?”

Chapter 570

Brielle was oblivious to the undercurrents swirling amongst her colleagues as she plowed through the morning's stack of paperwork. By the time she'd finished, her eyes were so sore and swollen it felt like they might start watering.

Rubbing her eyes, she was contemplating whether to call an impromptu meeting when her phone buzzed with a message from Max. [Lunch?]

It was as if he had a sixth sense for her well-being. His message was a gentle nudge reminding her not to skip meals lest her stomach issues flare up again. A bittersweet feeling washed over Brielle as she quickly typed back a response. [On my way.]

Max's eyes crinkled into a soft smile at her reply.

He was seated in the boardroom, where the atmosphere had been tense, and the team members spoke with trepidation, seeing their CEO's stern expression. Yet, within less than two minutes, Max's demeanor shifted from stormy to sunny, and the room breathed a collective sigh of relief. One quick-thinking team member seized the moment to finish their report, and indeed, there were no objections from Max.

As the meeting wrapped up, everyone felt as if they had been touched by a spring breeze. Their respect for the person who could lift the Max's spirits was growing. Could it be Ms. Alivia?

Speculative glances were exchanged. Perhaps Ms. Alivia was poised to become the CEO's wife soon.

Despite rumors to the contrary on the internet, those within Dorsey International knew better. After all, Ms. Alivia had been involved in company projects even while overseas, a testament to Max's trust in her.

The day continued at a breakneck pace for Max, with back-to-back international acquisition meetings concluding at three in the afternoon.

He massaged his temples as Patrick briefed him on the schedule. "At four, you've

got golf with the CEO of the Serenity Group to discuss the new tourism project in Lynn County. Then, dinner at six with Mr. Hatfield. Their fragrance business is booming, and they're likely looking to collaborate with Dorsey International on a limited edition line. Finally, at eight, we start bidding on the overseas acquisition,

which will go on for three hours. The competition is fierce, with several local powerhouses in the mix.”

Max's days were always full, but never before had he felt time was so scarce that even messaging Brielle had to be squeezed into the workday.

“Where's Sammuell’s dinner place?” Max inquired.

“Mr. Hatfield said you could choose the venue.”

“Then let's go with Bite and Sip Bistro.”

Patrick rifled through his mental Rolodex. Having been around the block a few times, he couldn't recall ever hearing of Bite and Sip Bistro.

Feeling a tad negligent for not knowing the CEO's chosen dining spot, Patrick whipped out his phone and searched. The address for Bite and Sip Bistro was just a stone's throw from Stellar Stage Entertainment's headquarters. His lips twitched at the realization.

It made sense why he was unaware. Bite and Sip Bistro was a fast-food joint.

Max, a man known for his refined palate, was now opting for fast food just to steal a moment with Ms.

Brielle amidst his hectic schedule.

Was he really bringing Mr. Hatfield of the prestigious Hatfield family to a fast-food restaurant? The imagery was almost too bizarre to fathom.

Still, Patrick didn't hesitate to secure the venue, arranging to rent out the entire bistro.

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The owner of Bite and Sip thought it was a joke when he heard someone wanted to book the place for three hours for a whopping thirty thousand

dollars. Their daily turnover was about ten thousand dollars, and that ' .

wasn't even pure profit once you factored in rent, wages, and other expenses. To them, anyone willing to drop thirty grand for a three-hour reservation must have a screw loose.

"If you keep this up, I'm calling the cops," the owner threatened after hanging up on Patrick, then instructed his staff to keep the fries and chicken drumsticks coming.

But then his bank account pinged with the deposit. He had to double-check his vision and the zeros on the screen before tremblingly dialing back.