

Master 61

Chapter 61

The auction room was abuzz with anticipation as the eighth lot was announced—a Rolex Daytona, the kind of timepiece that

screamed extravagance and didn't just show up at any old auction.

The auctioneer called for the opening bid, and a peal of laughter filled the room when a young woman with a clear voice cheekily

offered up five million dollars. It was a joke, and everyone knew it.

Brielle chuckled along, but her amusement was short-lived as Andrew coolly dropped a bid of twenty million dollars. She turned

to see him, his expression dead serious, the look of a man on a mission.

She felt a twinge in her chest, not for herself, but for her friend Aubree. She knew that this grand gesture wasn't meant for

Aubree. Sure, Andrew was generous with her, but the gifts he gave her, though expensive, were never this extravagant—certainly

not the kind of thing that would have him jet-setting across the world to bid in public.

As her hand curled into a fist at her side, she listened to the bids rise and fall. Andrew stood his ground, calm and collected with

each increase. And in the end, the watch was his for a staggering fifty-five million dollars.

Brielle's expression soured, and Dustin, sensing her mood, leaned in close to whisper, "Fancy it, huh?"

He even entertained the thought that if she wanted it, he might step into the bidding ring

himself.

She shook her head, her voice a soft sigh. "It's just not fair to my friend."

Dustin moved in even closer, their hair almost mingling as he murmured, "Your friend's got a thing for him?"

"Sort of."

Squinting at Brielle, Dustin took a moment to study her face. "Your friend likes Andrew, and you like Max—birds of a feather, you

two."

Brielle tensed, hoping Max hadn't overheard. "Mr. Lynch, don't be absurd. I do not."

Dustin chuckled, "I kinda hope you don't. Max is notoriously tough to handle."

He leaned in again, seeming to enjoy their hushed exchange. "Back in his Harvard days, some girl slipped him and herself a love potion."

In the midst of the grand auction, they were both engrossed in the gossip. Brielle gasped, unable to resist asking, "Then what?"

"Well, she locked herself and Max in a room for a whole day and night. When the cops finally broke in, guess what?"

Brielle's heart raced despite herself.

As she looked hooked on every word, Dustin indulged her curiosity. "The girl was out cold, tied to a chair, face flushed red. And

Max? His arms were covered in blood. He'd cut himself to stay awake."

Brielle bit her lip, impressed by Max's endurance. Then, she remembered how she slept with Max using one drink. She was

instantly feeling guilty.

"Must've been a weak potion," she mused.

Dustin gave her a knowing look. "That stuff was banned across North America because it worked too well. No man could resist

that. After the whole scandal, a lot of folks thought there was something wrong with him."

Blushing, Brielle thought of Max's fierce resolve. He was more than capable.

"Mr. Lynch," she whispered, eager for more juicy tidbits, completely forgetting the decorum of the occasion.

A firm tug on her wrist snapped her back to reality. Max's voice was icy as he pulled her in. "You two practically head-to-head.

What are you, becoming blood brothers?"

Dustin had more gossip to share, but as Brielle was whisked away, his brow furrowed in frustration. "Max, you do your thing, I do

mine. Why can't we keep to our own lanes?"

Their gazes clashed in the air.

Max cracked a smile. "Because it seems you're playing with what's mine."

Dustin was left speechless by the rebuke, while Brielle, flushed and flustered, lowered her head and straightened up, her thoughts scattering like leaves in the wind.

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Brielle was lost in a daze, barely registering the events unfolding around her, including the fact that Max had secured the Eternal

Whispers painting for a cool four hundred million, something she belatedly realized.

Eternal Whispers was the showstopper of the evening, but the auction organizers had one more trick up their sleeve – a

mysterious item that wasn't listed in the catalog and was only to be revealed live at the event.

This secrecy was the reason there was such a buzz of consultants at the bidder's tables, all eager to catch a glimpse of the

hidden gem, which could be anything from a piece of royal regalia that might have graced the brow of an ancient monarch to a

lost

masterpiece by a revered artist.

The trio of auctioneers, normally loquacious, held their tongues for a moment, their voices trembling with excitement.

It all seemed irrelevant to Brielle until the crowd erupted into a clamor, snapping her out of her reverie. She looked up just in time

to see the final lot revealed – none other than Leonardo da Vinci's Salvator Mundi.

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The noise level in the room skyrocketed as advisors at the bidder's tables frantically relayed the developments to their

employers.

The painting, which most believed belonged in the hallowed halls of the Louvre, was now up for grabs at the auction.

Brielle was taken aback, and then she heard Dustin placing his bid.

The bidding was frenzied, each offer outdoing the last, and the atmosphere reached a fever pitch with the final lot.

Max and Andrew, having won their desired lots, bowed out of the bidding war, but Dustin was persistent, raising his bid four

times, his usually nonchalant demeanor replaced with steely determination.

Brielle thought of Dustin's long-lost sister, wondering if he was bidding on this masterpiece as a consolation gift for his mother,

given the painting's evocative name.

After eight rounds of intense bidding, Dustin emerged victorious, claiming the da Vinci for a staggering nine hundred million

dollars.

As the gavel fell, the lights brightened, and waiters began directing the assembly to the adjacent hall for the gala dinner – the

true highlight of the evening.

Brielle followed the crowd into the banquet hall, where the aroma of fine wine filled the air and familiar faces mingled in

conversation.

Her gaze landed on Mr. Hartley. She couldn't afford to return from her first business trip

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with nothing to show for it.

Max was escorted backstage by a waiter to complete the necessary paperwork for his purchase, leaving Brielle momentarily

alone.

There were no acquaintances around Brielle, so she stood in an inconspicuous spot, thinking about how to start a conversation

with the president of the Hartley Group. What she didn't expect was that a young guy not far away was broadcasting live on their

phone. Her face appeared on the live broadcast screen, and although it only flashed for a moment, it was enough to attract

attention.

The young man, a delegate representing his employer at the dinner, was likely attending such a posh event for the first and only

time, hence his early announcement of the live broadcast, promising viewers an immersive experience of the exclusive auction.

While media coverage was restricted to the auction itself, the post-auction dinner was off-limits to the press. However, no one

objected to guests sharing their experience via live stream. The audience following the stream were primarily finance

professionals, all curious to peek behind the curtain at the high-powered networking taking place.

The boy was broadcasting live while softly introducing.

“The man over there is the president of Hatfield Inc. It seems like he hasn’t bid on anything this time.”

“The blonde-haired and blue-eyed one is the president of Hartley Group. I heard that a will be making some new moves, and

tonight we’ll see who he meets.”

“By the way, you must be curious about the young son of Infinity Brilliance. He bid on the last auction item for nine hundred

million dollars. He’s now backstage filling out paperwork, and he’ll probably be here soon. In the North American circle, his face

is heavenly.”

As expected, when Dustin was mentioned, the number of people in the live broadcast room instantly increased. His face is

indeed very handsome, and he’s very wealthy. Ordinary people would not have a chance to see such a person, and they all

wanted to see what he would look like at the banquet.

The boy swiveled his camera again, continuing to introduce, but what he didn’t know was that Brielle’s face flashed into the

camera frame again.

Questions began to pop up on the live feed.

“Was that Brielle just now? Can’t be, her family isn’t that wealthy, right?”

“Brielle? The top finance grad? I remember some forum gossip about her family being poor.”

“Isn’t she engaged to the Dorsey family? What’s she doing here?”

“Who knows? It was all anonymous tips back then, caused quite the stir, but Brielle never

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confirmed anything.”

“Hey man, can you pan the camera around? Let’s see if that’s really Brielle.”

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The young man paused and slowly adjusted his camera lens. The camera settled on Brielle’s face, and the chat erupted once

again.

“Yep, that’s Brielle. Man, you gotta ask her what she’s doing at the gala.”

“Could she have been, you know, taken under the wing by someone influential? There were always whispers about her being a

bit of a wild card.”

“I’ve always been curious, where do all these rumors come from? I was in class with Brielle, and she always kept to herself.”

“Must be someone close to her spreading the gossip. I remember some forum posts about her supposedly being harsh to her

sister, or was it a foster child? Anyway, she’s crafty.”

The

young man frowned slightly at the relentless stream of comments.

Anyone who graduated from Beaconsfield College in the last couple of years would recognize Brielle, but Brielle was so discreet,

turning down all extracurriculars, that her classmates hardly ever saw her.

Her looks were too striking, voted the belle of the campus on her first day, but soon after she vanished, only to be seen

occasionally in lectures.

The rumors about her grew wilder, with photos of her in luxury cars surfacing and forum insiders spilling an abundance of details,

making it hard for people to warm up to her.

“Looks like the CEO of Hartley Group is chatting with Brielle? What could they be talking

about?”

“Man, scoot a bit closer, see if there’s some shady deal going down.”

The young man had no choice but to inch closer discreetly.

Brielle was indeed standing with the CEO of Hartley Group, Flynn, who had approached her first. He was the epitome of a

gentleman, first confirming if she was Max’s plus-one. Upon her affirmative, he showered her with compliments.

Brielle, recalling Dustin’s earlier reveal, figured everyone knew about Max’s rumored indifference to romantic pursuits, which

explained Flynn’s curiosity about her.

Their conversation flowed from the final lot, Salvator Mundi, to the works of

Jacques-Louis David.

Brielle could tell Flynn was a romantic at heart. He believed in the nobility of failure over success, viewing victory often as a

counterfeit or vulgar.

Brielle lowered her gaze, instantly finding a way in, as his romanticism had a philosophical edge.

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“Philosophy can merge with the business framework. Take Taleb’s books, for instance. They discuss an idea called ‘optionality.’”

She cleverly shifted from personal interests to business, toasting Flynn with a smile. “It’s about having options, based on three

principles.”

Flynn looked at her approvingly, his eyes soft, “You mean like the Black Swan?”

Brielle nodded, “The Hartley Group has cleverly applied these rules. You’re a visionary leader.”

Flynn smiled, casually sipping his wine, “I’m pleased. You must’ve seen my graduation speech when I was seventeen.

He had spoken then about the potential impact of a Black Swan on his corporation; a theory that, when broken down into simple

language, raises the question-

Who could possibly take down Hartley Group? It was unpredictable.

The investments a company made could have nonlinear returns.

The company should create more options, that is, taking controlled risks for Black Swan-level innovations.

And Brielle had just alluded to optionality and the Black Swan. She was smart, knowing how to whet his appetite.

"Ms. Brielle, representing Dorsey International, you're here for the autonomous store systems, aren't you?"

"Yes, I believe your collaboration with Dorsey International will bring about favorable Black Swans."

They both understood that a Black Swan represented the unforeseeable.

"Mr. Flynn, to wager a controlled cost for a limitless return has always been the essence of Hartley Group. Dorsey International

offers a comprehensive retail technology package. All you need is to open it up to third-party platforms. In the future, department

stores, bars, restaurants, and more might adopt this core self-service system, and Hartley Group's impeccable business model

could forge a moat that no competitor could cross."

It was the first time Flynn had met a woman so knowledgeable about a partner's business. In the financial world, women often

stood in men's shadows, but Brielle was different, a cut above as Max's companion.

Without hesitation, Flynn raised his glass, "Ms. Brielle, you're quite captivating. I'm looking forward to our partnership."

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As the live stream unfolded, the viewers were struck dumb.

What had they just heard? Black swan events, automated stores, optionality?

Was Brielle actually negotiating a deal with the CEO? And it wasn't some shady, under-the-table deal either.

The screen fell eerily silent for a few seconds before someone cautiously offered their thoughts.

“She’s top of her class, so she should be doing alright after graduation, right? That’s probably why she’s at this kind of fancy

dinner.”

“Is it just me, or did she get even prettier? That dress looks amazing on her.”

“I’m jealous. How can someone be so confident chatting with Mr. Hartley? And the CEO seems to really value her opinions.”

“Some folks in their twenties are discussing partnerships with industry tycoons, while others hide behind screens, spreading

baseless rumors.”

The boy streaming the event saw Brielle about to turn around, quickly stashed his phone behind his back, and pretended to be

just passing by.

When Brielle and Flynn were discussing the logical relationships between things, she finally caught sight of Max.

Max was gracefully engaging with the people around him while making his way over. He always seemed to carry himself with

such elegance, no matter the setting. Though a businessman, he had the serenity of a mountain spring – calm, grand, and

gentle.

At only twenty-six, Max was a standout figure, both domestically and in North America.

Brielle sipped her drink, feigning composure while keeping an eye on him.

“Ms. Brielle, those who fall for Max are surely followers of Convulsionism, don’t you think?” Flynn asked.

Convulsionists were fervent believers from the early 18th century who held that certain objective, unchanging, and eternal truths

existed in the world. It was about nostalgia, fantasy, intoxicating dreams, sweet melancholy mixed with bitter sorrow, loneliness,

the agony of exile, the sensation of being cut off.

Flynn’s description of women who fell for Max suggested he saw him as a figure perched high above the clouds.

“Mr. Harper, I can’t give you a straight answer about him. Perhaps, in my eyes, he embodies both unity and diversity.”

No sooner had she spoken than Max arrived at Flynn’s side. The conversation between the two men turned to matters of

campus life. Brielle stood quietly, occasionally looking up to smile.

When Flynn mentioned the automated store, Max realized Brielle had completed her task.

Flynn made no secret of his admiration and even shared a cordial toast with Max, “You have a perfect companion for the

evening.”

Max smiled, and it was clear the two men had a close relationship, even discussing a girl Flynn had a crush on back in the day.

Behind Brielle, the boy who was still broadcasting finally mustered the courage to approach her.

“Brielle?” he called out softly, his

voice tinged with uncertainty.

The chat had erupted again, with several viewers blatantly slinging mud at Brielle. The online crowd clamored chaotically, many

urging him to probe Brielle for the truth.

Brielle turned around to face a young, unfamiliar face.

Simon reached out gently, “We went to the same school. Nice to meet you.”

Brielle shook his hand politely.

Simon didn’t know how to broach the topic, regretting his impulsive greeting. Finally, he closed his eyes and blurted out, “You

might want to check out the Beaconsfield College forum when you get a chance. Someone’s been spreading nasty rumors about

you there.” Brielle paused, taken aback. She had never paid much attention to external opinions, and as for forums or social

media, she had even less time to browse. These places were often where news spread the fastest.

“Thanks, I’ll have a look,” she said.

Simon nodded, catching the attention of Max and Flynn, who now looked his way, making him feel a sudden rush of

nervousness. These two were familiar faces from the financial

newspapers.

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He quickly tucked his phone behind his back, feeling a cold sweat trickle down his spine. "Well, I won't bother you any longer.

With those words, Simon hastily made his exit, sliding into an inconspicuous spot before lifting his phone before his face again.

The chat was still a hot mess, with an overwhelming number of people bashing Brielle. It was as if a mob had suddenly stormed

in with a vendetta-and for no apparent reason, since Brielle wasn't even a celebrity.

On the other side of the screen, Lillian was glued to the live broadcast on her phone, her fingers deftly dialing another number.

She couldn't afford to let Brielle's reputation flip Over the years, Lillian had nurtured a relationship with a professional online

brigade Whether it was the forums at Beaconsfield College, Dorsey International, or elsewhere, she had her minions entrenched,

constantly churning out negative press about Brielle

The strategy had proven effective.

There's truth in the old saying: "A lie told often enough becomes the truth." When all the chatter about someone was negative,

people started to take it as gospel.

Green with envy, Lillian stared at her phone screen, puzzled as to how Brielle had the gall to show up at such a high-profile

event. Even Spencer hadn't snagged an invite. What gave Brielle the right?

Mad with jealousy, she kept funneling money to her online army, urging them to amplify the slander against Brielle. As expected,

the negative comments multiplied, quickly drowning out any positive ones. Soon enough, the comment section turned into a

digital witch-hunt aimed at Brielle.

Lillian finally breathed a sigh of relief when she saw no one was left defending Brielle. then shot a message to Emily.

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[Hey Em, have you been overseas lately?]

[Nope, what's up?]

[Someone from the Hatfield clan must have attended the auction. I spotted Brielle there and it's bugging me. I asked Spencer,

and he didn't receive an invite either. It's all very odd, so I thought I'd check with you]

Emily quickly pulled up the news. The auction had been live-streamed by international media, but by now, it had wrapped up.

Brielle at the auction? Impossible!

Thinking of Brielle's notorious personal life, Emily's face twisted in disgust. There were plenty of North American playboys who

knew how to party, and she must have caught someone's eye, that shameless thing.

Lillian felt a twinge of unease reading Emily's message. Simon's live broadcast had been brief, but Max had made an

appearance. Considering Brielle's recent promotion, could it be that she had traveled overseas with Max?

Jealousy nearly consumed her at the thought of Brielle being in the same room as Max. The thought was like a wildfire, burning

through her composure. Her chest heaved with a mix of anger and exasperation as she mulled over the nature of Max and

Brielle's relationship.

Max admiring Brielle? As if! Brielle was a bookworm had a pretty face but no clue how to use it, so dull and stiff. Even Spencer

wouldn't give the time of day to such a woman-Max certainly wouldn't be impressed.

She took several deep breaths, too worked up to even think about food. Adjusting her neckline to reveal just a bit more, she

stormed out of her apartment and headed downstairs.

Tonight, she was visiting the Haywood residence. Cameron had come home when he heard she was stopping by. At this

moment, there were only the two of them in the hall. Miranda and Robert had been scolded by Faith, and they came over to

apologize.

The engagement between their families had been a decade-long affair, with their businesses intertwined at every level.

If the engagement were to be broken off, and Ryan took all his clients with him, the Haywood family would find themselves in a

very awkward position.

Lillian couldn't care less about that. As long as she could land Spencer, she'd be stepping through the doors of the Dorsey

family.

Brielle, that lousy woman, belonged in the gutter.

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The Haywood residence was a beacon of light in the quiet of Beaconsfield, with Cameron lounging on the plush sofa, poring over

some documents. He sensed Lillian's descent down the grand staircase and set the paperwork aside.

With her lips pursed, Lillian rubbed her eyes, the embodiment of distress.

"Cameron, has the mess been sorted out yet?" she asked tentatively. She was referring to the scandal where Faith had boldly

called off her engagement, a move that had left the Haywoods red-faced with embarrassment.

But what could be done? The Haywoods, though a respectable name in the top ten of Beaconsfield's elite, owed much of their

social standing to the favor of the Dorseys. Without the Dorsey influence, the Haywoods were merely wealthy, nothing more.

Lillian perched carefully on the edge of the sofa, her eyes brimming with unshed tears. "Bri was probably just spouting nonsense

the other day. If Faith really does call off the engagement, will the Haywoods..."

Cameron's gaze drifted to the expanse of skin on her neck, feeling a sudden dryness in his throat. He averted his eyes and

adjusted her collar for her. "Don't worry about it. Even if the engagement is off, the Haywoods won't crumble," he reassured her.

"Cameron, did you keep up with today's auction?" Lillian inquired, switching topics.

He nodded. He'd heard about it, but such events were beyond the Haywoods' social reach. "Bri was there, but I don't know who

she went with. I'm always concerned she might fall in with the wrong crowd," Lillian confessed.

Cameron's brow furrowed at the mention of Brielle. "She's the one who's been acting irresponsibly!"

"Cameron, don't get mad. Maybe I'm misjudging her. Why don't you talk to her when she gets back? Bri is still upset with me. I'm

too afraid to call her."

"Lillian, the Haywoods regard you as their own daughter. You're no less than her. You don't have to belittle yourself like this."

She leaned back into the sofa, an action that once again exposed her collar. Lillian was nurtured by the Haywoods into a woman

of fine complexion. While her features were merely pleasant, her vulnerable charm could soften any man's heart.

Cameron, already fond of her, couldn't resist pulling her into his embrace upon witnessing such vulnerability.

Lillian struggled feebly in his arms, "Cameron, let me go. I can't give you a definite answer just yet. This isn't right," she

whispered, her voice soft and deliberately coy.

Cameron's breath deepened, and he pinned her gently to the sofa. "Lillian, I'll wait as long as it takes for you."

Tears began anew, as if she bore the weight of the world's sorrow. Her tear-streaked face softened Cameron's intentions, and he

gently lifted her up, comforting her with his closeness.

Lillian sniffled, "I'm still worried about Bri. She won't see me now. If you can, please talk to her."

Mentioning Brielle scattered Cameron's good mood. Because of her, the Haywoods were unjustly embroiled in a mess. Now their

parents were groveling to Faith, and who knew what they were enduring.

However, he couldn't deny Lillian's request, and he agreed despite the bitter taste in his mouth.

Lillian had achieved her aim but remained uneasy. She didn't know how Brielle managed to attend the dinner. If Max had taken

her, Lillian was determined to ruin Brielle in Max's eyes. She had manipulated Spencer and Cameron, and she was confident

she could do the same with Max.

And if Max became enamored with her... The mere thought made Lillian weak at the knees.

Meanwhile, across the globe, a gala had just concluded.

The media, camped at the entrance, were eager to capture the crème de la crème of society. Only a few young executives were

willing to face the cameras; the rest departed discreetly. Even so, the media would speculate wildly about the departing guests,

ensuring headlines across North America the next day.

Brielle entered Max's car, but the atmosphere was cold as ice, seemingly crushing her with its weight. That frosty air emanated

from Andrew, who regarded her with icy scrutiny.

Brielle instinctively moved closer to Max, a cold sweat breaking out on her back. Andrew sneered, stretching out his legs and

crossing them with the lazy menace of a panther.

"First Dustin, now Flynn. Brielle, your ambitions are quite lofty, aren't they?"

Andrew had returned to the hall after finishing some paperwork, only to witness Brielle and Harper chatting amiably.

Brielle frowned, realizing Andrew always harbored hostility towards her. Resigned to this, she boldly reached for Max's slender

fingers and caressed the palm of his hand.

Andrew's face darkened, his eyes narrowing.

A wave of relief washed through Brielle as she straightened her fingers and slipped them through Max's, a tingling sensation

spreading through their intertwined hands.

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Max lowered his head towards the laptop, his fingers tapping rhythmically on the keys. Even in the confines of a luxury car, he

was still engaged in a video conference with the executives back home.

Noticing Brielle's movement, his Adam's apple bobbed as he whispered, "Quiet down, will you?"

He had already muted the microphone on his end. He could hear the corporate bigwigs' reports, but they couldn't catch a peep

from his side.

Brielle's heart felt like it had been struck by something, regretting her impulsiveness. She tried to stealthily withdraw her hand,

but he caught it and pressed it against the leather seat.

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There was warmth on one side, coolness on the other this extreme intimacy brewing in the dim light. Her remaining rationale was

nearly exhausted.

Worried that her own heartbeat would betray her, she quickly propped her head up with one hand and pretended to gaze out the

window. The fleeting lights cast alternating shadows on her face.

Andrew, watching the scene unfold, was incredibly peeved, his brow furrowing enough to crush a fly. After a moment, his face

contorted indescribably, "Brielle, have you no shame?"

Interrupting Max's video meeting with her antics, it was clear how slutty she could be in private.

"If I cared about shame, I probably wouldn't have ended up with Uncle Max."

Andrew found himself at a loss for words for the first time, his face cycling through various shades before he finally pulled back,

deciding to drop it.

After all, Max hadn't said a word, clearly indulging her.

Andrew sulked for a while before feeling unbearably stifled. "Max, how about we hit up The Sky Lounge tonight?"

The gala had attracted a who's who of the wealthy, and surely many would be heading to The Sky Lounge afterwards.

Compared to Tequila Sunset, The Sky Lounge was an even more exclusive spot. Perched at the very top of the skyscraper,

surrounded by floor-to-ceiling windows, one could look down and trample the city's glitz underfoot. If it were a snowy winter's

night, the view was even more breathtaking. The ethereal beauty of the snowflakes melding with the city's golden opulence was

a dreamlike vista few could ever hope to touch.

Dustin's infamy in the North American elite circles stemmed from the thrill-seeking month

he booked The Sky Lounge for, night after night. In a media interview, he mentioned the thrill of pressing a woman against the

glass, conquering not just her, but the city itself. Thanks to his antics, The Sky Lounge's profits doubled that year. It was only

later revealed that The Sky Lounge was, in fact, one of Dustin's many private assets.

"Not tonight, I've got another meeting later," Max replied nonchalantly, as if the glitz and glamour couldn't catch his eye.

Brielle adored this dismissive air of his the more austere and aloof he was, the more she longed to see him in disarray, with

reddened eyes and fierce determination.

Eventually, Andrew went off to The Sky Lounge alone, while Brielle accompanied Max back to the estate.

Max was indeed busy. After Brielle had taken her bath, she could hear him downstairs instructing Patrick to book flights.

"Mr. Dorsey, Mr. Hatfield wishes to meet. They've booked a room at The Sky Lounge."

Max frowned, closing the folder in his hand, "Tell the core team to handle negotiations with Flynn. We fly back home first thing

tomorrow. Push back the Hatfield Inc. matters, and tell group three to resume the meeting in twenty minutes."

He removed his Bluetooth earpiece and rubbed his temples with slender fingers. "By the way, tell the old man that the bidding

was successful to put his mind at ease."

Patrick meticulously organized the itinerary on his planner and added, "Ms. Alivia heard you're abroad and would like to see you

tomorrow morning, said she has something to deliver personally."

"I won't have time for that."

“Mr. Lynch just sent a message, asking if Ms. Lucinda would drop by The Sky Lounge, he’s set up a betting pool. Uh, I’m not

sure if he got the wrong person. We don’t have a Ms. Lucinda here.”

Patrick hesitated slightly at the mention of Ms. Lucinda.

A shadow deepened in Max’s eyes as he idly twirled a pen, “Tell him Ms. Lucinda was let go by Dorsey International.”

Chapter 68

Patrick didn’t join the inner circle at the auction, unaware of the reasons behind the scenes. He thought Dustin was on the prowl

for a Dorsey International employee, so when he heard Max’s message, he didn’t hesitate to shoot back a reply.

Dustin was sipping a glass of red wine when he received the message.

The casino tables around him were crowded, filled with the scent of perfume and the clinking of glasses, as the banquet had

spilled over into this space. The city’s nightscape stretched out beyond the huge floor-to-ceiling windows.

Several women stood not too far away, gazing dreamily in his direction, but Dustin paid them no mind, his attention fixed on the

message from Patrick.

He, a man who flirted his way through social circles, and Max, the untouchable elite, were worlds apart. After the scandal

involving Max broke out, Dustin had always found the man to be a bit pretentious.

In the high-stakes financial world, men forever dominated the scene. Many daughters from venerable families were raised as

prey from the start. They were unlike ordinary girls, boasting top-notch educations and glittering backgrounds, but in their

parents’ eyes, they were still just prey, and the elite men at the center of this circle were the hunters.

It was a grand seduction, prettily termed as ‘strategic alliances’ by the outside world.

To Dustin, Max’s disinterest in women was exceedingly odd.

Dustin, propping his cheek with one hand, scoffed and wrapped an arm around a bunny girl next to him, exchanging a few

playful words before dropping the subject. He figured it'd be the same when he met that woman in Australia.

Meanwhile, Max's meeting dragged on until three in the morning. Loosening his tie as he headed upstairs, he was greeted by a

faint scent upon flicking on the room lights.

Was that scented candles?

A slight bulge on the bed indicated a presence, and a woman's dark hair spread across the pillow, making her skin look

exceptionally enticing.

She must have found the light too harsh, for her eyelashes fluttered, and she turned over. The silk comforter slipped slightly,

revealing shoulders as delicate as a crescent moon.

Max stood by the door, dimming the overhead lights and leaving only the bedside lamp on. He hadn't expected her to be asleep

in his room, let alone that she had lit scented candles.

He shed his suit jacket and took a shower. Coming out, he found her awake, slightly dazed, clutching the comforter and looking

up at him with a faint gaze. Her hair was a tousled halo in the soft light.

Max's breath hitched, and he strode over, capturing her lips with his own.

Brielle thought she was dreaming again, one of those sensual, paralyzing dreams.

Their breaths mingled in the rising heat. By the end, she almost wanted to plead for mercy, but her mouth was sealed by his.

Sweat dampened the hair at her forehead, her eyes misty. Max looked down at her, gently tucking a strand of hair behind her

ear, "Tired?"

His voice was rich and mellow, like snow in a volcano, gently melting away.

Brielle lifted her eyelids lazily and hummed in response. It was a purr, cat-like, scratching at Max's heart with an inexplicable itch.

He frowned slightly, baffled by his own emotions. The result was that Brielle had no strength the next morning and slept the

entire flight.

Beaconsfield was entering autumn, and she wrapped her neck with a silk scarf to cover any marks.

Max was fond of her body. He didn't say it, but Brielle felt it. He was also particularly fond of her lips, especially her Cupid's bow.

Standing in front of the airport restroom mirror, Brielle touched her lips.

When they arrived, she told him to go ahead, staying back under the pretext of waiting for Aubree. It was just an excuse, a

moment for her to gather her composure.

Max was too sophisticated with his moves, perhaps unintentionally so, but always enough to leave one restless. This wasn't the

outcome she wanted.

Brielle took a deep breath and splashed her face with cold water, cooling her flushed cheeks.

Chapter 69

Aubree arrived promptly, driving a sleek Maserati.

Brielle, trying to hide her nervousness, casually adjusted the scarf around her neck and slid into the passenger seat. As she

settled in, her spine stiffened uncomfortably, and the temperature she had managed to cool within herself began to rise again.

"Bri, did you hear about the scene Faith made over at the Haywood estate?" Aubree asked, pressing the gas pedal with a bit of

frustration.

Brielle sat up straight, trying to expel the thoughts of Max from her mind. "Yeah, I ignored their calls. How did it end up?"

Aubree couldn't suppress a grin. "Your folks paid them a visit to apologize, but you know Faith, she's relentless. She accused

you of being a flirt and made a huge fuss about ending the engagement, claiming you cheated on her son. In the end, I think it

was Ryan who stepped in."

"Ryan?"

"Mhm, Ryan calmed Faith down. So, the engagement's still on."

Brielle pursed her lips. Ryan had just been let go from Dorsey International, and his reluctance to break off the engagement was

likely to avoid catching Michael's attention. Despite announcing his retirement, Michael still held absolute sway over the Dorsey

clan. And Brielle didn't want to draw his scrutiny either.

"Bri, if Michael gets involved, I'm worried your situation will become really awkward. He turns a blind eye to the other Dorsey

men's escapades, but not with Max, his golden boy. He can't have a blemish on his record, you get me?"

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Fooling around with Max in secret was one thing as long as it didn't reach the old man's ears, but having any other designs

would be a disaster. If it came to that, no one in the Dorsey family would stand by her side, not even Max.

Brielle understood this all too well, which was why she always kept a tight rein on her emotions. Falling for Max would mean

never getting back up again.

She leaned back, intending to close her eyes and rest for a moment when suddenly the car lurched forward. The sudden force

startled them both.

"Screech!"

The brakes were slammed, leaving a dark streak on the pavement. Around them, the hustle and bustle continued, while the

Maserati's rear was slightly dented.

The car that hit them stopped, and out came Cameron and Lillian. Lillian seemed shaken, clinging to Cameron's arm in the

aftermath. Cameron soothed her while flanked by a secretary. He looked up and saw Brielle, a flash of disgust crossing his face.

“What kind

of driving is this?”

Lillian, standing next to him, appeared surprisingly thrilled but restrained herself as if worried about provoking Brielle’s disdain.

Brielle felt like this was a stroke of bad luck, getting rear-ended by them of all people. “The car’s Aubree’s, and you’re fully

responsible for the fender bender. Just deal with the insurance company directly.”

Cameron didn’t want to engage with her, but her aloof demeanor irked him. “Do you have any idea how much trouble you’ve

caused the family?”

Lillian gently tugged at his sleeve, whispering, “Cameron, don’t be mad. Bri probably hasn’t gotten the message yet. She was

abroad, you know, with the time difference.”

Her words only reminded Cameron of Brielle’s deliberate non-responsiveness. Countless unanswered calls and texts fueled his

irritation. “There’s a family meeting tonight. Mom and Dad want to talk to you. Stop being so headstrong.”

By now, Aubree had hung up with the insurance company and was irate at seeing Cameron babying Lillian. “Cameron, who’s

your real sister here? Did you see at the million-dollar bracelet you bought Lillian? Your family has no shame, treating Bri like a

pawn in a marriage deal. Spencer and Lillian have been fucking each other like crazy, and you still treat her like a treasure.”

Cameron’s face turned stormy, his gaze as chilling as a crypt. “Aubree, I’ve known Lillian

for

years, and I know what kind of person she is. As for the little affair between you and Andrew, don’t think no one knows about it.”

Aubree’s expression faltered, confused about how he knew.

Lillian’s eyes sparkled maliciously upon hearing this. Aubree and Andrew? Weren’t they siblings?

Concerned that Lillian might stir up trouble, Brielle quickly interrupted. "Please tell mom and dad I'm swamped with work and can't make it."

"Grandpa said he wants to see you. You wouldn't want to disturb his peace in his twilight years over your issues, would you?"

Brielle felt a sharp pain in her chest, freezing on the spot, unable to respond.

Aubree was furious. Brielle's grandpa had been diagnosed with dementia two years ago, and aside from Brielle's regular visits to

the nursing home, the rest of the Haywood family barely paid any attention. Now they were using an old man to manipulate

Brielle-it was utterly despicable.

Chapter 70

Brielle locked eyes with Cameron, her gaze unwavering. "Really, Cameron? You're playing the grandpa card? Did you forget he's

your grandpa too? He's been nothing but good to you. Is this how you repay him?"

She had fond memories of her grandpa Julian because, when the Haywood family wanted to formally acknowledge Lillian as

their goddaughter, it was her grandpa who stepped in to stop it, believing it was unfair to Brielle.

But Julian had long since relinquished his authority, and with his dementia worsening year by year, he didn't have any

inheritance to speak of. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been exiled to a nursing home by the Haywood family.

Cameron's eyes were stormy as he glared at Brielle, his anger and disgust not even slightly concealed. "Do you think I want to

bring this up in front of Grandpa? I'm just reminding you, once this whole thing blows up, someone is bound to run their mouth to

him. You know how much he cares for you. If he suffers because of you, you'll never live it down."

The weight of that accusation was almost too much for Brielle to bear. She turned her icy gaze to Lillian, who was smugly

watching the scene unfold, and her lips curled into a frosty smirk. "So, it's all about that engagement with Spencer, huh? If he's

not keen on calling it off, then I won't stir the pot. But I must say, I didn't realize he cared so much about me. Seems like hooking

up with him isn't much of a feat. The real skill is in capturing his heart."

Lillian was seething, barely able to maintain her composure. Her hand was entwined with Cameron's, and in a moment of

frustration, she squeezed a bit too hard, causing him pain. Cameron turned to her, misconstruing her grip as fear of Brielle.

"Lillian?"

Lillian was afraid that a few more barbs from Brielle would make her lose control. She quickly intervened. "Cameron, don't you

have a meeting to attend? Don't be late. Bri's an adult. She can figure this out on her own."

Cameron nodded, impressed by her maturity. He looked at Brielle. "I can't tell who's the real Haywood daughter. If you had half

of Lillian's sense, Mom and Dad wouldn't be embarrassed by you at their age."

Brielle laughed, her eyes dancing with a provocative light. "You should be thankful she isn't really a Haywood. Otherwise, you

two dating would be quite the scandal."

Her words struck a nerve with both Cameron and Lillian.

Brielle pulled Aubree into the car, calmly buckling her seatbelt. Aubree glanced in the rearview mirror, itching to reverse and

smash the front bumper of that luxury sedan. "Lillian's got game, fuckin' Spencer while keeping your brother on a tight leash. I

wonder

if there are others in the circle who have been enchanted by her in the same way."

Brielle closed her eyes, exhausted from a night of being tossed and turned by Max, and now her legs were still weak. This new

scare only added to her frustration.

"There might be," she admitted.

Aubree hit the gas. "Doesn't seem too cold today, yet you're all wrapped up in that scarf. You must have had quite the night."

Brielle's cheeks flushed, knowing she couldn't hide it from Aubree.

Aubree pulled up to Brielle's apartment, playfully tugged the scarf down, revealing a patchwork of marks on her delicate neck-

shades of pink and rose, testimony to how much a certain man adored her skin.

Aubree whistled lowly, muttering an impressed "damn," then cupped her hand like a microphone and held it to Brielle's mouth.

"On behalf of all the other ladies, tell me, what's it like to sleep with Max? Is he as good as he looks? Is his voice as sexy in

bed?"

Brielle was backed into a corner but Aubree caught her wrist and pulled her back. "Spill it. You have to tell me. Do you know what

I think about every time I see Max?"

Brielle shook her head, noting Aubree's curious expression. "I wonder what it's like to kiss those thin lips of his."