

Master 631

Chapter 631

Andrew's brows knotted as he swallowed hard, Brielle's words racing through his mind.

Aubree had left Beaconsfield. The thought brought on a wave of irritability.

He stood up, grabbed a nightgown from nearby, and helped Tessa into it. "Just rest up, okay? Take a moment to chill."

"Are you ditching me because the Rowlands are going down? You can stay. Andrew, please..."

"Enough!" Andrew's voice took on a stern edge, and then he sighed, "I've never thought that way. It's just... with the way you are right now, we're not in the right headspace for... this. You need to chill. I need to get some air."

With that, he strode out the door.

Marissa was already waiting outside, relieved to see him emerge. "I was half expecting you to spend the night with her, Andrew. Listen, we've got the inside scoop - the Rowlands are finished. The big guns have been sent in to dig deep, and Zaiden's fate is sealed. The cover-up by the Rowlands is fact. By morning, their stock is going to tank, and the government will freeze their assets. Don't go spouting any nonsense about marrying Tessa now. She's not the one for you."

Marissa didn't bother to lower her voice, so Tessa heard every word from inside. Tessa's body shook with spasms of pain, and she ran to the bathroom, vomiting blood.

She couldn't let things end like this. What would she be without Andrew in her world? Her only play now was to force Andrew's hand in marriage.

Gazing into the mirror, her face hollow, she looked like a ghost of herself.

Tears started anew, fueling her hatred for Brielle. Was this all Brielle's doing? That bitch!

Tessa wanted to release the video she held, to let all of Beaconsfield see, to make Brielle suffer! But the timing wasn't right. Aubree was, in name, part of the Clements family. If the video implicated them, Tessa would lose everything.

She had to use the video to make Andrew marry her.

Meanwhile, outside Harmony Haven Hotel, Brielle stood apart from the angry crowd, watching the remnants of the Rowland family face public condemnation. Her expression was calm, a faint smirk on her lips.

She looked up at Max and let out a sigh. "The Rowlands won't last long now. Let's head back." Max ruffled her hair lightly, "What's next? Were you hoping Dustin would pull some strings in the Clements' business dealings?" He had his suspicions, but this didn't require Dustin's help. "Yes, but I've changed my mind. Aubree won't be back for two months, and I want Andrew to

fully understand his own heart by then."

It was always easier to see the truth from the outside. Andrew, the coward, deliberately overlooked Aubree and was unwilling to acknowledge their relationship, fearing the judgment of others.

He was born into the spotlight, the anointed heir of the Clements, so his life was a smooth sail. How could he allow a stain on his life, especially one so scandalous? If his and Aubree's relationship came to light, it would shame the entire Clements family.

Nobody could predict how the public

would react. The Clements

Corporation might suffer, and people would question the true motive behind Aubree's adoption. The idea of a child bride was an anathema, and for a family with a century of history, holding onto such archaic notions would invite scorn.

So Andrew hooked up with Aubree but refused to acknowledge it.

Tessa became his perfect alibi. As childhood sweethearts, Tessa was so dependent on him, and they were seen as a match made in heaven.

With Tessa, he remained the untouchable heir of the Clements family, the CEO of

Clements Corporation.

What was this charade?

Andrew lived his orderly life, filling his

voids with Aubree whenever he was bored, but since his arrival, Aubree had spent every moment loving him, only living in the spare moments.

Did he truly deserve her?

Chapter 632

Brielle closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

The Rowland family had faced their comeuppance, and as for Andrew, his would come in due time. All she needed to do was wait quietly,

When she returned to Premier Palace, her mood lifted considerably. The image of the Rowland clan smeared with trash brought a smirk to her face.

She had just settled on the couch when Max handed her a glass of water. After a few sips, feeling rather chipper, she decided to dig out that scarf she'd been knitting and continued her work by the bay window.

Max watched her mood improve and silently breathed a sigh of relief but couldn't suppress a cough.

Wesley knew he had been running a fever since the night before. "Sir, maybe we should call the doctor. Your temperature is very high, and if it hits 104 degrees, we'll have real trouble," Wesley suggested, his concern merging with Max's timely cough, finally pulling Brielle's attention toward them.

Brielle looked at Max and, indeed, noticed his pallor. She set the scarf aside and saw Patrick come downstairs with a stack of papers. "Sir, the last meeting is about to start, and it's going to last about an hour. Once this is over, we should be clear of the overseas issues for a while."

At that moment, Brielle was by Max, reaching out to check his forehead. Feeling the scorching heat, her expression changed instantly. She hadn't noticed Max's fever earlier, being out of sorts herself, so she quickly asked Wesley, "Wesley, do we have any fever reducer here? Bring some over, will you?"

Then, turning to Patrick, she asked, "Can't we postpone the meeting?"

Patrick looked troubled.

Max patted Brielle's hand, his voice rough with the hint of a cold, "It's okay, don't worry, it's just

an hour."

Brielle frowned. "You have a high fever."

Max wanted to say that he had worked sick countless times before, and it was nothing new.

Brielle's grudges needed time to dissolve. The fall of the Rowland family was just the start. Andrew still needed a slow grind to intensify the pain. She was one to hold fast to her vendettas, now only slightly satisfied.

Max understood her evasion and would bear the brief heartache. He coughed again, and his eyelids looked heavily fatigued. Patrick sighed, "Mr. Dorsey was called to the sanatorium again last night and didn't rest at all."

Brielle felt a pang of sympathy, but the sanatorium was indeed an issue. Martha was, after all,

Max's birth mother, and he couldn't ignore her.

She placed her hands on his temples, easing his discomfort with the coolness of her fingertips. Max closed his eyes in relief.

Wesley had found some fever reducer, and Brielle brought it to Max's lips. "Take this."

Max complied, swallowing the medicine, but heard Patrick's urgency. "Sir, the meeting starts in ten minutes."

Max didn't dally any longer. "I'm fine. You've been down lately, so just rest here."

The meeting couldn't be postponed, so Brielle only nodded. She picked up the unfinished scarf and sat close to knit while Max turned on his laptop's microphone and conversed fluently with the other party.

Brielle focused intently on her knitting. The scarf had taken quite a bit of time in fits and starts, but thankfully, it would be finished tonight. At the end of the scarf, she knitted two irises, and as she tied off the last stitch, Max concluded his

meeting.

Brielle then wrapped the scarf around his neck. If they waited any longer, spring would be upon them.

A spark of warmth lit Max's eyes as he chuckled, "Can I wear it tomorrow?"

Brielle's cheeks flushed, and seeing his pallor from illness and fatigue, she felt a wave of concern. "Yeah, you should wash up and head to bed tonight."

Meanwhile, at the Clements household, Tessa glared at her reflection with fury.

Brielle! It had to be Brielle!!

Her teeth were practically bleeding

with hatred. Her cheeks throbbed

None her teare

with pain, and her tears fell in heavy droplets. She vowed to live until the day Max cast Brielle aside, to repay every humiliation she suffered

tonight upon Brielle.

"Cough, cough."

Blood stained Tessa's mouth. With every thought, her hatred deepened.

Her face was swollen, her sneer sinister and dreadful.

The video was her trump card. She

had to marry Andrew with it as m leverage Once married to Andrew, she would still be the illustrious lady.

The Rowland family had fallen, but she could be the lady of the Clements

household!

Chapter 633

She called in the housekeeper, requesting some ointment to reduce the swelling. However, Marissa overheard Tessa, and a wave of discomfort washed over her.

The Rowlands had brought them such embarrassment this evening, and now here was Tessa, in the Clement household, ordering their staff around as though she owned the place.

Marissa's fondness for Tessa, which had once been considerable, had now turned to disdain. After all even the best of relationships couldn't survive two destructive blows, especially not on the same night-one exploiting the Clements and the other dragging them down with her.

Fuming and aware that Andrew had stepped out for a smoke and was not in the villa. Marissa marched straight to his bedroom. "So, after the havoc the Rowlands have wreaked tonight, you've not even uttered an apology?"

If this had happened before. Tessa would have apologized immediately. But she had just overheard Marissa's conversation with Andrew and knew that Marissa was displeased with her and unwilling to allow her marriage to Andrew.

The disdain in Marissa's eyes as she looked at Tessa's swollen face was unmistakable. "You and Andrew will not be getting married. Forget about it. Each and every one of the Rowlands is crafty, and now that you're under scrutiny, we cannot afford to be associated with you at such a

delicate time.*

Tessa tasted the blood in her mouth and was surprised she hadn't passed out yet. Now, she had managed to offend the rest of the Clements clan, and Andrew was the only person she needed to secure. She had to have sex with Andrew as soon as possible and, better yet, bear his child. That way, her position in the Clement household would be secure.

'Marissa, I didn't want any of this to happen tonight. We have been framed, and you saw that woman with Max, didn't you?"

A smirk of sarcasm crossed Marissa's face-did Tessa take her for a fool?

"Zaiden has been skimming off the top for years, long before Brielle ever came into the picture at Beaconsfield. And now you're trying to pin everything on her. It's no wonder your family protect Zaiden, it seems you still can't see your own faults. Leave now. We have no room for

you."

Tessa felt as if she were about to crumble. In the span of one night, she had lost everything. even Marissa's affection. She wanted to cry, but she knew tears would be useless now. Since she couldn't salvage Marissa's favor, she might as well make a ruthless deal.

"Marissa, I have a video I want you to see."

Marissa looked visibly irritated. She didn't want to watch any video at that

moment; she just wanted this woman to leave.

With a detached tone, Tessa ordered the housekeeper. "Leave us."

Incredulous, Marissa scoffed, "Tessa, I've watched you grow up. When did you become so shameless?"

Tessa felt a pang of heartache, and the taste of blood threatened to rise in her throat again, but she forced it down. She couldn't falter now. The state of the Rowland family was uncertain, and they were waiting for her to clean up the

mess.

With the Rowlands now a target, there was no going back. Her only refuge was to remain with the Clements.

Once the housekeeper had left, Tessa pulled up the incriminating video on her phone and positioned it in front of Marissa. "Marissa, what do you think the impact would be on you if this video got out?"

"You see, it's Aubree caught up with three men, and they mention Andrew too. If this leaks, the Clements will suffer, especially since the public still sees us as closely linked. At a time like this, when we're under the microscope... I'm not asking for

much, Marissa. I just want to marry

Andrew.

"If I marry Andrew, this video will never see the light of day."

Marissa's face drained of color at the

sight of Aubree being assaulted by the men, their ir vulgar comments

interspersed throughout the footage. Turning to Tessa, she demanded,

"Where did you get this video?"

It was disturbingly clear and targeted.

Even if she didn't care for Aubree, the

girl had been under her care for years. Indeed, Marissa didn't like Aubree's relationship with Andrew, but she was considering the Clements' reputation. She could tell Aubree genuinely cared for Andrew, but they were siblings in name, and Aubree had been with the Clements since she was a child. If the Clements were labeled as keeping a child bride, everything would be ruined.

Aubree's actions were all consensual. All Marissa could do was groom Aubree

and marry her off to a suitable family. The Clements had never skimmed on her.

Trembling with rage, Marissa struck Tessa across the face. "You bitch! I underestimated you!"

The slap was forceful. Tessa collapsed onto the bed, coughing up blood.

Chapter 634

"Did

I you have someone go after her?" Marissa's voice was icy, her body quivering with barely contained rage. She thought she was dealing with a naive and innocent young lady, but Tessa turned out to be a vile wolf in sheep's clothing!

If she had known Tessa's true colors earlier, she would have told Andrew to stay the hell away from that tramp!

Tessa was in pain all over, feeling like she had been dragged through the mud this evening, She clenched her teeth, wiping the blood from the corner of her mouth, and let out a bitter chuckle. "Marissa, you do realize the consequences of that video, right? I'm getting married to Andrew one way or another, and I hope you can make arrangements. He wants to marry me, too."

She was like a piece of disgusting gum, desperately sticking to Andrew. Marissa saw through her intentions, stepped forward, and slapped her again. "That slap was for Aubree. Despite that degrading video, she's still a lady who's been nurtured by the Clements family for years. Once Andrew dumps you, you'll be nothing but a no-name, washed-up has-been. As long as the Clements family stands, we'll protect Aubree. The Rowland family is done for, and you're even. worse off than Aubree is! Fine, you want to marry Andrew, I'll let you. But if that video gets out, you better be ready to face the Clements family's wrath."

Another tooth flew from Tessa's mouth, and her heart was in so much pain that she became numb, unable to shed a single tear. Blood kept trickling from her mouth as she coughed repeatedly.

Marissa sneered, "That video better not reach Andrew's eyes. Even if he's over Aubree, they've got over two decades of history. Do you really think he'll let you off the hook for causing all this?"

Tessa shrank back, silent, her heart overflowing with resentment, cursing Brielle, cursing Aubree. They were the reason she had fallen so low.

Marissa took a deep breath. "Keep that video hidden, Tessa. I'm telling you seriously, my husband has always been fond of Aubree. The day that video surfaces, he won't hesitate to turn you into a pariah. Don't believe me? Just wait and see. You think marrying into the Clements family will give you peace? Don't count on a single day of tranquility!"

The more she thought about it, the angrier Marissa got, grabbing Tessa's hair and slapping her hard across the face. "Brielle was right to slap you tonight. With skin as thick as yours and a heart as poisonous, you probably can't even feel the pain. Just stay put right here."

Tessa trembled from head to toe, not daring to utter a word of protest. She was in so much pain she couldn't even breathe, feeling like she was suffocating.

After Marissa left, Tessa shakily got off the bed, kneeling on the floor, spitting out more blood mixed with two of her teeth. Her nails were all broken, her palms bloody.

Even if Marissa hated her, what did it matter? As long as Andrew loved her, that was all she needed.

She thought she couldn't cry anymore, but the tears suddenly began to fall in big drops. She trembled, trying to pick up her teeth but couldn't.

"Cough, cough, cough."

After spitting out some more blood, she staggered to her feet, wanting to e
find a maid to clean up the room.

The maid looked at her with a sneer of disgust. "Clean up yourself. foftom

Madam has instructed us not to take

from

you anymore. Do you

really think you're still the spoiled Ms. Tessa, huh? Pfft!"

Tessa stiffened, in so much pain it felt like she might die. She had to get Andrew

back

immediately. Andrew would pity her. As long as he loved her, she could' have the good life she craved.

Chapter 635

She fumbled with her phone, her fingers shaking so badly that she couldn't dial a single digit. Tears welled up, mixing with the blood she hastily wiped from the corner of her mouth.

The whole world seemed to be conspiring against her!

With gritted teeth, Tessa collapsed onto the bed and succumbed to a fitful sleep.

That night, Andrew didn't come home.

The next morning at seven, government officials arrived at the hospital where Zaiden was working to conduct an inspection.

By nine, Zaiden was escorted to the police station.

At ten, the Rowland family's stocks hit rock bottom, and the media went into a frenzy covering Zaiden's scandal.

The atrocities that Zaiden had committed were beyond repulsive, igniting public outrage like wildfire, with people practically itching to mete out medieval justice on the Rowlands.

With the official news reports detailing Zaiden's misdeeds in stark black and white, more victims' families started speaking out on social media platforms. The Rowland family's reputation tanked, and they became the city's pariahs.

It was clear to all: the Rowland family was beyond salvation.

At this crucial juncture, Tessa, who had always been at the core of the Rowland family, was nowhere to be reached. The Rowlands were desperate for her help, but Tessa had effectively vanished.

They thought of seeking her out at the Clements residence, but given the bad blood between the two families, the Clements flat-out refused to arrange a meeting.

In this moment of crisis, Tessa wasn't just being condemned by the public; in the eyes of the Rowland family, she was a cowardly traitor.

Brielle watched the news unfold online with a serene expression and a slight smirk playing on her lips. A bit of her frustration dissipated, but clearly, this wasn't the ending Tessa deserved.

Closing her laptop, she knew that no one could save the Rowlands now. Andrew might protect Tessa temporarily, but once he found out what she had done, his self-loathing would only intensify. Death by a thousand cuts was far more painful than a swift execution.

Tessa was utterly alone now, clinging to Andrew as her lifeline. And if Andrew, her straw of salvation, chose to abandon her, it would be Tessa's personal hell.

Brielle would let the despicable pair torment each other, and she didn't even need to lift a finger.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Brielle turned her back on the so-called Rowland and Clements

drama, focusing instead on Stellar Stage Entertainment's portfolio.

That morning, Max had deliberately skipped his usual visit to Dorsey International and ignored the Rowland family's debacle, leisurely finishing breakfast with Brielle. Just as he was about to suggest a stroll around the upscale Premier Palace, his phone rang-an urgent call from the nursing home.

His brows knit together, and his complexion soured instantly. The calls from the nursing home had escalated from once every three days to three times a day,

Martha was endlessly inventing new ways to make trouble, hell-bent on challenging Max. Caught between Brielle, Martha, and a recently concluded overseas acquisition, Max felt he hadn't had a moment's peace.

He was running a fever last night and now, he had zero desire to take this call, but the phone persisted as if it would keep ringing until he answered. Seeing the fatigue in his eyes, Brielle's heart ached. Yet, this was the harsh reality they had to face. She had been preoccupied with the Rowland family crisis, and now, she was reminded of the rocky path they still had to tread.

Max eventually headed to the nursing home, while Brielle spent some time at home reviewing documents before heading to Stellar Stage Entertainment.

There was no immediate rush, at least not until Aubree returned in two months. She just needed to handle her current tasks well.

Stellar Stage Entertainment was in the early stages of producing its first movie, and there was still a lot to be done. The remaining funds needed to be allocated to hiring more coaches to ensure that the artists willing to stay with Stellar Stage would receive ample training. Before they could shine, they needed to be in top form.

Brielle stayed at Stellar Stage Entertainment until evening. She also took a call from John, who reported

ve

that everything was going smoothly

abroad and that Aubree and Ricardo

were proving to be exceptionally

talented.

A warmth flickered in Brielle's eyes. After a moment's thought, she reminded

John, "John, Aubree's my friend. If there's anything off about her, you let me

know right away."

John readily agreed.

After working late, Brielle drove off,

remembering the potted plants Aubree had been nurturing in her

house. She decided to stop by and water them but was dismayed to find Aubree's door defaced with malicious graffiti-vile insults likely scrawled by

troublemaking neighbors during

Aubree's absence.

A frown creased Brielle's forehead. She called John, suggesting he ask Aubree if

she wanted to sell the house.

John passed the phone to Aubree, who was resting, and he waited.

Aubree fell silent for a minute upon hearing the suggestion to sell. Brielle knew

Aubree was struggling to let go.

Chapter 636

Aubree had never moved from this place because it held a myriad of memories with Andrew.

Well maybe not all of them were happy memories.

Every time Andrew got plastered, when work got under his skin, and he felt like he was about to lose it, he'd come over to her place. They'd go at it like rabbits as if, by doing so, they could forget everything else in the world. They were in their roaring twenties, brimming with energy that seemed endless, and it all got channeled into their passionate escapades.

A sharp pang of pain hit Aubree's chest, but it was quickly drowned out by the echoes of those men's insults in her head. Her stomach churned with nausea, and unable to hold it back, she doubled over and vomited.

Brielle jumped, alarmed, "Aubree, are you okay?"

After rinsing her mouth with water Ricardo handed her, Aubree replied with a pale face. "I'm fine. I just skipped dinner and felt a bit queasy. If you think we should sell the place, let's do it. I need a fresh start anyway. The neighbors there... they're not exactly part of my fan club."

Brielle looked at the graffiti that marred the walls and the door- 'whore,' 'slut,' and 'tramp'-the hurtful words were scrawled endlessly by both men and women.

"Alright, I'll call the real estate agent tonight."

After hanging up, Brielle knew Aubree was probably still in the dark about the scandal rocking the Rowland family. She didn't plan on spilling the beans. If Aubree wanted to focus on her acting, so be it.

The agent Brielle contacted was efficient. Coupled with a hefty price drop, a buyer was found almost immediately.

The paperwork was sorted out the same evening, Aubree's belongings were moved out, and the keys were handed over. The house was sold in less than three hours using a special expedited

process.

Meanwhile, the Clements family was in the throes of a heated debate. The Rowland family's reputation was in tatters, but Tessa was still living with the Clements.

Was Andrew really going to seize this moment to marry her? It was utter madness!

Marissa sat amongst the family, silent throughout. Her quietness surprised everyone. She was the one who valued the family's reputation most. Why was she mute now when their name was at risk?

Marissa's expression was impassive as she sipped her water.

Andrew had roughed it out last night in the villa next door, not sharing a bed with Tessa. So, he didn't know that she'd also spent a night on the floor.

Today, his phone had been bombarded by reporters and calls for emergency meetings. He

hadn't stopped all day and hadn't seen Tessa, only instructing the house staff to take good care of her.

As soon as he arrived home, he was whisked into a family meeting, looking visibly irked.

Marissa set down her cup. "Andrew, if you care for Tessa, then marry her. She has no one else but you now, right?"

The family was stunned, and even Andrew was taken aback. Marissa, of all people, was supporting his marriage to Tessa despite the Rowland scandal.

Andrew's brow furrowed as he tried to read something, anything, on Marissa's stoic face. But she was unusually somber tonight, only querying the family lawyer beside her.

"By the way, I have five percent of the Clements Corporation shares that I want to transfer. Can you arrange the paperwork for me?"

Was Marissa thinking of transferring her shares to Tessa? Had she lost her mind?

Surprise flickered across Andrew's face. "Mom, I know you like Tessa."

Just then, Tessa descended the

stairs. She had worked hard to

om

reduce the swelling on her cheeks.

Though still reddened, she looked far

better than the previous night's

disarray.

Hearing from the staff that Andrew had returned, she hurried down, tears

streaming down her face. "Andrew."

He hadn't been home all night, and

she had endured plenty of cold shoulders here. -Marissa despised her, and every servant in the house looked down upon her. Tessa couldn't stand it here. She yearned

for a life with Andrew, just the two of

them.

Seeing her fragile form, Andrew's heart softened. Only when Tessa reached his side did he grasp her hand. "My mom's going to transfer five percent of the company shares to you. Say 'thank you,' will you?"

Chapter 637

Tessa's eyes flickered with shock-a whole five percent of the Clements family stock?!

The Clements were among the top three most influential families in Beaconsfield, Five percent represented a fortune in the billions, How could Marissa part with such wealth?

But if Andrew said it was so, it had to be true,

A smile forced its way onto her face while internally, she scoffed, Once she married Andrew, everything the Clements owned would be hers. No matter how much Marissa despised her, she'd have to cough up those shares.

Just as Tessa was about to muster a thank you, Marissa's voice cut through, "I'd rather throw those shares to a beggar on the street than give them to you,"

Tessa was shaking with fury, her eyes so red and raw it seemed she had shed all her tears, She gritted her teeth with such fierce anger, it was like she was ready to grind them to dust.

"Andrew, you can marry her if you wish, but she cannot have a thing from the Clements estate, especially not the shares. As for your own money, do what you will, but don't forget that the Clements fortune belongs to the entire family. It's only because you're an only child that we trust and support you."

Besides, Marissa had the right to hold onto more shares back in the day, but out of disdain, she settled for five percent. Now, whom she decided to give them to was her prerogative,

Tessa felt like she was on the verge of spitting blood.

Damn it all!

Her palm was smeared with blood from clenching so hard, but she held onto Andrew as if holding onto a lifeline. Andrew felt her shiver and patted her back in an attempt to comfort her.

Tessa's face was ashen as she lifted it to Marissa. "I don't need the Clements stock. I just want to be married to Andrew."

Marissa snorted with a cold laugh. "Fine, get married. I won't object."

Humiliated, Tessa recalled the indignities from the night before. Her dignity had been trampled over and over. She had to accept it.

Andrew was furious, yet he couldn't lash out at Marissa. "Mom, I'm taking Tessa to my place."

Marissa shrugged, "Whatever, I don't really want to see her anyway. I'll handle the wedding arrangements. Now take her and go."

Tessa avoided looking at anyone, gripping Andrew's hand tightly. He led her out, buckling her into the car seat.

In the car, Tessa began to cry, her lips bitten bloody. "Andrew, let's do it. We're getting married soon. I'll come to your place tonight, and we can... you know, be together, okay?"

11:247

Andrew's expression darkened. He looked down at her face, gave her a reassuring kiss, they moved to the driver's seat. In truth, he was

reluctant to take Tessa to his current residence. He's confused by his own

resistance and thus felt irritable.

Over the years, Andrew had built a reputation for his shrewd business tactics, managing to hold his own! against veterans like Max. Moreover, Andrew had been scandal-free and devotedly courted Tessa, a fact that had become a sort of urban legend in their social circles.

Driving in silence, Andrew answered

a call from Jaired at a stoplight, m whose tone was teasing. "What's going on, man? I heard you and Tessa got a beatdown from Brielle.

That's gotta be fake, right?"

No one would believe such a thing without seeing it with their own eyes. With the Rowland family drama at its peak, Jaired's curiosity got the better of him,

prompting the call.

Andrew was known for his quick temper, so it was hard to imagine anyone daring

to cross him, not even Brielle with Max's backing.

Andrew's eyes narrowed, his tall frame accentuated by a black trench coat. He

opened the car window with a cigarette agitatedly pinched between his fingers.

"She's digging his own grave," Andrew's voice was icy, his anger at the slap still simmering, plotting a time when he'd get back at Brielle.

Chapter 638

Jaired casually swung his legs onto the coffee table, a faint glint of mischief passing through his eyes. "Max is her shield. I you touch her, you can kiss our friendship goodbye for good."

Andrew's eyes were laced with sarcasm and spite. "I don't care about that. Even if Max goes ballistic, do you think he'd actually off me for messing with Brielle? Before that happens, I'll make sure Brielle's the one who's done for."

It was clear he had had it with Brielle.

Chuckling lightly, Jaired loosened his tie. "What's the real deal with the Rowland family mess? Didn't-you dig into it? How did it suddenly blow up in the media like that? Don't tell me Brielle is behind this?*

Andrew had never considered pinning the situation on Brielle. If she had that kind of savvy, she wouldn't have gone straight to Harmony Haven Hotel to slap Tessa. She must have been out of options to resort to such drastic measures. He never considered that Brielle's appearance at Harmony Haven Hotel was entirely because of the picture of the necklace Tessa had sent.

"Do you really think she's capable of that?"

Jaired squinted, rolling up his sleeves to his elbows. Unlike those pampered rich guys, his tan skin, still gleaming from a recent workout, radiated robust, masculine energy. A handkerchief hung loosely around his neck, which he used to absentmindedly wipe away sweat, his whole demeanor exuding an aura of raw vitality. He had been on the team for years, so his muscles tensed with each movement.

"Andrew, if she didn't have the chops, how did she manage to bewitch Max? The guy's been living like a monk, for heaven's sake. Before Brielle, I bet not even a female mosquito got close to him."

Jaired had been curious about Brielle even before he returned to Beaconsfield. First Alivia, then Tessa, and now the Rowland family-there was every reason to suspect her involvement.

Andrew fell silent, his expression darkening with intensity. If it really was Brielle, then it was time to settle both old and new scores.

Jaired sensed the hatred was sufficiently stoked, so he ended the call. After a refreshing shower, he walked out, headed to the liquor cabinet, and took a swig of the finest whiskey.

The Rowland family's predicament had him concerned, and he had already done some digging. Zaiden's misdeeds were indeed factual and not fabricated, or else the higher-ups wouldn't have acted so swiftly. But the tens of billions lost by the Rowland family overseas seemed engineered. The initial bid for that land was only twenty billion, but out of nowhere, several companies joined the fray, driving the price up to thirty billion.

Jaired, having spent years on the military, didn't have the reach to extend his influence internationally, and with the Riddle family's unique status, traveling abroad was a bureaucratic nightmare.

1/2

11-24

He managed to uncover that the Rowland family's overseas business was sabotaged, but it didn't seem related to Brielle. Even with all her cunning, how could she possibly extend her

reach so far?

So he deliberately tossed the problem to Andrew, whose family's influence was more fable overseas. Surely, they could unearth something. Whether or not it had anything to

do with Brielle would soon be revealed.

A sharp glint flickered in Jaired's

eyes. If Brielle was involved, then her motives for being around Max

deserved scrutiny.

Meanwhile, after hanging up with Jaired, Andrew's complexion soured. He was itching to confront Brielle, to give her a taste of her own medicine.

That slap had left a mark he couldn't ignore, not to mention Brielle's audacity in

slapping Tessa right before his eyes.

If Max didn't care about their friendship, why should he?

Tessa's crying from the passenger seat grated on his nerves. Softening his tone after hanging up the phone, he tried to comfort her. "Stop crying. I

won't let Brielle off the hook. As for my mom, you know how she is. You remember how harshly she spoke to Aubree."

In a sudden move, Tessa leaned over and kissed him fiercely.

Chapter 639

Andrew's gaze darkened. He could have returned her kiss, taken care of everything right there in the car, and torn her apart. But his body was cold, and no matter how Tessa teased him, he wasn't in the mood.

The traffic light had turned green, so he pushed her away. "I'll take you to my place, and we'll get married."

Joy lit up Tessa's face, and her lips quivered as she nodded through tears. This was perfect. Andrew was willing to marry her. If she could just get pregnant quickly, Andrew would be wrapped around her finger for good.

Aubree had ultimately lost. That tramp had been fucked by countless men. What did her wealth matter now?

When it came to love, Aubree had lost completely!

Tessa cried and laughed. Although the Rowland family had fallen, her marriage to Andrew would make Brielle and Aubree suffer. A thousand times more than the agony she was

currently feeling!

There were no servants at Andrew's place, as it was usually just him and Aubree. Thinking of Aubree, his grip on the steering wheel involuntarily tightened, and he parked the car in the driveway with a heavy heart.

The lights were on in the room. Andrew's heart skipped a beat uncontrollably.

Just like the countless nights before, he'd return to find Aubree waiting for him with the lights on. Upon opening the door, he'd see her dozing off on the couch, her head bobbing.

He had refrained from contacting Aubree, believing she would come back as she always had. There was no need for sweet talk before, was there?

A trace of scorn flickered in his eyes. Sure enough, Aubree had returned. It seemed Brielle's words were just to scare him.

Tonight was perfect since Tessa was with him, too. When the two women met, he would tell Aubree to get lost.

She returned the necklace, causing him frustration. Now it was his turn for revenge, to give her

a taste of her own medicine.

He pulled out the car keys and didn't even bother to check on Tessa, striding towards the door and ringing the bell.

He intentionally didn't use his key, waiting for Aubree to open the door. However, after a full minute, there was no movement inside. Andrew felt his patience waning, tapping the door impatiently.

"Aubree!" He called out, but still no response.

What on earth was she doing?

Meanwhile, Tessa sat in the car, hearing Andrew call out that name. She felt a chill run through her veins, her lips trembling uncontrollably. She couldn't cry; her whole body ached as if her muscles and bones were being crushed.

Andrew had forgotten he had brought Tessa home. After knocking for a while with no answer, his expression darkened. Tonight, he would fuck her good!

He took out his key and opened the door to the room.

The room was a mess, not from a burglary, but from things he had left in a hurry to take care of Tessa. They were still scattered on the floor, untouched.

His brow furrowed as he marched towards the bedroom with an angry tone. "Aubree, what the hell are you doing? Don't you see the mess on the floor? Why haven't you picked it up?"

His voice was harsh. He kicked aside the clothes in his path and flung open the bedroom door.

The bedroom was clean, the air fresh. His heart inexplicably trembled as he flipped the light switch. Only then did he see the bedroom clearly—apart from the furniture, it was empty.

Almost in disbelief, Andrew walked to the curtains and yanked them open.

Nothing.

He then moved to the closet, opening its doors.

Chapter 640

The closet was a shared space between him and Aubree, split down the middle- or at least. that was the theory. The reality was Aubree, ever the fashionista, had claimed the lion's share for her endless wardrobe. She could go a whole year without wearing the same outfit twice-from the freshness of spring to the cold of winter, every single day.

Seeing the closet as it was, the anger in his eyes softened. Aubree hadn't taken her clothes, which meant, despite storming off in a huff, she'd likely be back within a week. He exhaled a sigh of relief, closed the closet door, and made his way back to the living room.

Meanwhile, Tessa had arrived at the entrance and caught sight of the his-and- hers slippers on the rack. Her heart ached anew, nearly causing her to cough up blood from the emotional wound.

It seemed only then that Andrew realized he hadn't come home to an empty house tonight. "Come on in, Tessa, the wind's biting out there," he said, his voice a little awkward.

He grabbed a broom and began sweeping up the broken shards on the floor, clumsily gathering the dirty clothes from the couch and tossing them into the washing machine. But the thing was, the machine was Aubree's domain. He hadn't the faintest idea how to operate it. What in the world were these round buttons and blinking lights all about?

His brows knitted in frustration, turning the machine this way and that, eventually caving and pulling out his phone to call Aubree. If she picked up, he was ready to let her have it. Why be so dramatic and leave without doing the laundry, cleaning up, leaving him to deal with the

aftermath?

But Aubree didn't answer, and a wave of unexplained loss washed over him.

Shivering, Tessa reached out from behind him and pressed the buttons on the washing machine. It whirled to life, the lights came on, and the drum began to spin. She said nothing, her face pale, her heart feeling as though it had been torn open, bleeding out endlessly.

Andrew seemed to remember the presence of another soul in the house and muttered a distracted "Thanks."

The word was like a thousand needles to Tessa's chest, the pain so intense she could barely breathe. "No need for that between us, Andrew," she whispered.

He stared blankly for a moment before snapping back to the present. He was fond of Tessa, but out of concern for her health, they had kept things uncomplicated-aside from the occasional kiss, nothing more.

Aubree was the one who laundered his shirts, socks, and trousers. She was the one who cooked his meals. Even in bed, they fit together with a comforting familiarity.

To Andrew, Aubree was like an ever-burning light in the darkness, initially too glaring but now painfully missed once extinguished. Even with Tessa there, the room felt too large, too empty.

Tessa wrapped her arms around him, her voice a plea, "Can we take a shower together? Please?"

From the moment she'd entered the

room, she felt a strong sense of rejection. Everything here was tainted with Aubree's shadow, and she desperately wanted to erase it.

"We're getting married soon, Andrew. Your mom said she'd handle the wedding arrangements, she tried to remind him, her voice trembling with urgency.

They had to get married; failure wasn't an option. Andrew had always said he wanted to marry her. If not, what would she do?

Andrew looked down at her hands wandering over his chest. In this room filled with the essence of Aubree, he felt a sudden, overwhelming urge to flee.

He grabbed the keys from the table. "Let's go somewhere else tonight. I have another place with staff that will look after you. Here, you'll be all

Xwith

alone."

Tessa's eyes widened, and she could no longer hold back. She fainted.

"Tessa!" Andrew cried out, panic-stricken, as he rushed her to the hospital.