

Master 661

Chapter 661

She took a sip of the fruit wine, and her eyes sparkled. "Is this the house special, brewed by the owner himself?"

Kenzo raised an eyebrow, observing her fingertips resting on the glass. The cozy warmth of the room, combined with the pleasure of a favored drink, left her content as a cat curled up in a sunbeam.

She was pristine and poised. Persian cats were known for their standoffish nature, after all.

*Sure, join me for dinner and the script is yours."

Brielle blinked, hastily setting down her glass. "I can't just accept that. I'll pay you whatever the highest bid from the other companies was. I know you're not hurting for money, but taking this script for nothing wouldn't sit right with me. I'd feel awkward coming to you for business again."

"There's always a next time for business, but my terms might change by then," Kenzo's gaze drifted to her fingertips lying gently on the edge of the table. She probably wasn't used to being in such close quarters with men. Initially tense, her fingers were tight, but after a bit of wine and their long acquaintance, she had relaxed. Her fingertips lightly touched the table, her face adorned with a smile.

"You're not here on behalf of your sister, are you? Like, asking me to break up with Max or something?"

Kenzo chuckled, his eyes twinkling with mischievous amusement. "Do I seem like that kind of guy to you?"

"Not really, but Alivia has always been the apple of your eyes. If she asked, you'd probably say yes."
Everyone in the Barnes family did seem to revolve around their little princess.

"Alivia did give me a task, but it wasn't to use the script to get you to dump Max."

"What is it then?" Brielle was puzzled. The wine was so delicious she couldn't help but indulge in a few more glasses.

"To seduce you."

She choked on her drink, coughing so hard her face turned crimson, and tears nearly spilled from her eyes.

Her complexion was glowing, her hair neatly tucked behind her ears with a few stray strands framing her face. Now her ear tips were reddened from the coughing, her eyes shimmered like a lake at sunrise, and even her fingertips had taken on a pink hue.

Brielle figured Alivia must have lost her mind. Why couldn't she just be happy with whatever Michael arranged? Why send her own brother to seduce someone?

Hearing those words from Kenzo sent a shock through Brielle as intense as when her colleagues caught her kissing Max that morning. To make matters more awkward, her sweater was now damp with spilled wine, its scent enveloping her.

"Excuse me, I need to use the restroom."

She placed her glass on the table and opened the door of the private booth, heading down the hall to the restroom she remembered well.

Just as she was about to enter, she caught sight of a man resembling Max passing by on the other side. Her steps faltered. Max was supposed to be finding Annie, so what was he doing here?

Almost on autopilot, Brielle followed, watching as Max entered another booth. Whether it was the wine's aftereffect or her vision blurring, she couldn't be sure. Peering through the slim gap between the booth's door and its small window, she saw Max sitting on the center-most couch, Annie nestled against his shoulder, their voices murmuring within.

The reason she was sure it was Annie was because of the photos her colleagues had shown her earlier. The woman's outfit was identical to the one in the photos.

Brielle's breath hitched, and she instinctively wanted to flee, but she heard a man's sneering laugh from inside. "Mr. Dorsey, you sure know how to live it up, coming to a place like this for a dame. You rejected all those women I sent you way back when and even mocked me for it. And now, look who's fallen for the charms of love."

Max's hand rested on Annie's head, his tone nonchalant. "Murray, times change."

Murray's eyes lingered on Annie, who indeed possessed a certain allure. It seemed Max hadn't lost out this time. "I hear Miss Annie has secured a teaching position at Harvard. No wonder you're so protective. But then, I've also heard that Miss Annie isn't your real preference, Mr. Dorsey. Or is that girl just a stand-in for someone else?"

Annie, leaning into Max's embrace, responded coldly to that insinuation. Standing outside, Brielle could almost imagine it was her voice that she heard. "I've known Max for over a decade: That woman looks a bit like me, but that's the only reason he fell for her so easily. I don't mind his fleeting affair."

Murray suddenly let out a laugh, raising his wine glass in a toast. "Well then, if you're done with the lady, do you mind if I make my move?"

"Be my guest."

Max's gaze remained fixated on Annie as if Brielle were nothing more than a plaything he had tired of.

Brielle stepped back, bumping into a wall of a person. Turning around, she realized it was Kenzo. Just as Kenzo opened his mouth to speak, she covered it quickly with her hand and whisked him away from the

scene.

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Kenzo awatted her hand away and dabbed at his lips with the tips of his fingers. It was then that Brielle realized she had overstepped, and she quickly apologized. "Sorry, Kenzo Kenzo's face remained serene as he brought a hand to his temple. "I noticed you hadn't shown up. so i came to check on you. You look a bit pale. Have you been drinking too much?"

"I just had a few glasses of fruit wine. I'm not that far gone."

They returned to the private room, and the scent of alcohol still clung to Brielle. She had forgotten why she had visited the restroom, and her mind felt hazy,

Kenzo glanced at her sweater, still damp with the spilled wine. "Aren't you going to dry it off?"

Brielle looked up, her thoughts slow to catch up. When she realized what he meant, she quickly waved him off with a smile. "It's alright."

She took a seat and chatted with Kenzo about the script for a while, took a few more drinks, and then began to stare blankly at the spread on the table, not touching a bite.

Kenzo picked up some food with the serving utensils and offered it to her. "Not hungry?"

It was only then that Brielle felt a hint of clarity return. She wasn't sure if it was the effect of the wine or the heat in the room, but her palms were sweaty, and she felt an indefinable ache-everything felt off.

Kenzo thought she might be drunk, but when they discussed the script, she was articulate and sharp, not showing any signs of inebriation. She finished the entire bottle of fruit wine by herself.

Kenzo watched her, then, with downcast eyes, said softly, "You should eat something first."

Brielle managed a foggy smile. "Yeah, thanks, Kenzo."

She was as delicate as a kitten when she ate, taking small, careful bites and chewing slowly so as not to spill anything on her clothes.

After a small bowl, she couldn't eat anymore, although she did seem to favor the fruit

wine.

"If you like it, I'll ask the owner to pack a few bottles for you to take home."

"Thank you, Kenzo. That would be great."

"Brielle, you're drunk."

Maybe so.

Kenzo chuckled, setting down his wine glass and watching her as she rested her head on the table, revealing a small profile. Her cheeks and ears were flushed, her eyelashes long-she appeared so soft and vulnerable.

She's not at all like the director of Dorsey International, the president of Stellar Stage Entertainment. Her usual icy demeanor was gone.

Kenzo walked over to her and bent down to take a closer look, speaking softly. "Brielle?"

She didn't stir.

Kenzo called the owner to settle the tab and asked for a bottle of fruit wine before helping

Brielle out.

As they left the private room, Kenzo spotted Annie sauntering down the hallway. A frown creased his brow.

Annie stuck out her tongue playfully, hands clasped behind her back, exuding an air of girlish naivety. The man known as Murray followed her, feeling embarrassed by her behavior.

"Miss Annie, Max is your friend, after all. You got an imposer and stirred up trouble between him and Brielle. If he finds out, I'm afraid..."

"Oh, stop worrying. It's just a bit of fun. Everyone says I look like Brielle, and it bothers me."

She pouted, her demeanor entirely different from her usual cool composure, clearly an act.

"And I have to imitate her every day, which is so exhausting. I can't smile, carry sweets, or even see Ricardo-I haven't seen him in years."

Murray, previously threatened by Ricardo, scoffed at her words. "Ricardo doesn't listen to our boss. If you visit him, he's likely to give you a piece of his mind."

A spark of mischief flashed in Annie's eyes. "Ricardo's more fun; I like him best!"

Annie clapped her hands, the thrill of adventure sparkling within her she wasn't worried about Brielle overhearing her. Brielle was too drunk to make sense of anything.

And what if Brielle knew? Annie might just intentionally reveal her intentions, playing with her prey before going in for the kill.

Alivia's fifty million wasn't easy to earn, but this game was more entertaining than murder. She planned to visit the company tomorrow and see Max's reaction.

As for Kenzo, he was not one for idle chatter. Alivia had always said her brother was the best at keeping secrets in the world.

Murray looked apologetically at Kenzo and bowed respectfully. "I'm sorry, the

young lady is spoiled. I'll take her away now."

As Annie walked away, she warned Murray incessantly, "I said I wanted to stay here longer. My godfather has agreed, so stop following me. He said I could go back after finishing my doctoral thesis."

"But the boss said..."

Annie stopped, and her gaze

darkened. "Do you know why I like

Ricardo? Because he's obedient and doesn't try to be clever. You don't like Brielle's face, and you rashly ordered Ricardo to kill her, pretending it was Godfather's command. You're getting too bold."

Murray immediately knelt down, head bowed. "It's because you said you didn't

like someone looking too much like you."

"Why not just change her face? It doesn't necessarily have to cost her life. Her

face is a bit annoying."

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The back and forth between the two people completely disregarded Brielle as a human being. It was as if she was just some stray cat or dog, easily dismissed.

Annie took the candy from Murray's hand, and her expression finally softened a bit. "Aw, come en, I'm not mad at you. Don't let my poker face scare you off. Let's get a move on. The defense we set up is nothing compared to what Max can do. If he catches us slacking off because we're goofing around, we're toast."

Murray nodded, respectfully falling in step behind her,

The long corridor grew quiet in an instant, the lively warmth from the party room spilling out from the ajar door. Brielle felt suffocated and slowly pushed Kenzo away, leaning against the wall to catch her breath. She had no idea what she looked like. Her neck was craned slightly, her face flushed with a rosy tint.

The image of Max pinning her against the wall outside that room, his lips on hers, flickered through Kenzo's mind like a movie stuck on replay.

He frowned, looking away, "Can you walk?"

Brielle heard someone asking her a question, and there was a slight shimmer in her eyes.

"Yes."

"Alright, you're on your own then."

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He didn't touch her again. Holding his drink, he just stood by her side.

"Sorry for the trouble."

Even drunk, Brielle wasn't one to cause a scene. She steadied herself against the wall and began to walk out.

Kenzo took her phone and dialed Max, but before the call could connect, a figure appeared at the end of the hallway, sweeping Brielle into a tight embrace.

Max, taking in the scent of alcohol on her, felt a twitch in his brow.

Kenzo stepped out from the shadows, handing over a fruit wine bottle and a script. "I was just about to call you, and here you are."

Max took them, his frown deepening at the sight of the bottle, so Kenzo explained quickly, "She asked for it and claimed it was tasty."

Max massaged his forehead, resisting the urge to pinch Brielle's cheek.

Brielle winced at the pinch, instinctively trying to pull away.

"Brielle?" Max called out, lifting her in his arms and heading straight out.

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11.13

Kenzo lingered for a moment before following them out. He saw Max leaning

Brielle against the car.

"What's got into you, drinking like this, Brielle?"

Her arms looped around his neck, a

smile playing on her lips as her

to encircle his

slender legs became

waist. Max's

ragged, his lips pressing against the

nape of her neck, grateful for the

docility that came with her

inebriation.

Brielle, breathless from his kisses, rested her chin on his shoulder, her vision blurring just enough to see a vague figure in the distance. But she was too tired, her mind a blank slate.

Max bundled her into the car, his voice husky with restraint. "Stay still. We're

going home

to rest."

Brielle settled onto his lap, and amidst the car's jostling, she drifted to sleep.

Back in the small diner, a man behind a mask picked up a glass left on the

table. Brielle's lipstick wasn't one for e bold colors. She never wore bright red and always stuck to nude shades. with just a hint of soft pink. So, the glass bore a faint mark.

ruin her

The masked man pressed his lips against that imprint, his eyes churning with emotion. He wanted to her to see her sink in the mire of chaos and fall. He wanted to taint her so thoroughly that even the marrow in her bones turned black. Those legs wrapped around someone else were an eyesore indeed.

In the dimly lit car, Brielle turned over, feeling restless. The word "understudy"

floated through her mind, followed by a sense of being ignited by rage.

She bit her lip, overwhelmed by a deep sense of frustration.

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Max patted her cheek gently, grabbing a moist towelette from the car to clean the tips of her fingers.

It was cold. Brielle's fingers recoiled.

When the car finally pulled up to the nearest hotel, Max ordered Patrick to ensure Annie was taken to the hospital while he carried Brielle into a room. This was the second time she'd gotten plastered. If he didn't intervene, any Tom, Dick, or Harry could've ended up sharing a drink with her.

As soon as they entered the room, Brielle felt herself pressed down onto the bed. She couldn't breathe and struggled to push the weight off.

This time, Max was serious. Her chin was grasped firmly, and there was no escaping the deep kiss.

It wasn't until dawn that Max finally released her. Brielle, exhausted, had long since passed out, her body bruised and battered.

The comforter was pulled up to her chest, the room's heater was cranked up high, and beads of sweat moistened the strands of hair on her forehead. Brielle was too tired to

open her eyes, but she vaguely felt her hands tied and a blindfold over her eyes.

"No more," she murmured, pushing away and opening her eyes. The blindfold obscured her vision, making everything unclear.

Halfway through the night's drinking, her consciousness had blurred. Kenzo hadn't warned her the liquor would hit so hard,

What else did she remember? Right, she remembered seeing Max with his new secretary.

"Mmm."

She felt someone behind her, and a cold sweat broke out over her body as she struggled to remove the blindfold. This wasn't the Premier Palace; everything felt unfamiliar.

Max watched her struggle, then flipped her over and pinned her chin for another kiss.

Brielle's struggles intensified. The moment Max untied the necktie from her wrists, she yanked off the blindfold. Seeing the person in front of her clearly, her face flushed with

anger.

Bastard!

Max didn't give her a chance to retaliate. He was already dressed, his composure restored, knotting the tie he'd used on her hands around his neck. He was such a jerk!

Hello wanted to curae put loud but found her throat was hoarse,

she'd pleaded the night before. There was a deep bite mark on Max's collarbone that she

She'd begged him, and he hadn't yielded. In her haze, she'd bitten him hard

Did it ever occur to you that if I hadn't come for you, you'd be carried off to a hotel room by someone else after getting drunk?" Max glanced at her as he adjusted his tie, then moved to leave the room.

"Wait." Brielle got out of bed, but her legs gave out, and she dropped to her knees. She cursed him again in her heart.

Max intended for her to learn a lesson, not to be truly angry with her. He hesitated when he saw her kneel and her knees redden. After all, he'd teased her all night and had just deliberately frightened her. Leaving now would be no better than acting like an jerk.

He closed the door, returned to the bedside, and tried to lift her. Brielle was furious and tried to push him away, but her control slipped, and her hand accidentally slapped Max's cheek.

The sound was sharp in the tense air, and silence followed.

It was

intentional.

The slap stung her heart more than his face. It felt like a vice grip on her chest, leaving her breathless.

Es

She quickly dressed, grabbed her purse, and fled the hotel like a fugitive. Once in the taxi, she stared at her hand for a moment.

She rubbed her forehead, regretting the slap. Her mind was too cluttered for explanations to sound anything but weak.

Suddenly, her phone rang. It was Kenzo checking if her head hurt.

Instead of returning to the Premier Palace, Brielle went home. She had to nurse

her hangover. Her stomach churned until she sipped some hot water.

"No headache, just tired."

"Tired?"

She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, her face flushed, with marks creeping down her neck. She looked away/quickly.

After exchanging pleasantries, she hung up and splashed her face with cold

water.

She and Kenzo had known each

other a while, and she had let her

guard down. One glass of that fruit wine was enough to muddle her, yet she'd had a whole bottle. By the end of their meeting, her memory was fragmented.

2/3

11:14

No wonder Max was angry. It was the second time she'd gotten drunk in a short period And she'd slapped him. Even though it was light, it still counted.

The TV continued to blare news

about Andrew's impending marriage

to Tessa The media had.com

sensationalized the childhood

sweethearts' story, with four days left

until the

wedding.

Brielle felt agitated and was about to

change the channel when another story caught her eye Infinity Brilliance's research institute was

recruiting from top schools, and they'd just unveiled their new dean.

Alivia's face sparked a media frenzy as she was hailed a national treasure.

Beautiful,

educated, well-connected, and competent, she was the kind of woman who turned heads everywhere.

Confident and poised, Alivia addressed the media with warmth and assurance.

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Brielle's aches melted away in an instant as she watched Alivia dominate the entire TV screen with her poised presence.

This was the official broadcaster, and getting an interview slot here took some real clout.

Inevitably, the gossip mills churned once more, speculating about Alivia's relationship with Max. Brielle couldn't care less. With a flick of her wrist, she turned the television off.

She was in a bit of a fugitive state of mind, avoiding thoughts of Max, and instead headed to Stellar Stage Entertainment. Upon arrival, someone was already waiting in the lobby-John's ex-wife, Amelia.

Amelia had bided her time before showing up at Stellar Stage Entertainment, which showed she had some patience.

Brielle was clutching the script Kenzo had passed to her, and Amelia's eyes narrowed at the sight of that familiar cover.

"Kenzo's working with Stellar Stage Entertainment now?" Disbelief tinged her voice as she sized up Brielle.

Having been through the wringer with Max the night before, Brielle still had a glow in her eyes that could be misconstrued.

Amelia bit back her frustration, "Were you with Mr. Kenzo last night?" She had parted ways with Kenzo just the previous evening, and at that time, he hadn't found a partner yet. Yet here was his script, in Brielle's hands overnight.

Wasn't Kenzo supposed to be indifferent to women?

Too many companies had tried to seduce him with beauty before. After all, a script by Kenzo was synonymous with untold riches and rave reviews. But every woman sent his way had been turned away. Eventually, some tried a different tactic, sending attractive men instead, but to no avail.

With Brielle looking the way she did, it was hard not to jump to conclusions.

Amelia had never taken Brielle seriously, who was just the CEO of some nearly bankrupt outfit.

Stellar Stage Entertainment's cash flow was probably less than her personal bank account. What kind of benefits could this CEO reap?

She sneered, "I'm Amelia, a director. Pleasure to meet you, Ms. Haywood. I've heard much about you." Her lips said 'pleasure, but her refusal to offer a handshake spoke volumes of contempt.

Brielle hadn't expected to be cornered as soon as she stepped into the lobby. She couldn't

be bothered to engage. "If you have a proposition to discuss, Ms. Amelia, you can coordinate with the receptionist. I'll schedule a time."

Amelia's eyes narrowed sharply, almost disbelieving what she heard. How was the CEO of some crumbling company busier than her? Amelia had turned down several invitations to come to Stellar Stage Entertainment!

"Ms. Haywood, I believe Stellar Stage Entertainment's stocks are nearly depleted. This company might not even exist tomorrow, so there's no need for such airs."

Still fuming from the morning's events, Brielle looked up, her patience worn thin. "Ms. Amelia, you needn't worry about Stellar Stage Entertainment. Even if you're done, Stellar Stage Entertainment won't be. I'm busy. Good day."

"You!"

Amelia was so angry she took a few steps to follow but was stopped by security.

Watching Brielle's retreating figure, Amelia nearly laughed in rage. Did Brielle even know who she was? She was the most sought-after female director!

Fuming, Amelia took out her phone and fired off a post on her social media. [Stellar Stage Entertainment's CEO is indeed young and attractive, quite the strategist. She's got my ex-husband tamed perfectly.]

The post insulted two people. It insinuated that Brielle and John had an inappropriate relationship and suggested that Brielle's success was solely due to her looks.

The sight of Brielle's face made Amelia's jealousy boiling over. Despite her efforts at self-care, age was an undeniable factor. No amount of cosmetic surgery could hide the traces of time in her eyes.

Envious that Kenzo had rejected her and instead seemed involved with Brielle, she was livid.

The women of Beaconsfield desired

two men above all. One was Max, the m

reclusive CEO of Dorsey International, who was rarely seen in public. His

photos in financial papers were

reused for years, and he seldom gave

interviews.

The other was Kenzo, with a

her waten

background similar to Max's. One was ice, the other water) Max was upapproachable, but Kenzo had to make public appearances as a celebrated scriptwriter, giving others a chance to interact with him.

Before meeting Kenzo, Amelia hadn't ruled out the possibility of something happening between them. She had her fair share of liaisons with male artists, some of whom were attracted to a mature woman like her.

But Kenzo had high standards and hadn't given her a second glance. He must have thought she was too old, preferring someone like Brielle.

Unable to bear being outdone in youth, Amelia was itching to lash out at Brielle in

more

2/3

09:29

posts, but as a public figure, she had to restrain herself.

Brielle had just settled into her office when Aubree's call came through. Aubree must have just finished m

ve spooting and had seen the trending topic. She was livid. "What's with that old hag targeting you? Did you see what she posted? Utterly despicable!"

Brielle hadn't heard Aubree vent like this in a long time. It warmed her heart, and

she sighed.

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Aubree sensed something off-kilter with her emotions. "Bri, it's been ages since we hit up a bar. How about we swing by Tequila Sunset tonight?"

She couldn't keep feeling nauseous at the mere sight of men. She needed to snap out of it, pronto. And where better to find a crowd of men than at Tequila Sunset?

Brielle was taken aback. She remembered Ricardo's words - Aubree couldn't stand being around men right now, except for Ricardo, that is.

Brielle, still nursing a hangover from last night, knew she couldn't indulge in drinks again so soon. But accompanying Aubree for a night out, just to sit and chat, that she could do. "Bri, Mr. Lynch will be there too."

Dustin was in town?

Remembering the research institute being mentioned in the news, Brielle wasn't surprised. Dustin was always on the move, flitting from one place to another.

After hanging up, Brielle thought to notify Max. As someone still reeling from last night's binge, the last thing she needed was Max getting wind of her bar plans- he'd be livid.

However, the scene she witnessed the previous night weighed on her, and the words exchanged still felt murky in her mind. Was Max the kind of guy to pull a bait-and-switch with a stand-in? Would he have given her that rosary if he was truly smitten with Annie?

There had to be pieces of the puzzle she was missing.

Brielle hurried through her work at Stellar Stage Entertainment and headed home, intent on digging out the rosary. She wasn't sure what to say by way of apology. Their last misunderstanding had her seeking him out, rosary in tow. Maybe wearing it now would help cool his temper. Perhaps she should wear it constantly from here on out.

But after turning her room inside out, the rosary was nowhere to be found. She was certain she'd left it at home. How could it just vanish?

Her face clouded over as she dialed the property management's number to request a review of the surveillance footage. Without knowing the exact date it went missing, the property management was less than helpful. "Ms. Brielle, maybe you should just report it to the police or, better yet, install a camera in your place from now on."

Without a timeframe, the task was too daunting, and it was not within the scope of their

services.

Deflated, Brielle mulled over the significance of the missing rosary. What would she say if Max suddenly asked her to wear it one day?

She considered the miscommunication from last night and this morning's slap. Now the rosary was also missing-how would she mend these rifts?

She rubbed her temples and glanced at the clock. Time was ticking, so she rushed off to Tequila Sunset.

As she was about to get out of the car, she spotted a familiar vehicle in the distance-Max's. Max, accompanied by Patrick and Annie, was shaking hands with a man in his forties. They acknowledged each other with a nod and proceeded inside.

Brielle sat dazed in the car for a few minutes before her window was rapped on. "Bri,

what's got you spaced out?"

It was Dustin's voice. He was fresh from some formal event and opened the car door. "Did you hear me?"

Brielle caught the metallic scent of blood. Was Dustin injured? But in his formal attire, it seemed he had just come from a social function.

"Mr. Lynch, are you hurt?"

Dustin grunted, and a sheen of sweat glistened on his forehead. "It's nothing. Just a scratch."

The look on his face told Brielle it was anything but minor. And yet, here he was at the bar. "I'll take you to the hospital."

"Aubree is waiting inside. I saw some pretty boy with her-is she switching things up?"

Brielle didn't want to delve into Aubree's troubles, but Dustin added, "That pretty boy looks familiar. Can't place where I've seen him before."

"Ricardo's done a lot of odd jobs before and has a memorable face. You've probably crossed paths."

Dustin leaned back, trying to steady his breathing. "Let's

go

inside."

"Are you sure you're okay?"

Dustin was stubborn, so Brielle didn't press further.

Inside Aubree's private booth, several

young, attractive lads were lounging about. Brielle's steps faltered as she saw Aubree reach out to touch one of the boys' shoulders.

A vein on Brielle's forehead throbbed. "Aubree? What are you doing?"

Ricardo looked up, deadpan. "Desensitization test."

Clear enough, Aubree wasn't quite there yet. Only Ricardo's presence was tolerable.

Dustin settled on the opposite couch, eyeing the pretty boys with a squint, his

gaze finally

resting on Ricardo. Was it really just a case of déjà vu from a public sighting?

Feeling Dustin's scrutiny, Ricardo just

sat there innocently like a newcomer like a to the scene.

Aubree's expression soured as she withdrew her hand, the overwhelming urge to hurl receding. She gestured for the

male companions to leave. But one, not ready to give up, brushed her hand, evidently hopeful to stick around.

Chapter 667

Aubree's face turned ashen in an instant. She hurriedly pushed open the doors of the private booth and made her way to the restroom in the hallway, where she leaned over the sink and began to vomit until her eyes reddened.

The guy hadn't expected such a reaction and felt a flush of embarrassment that only subsided when Brielle produced a credit card as compensation, prompting the

disgruntled group to leave willingly.

The booth was thick with the scent of alcohol and perfume, yet Ricardo's senses honed in on the faintest trace of blood amidst it all. He glanced toward Dustin, whose silhouette was obscured by the shadows, revealing only a hand clutching an unlit cigarette-a concession to the enclosed space and the presence of a lady.

Brielle made to stand and check on Aubree, but Ricardo held her back. "Ms. Haywood, let

her be for a moment."

Aubree had braced herself for tonight's ordeal yet still found herself overwhelmed. She's probably feeling upset right now.

Reluctantly, Brielle sat back down.

Dustin had come tonight to inquire about the Sunflower Children's Home, having heard that Brielle had grown up there. Their investigation had led them only as far as that orphanage before hitting a dead end. The trail was deliberately erased.

The Lynch family had spent years mingling in North American high society, rubbing shoulders with the offspring of the wealthy and influential and securing their top-tier status. Yet, their domestic influence paled in comparison to the old- money dynasties.

Dustin had already partnered with the Clements family, but even they could only dig up leads pertaining to the orphanage.

Tonight Dustin had learned that Brielle had undergone a DNA test, which had ruled out the possibility of her being the missing sister in Dustin's family.

The orphanage's records were incomplete. They were historically managed by the enigmatic director Mark, and a fire had destroyed much of the documentation. The new director of the Sunflower

Children's Home was clueless about past procedures, and Mark had vanished without a trace. The mystery deepened.

Dustin's questions weren't limited to the orphanage. He was also interested in Mark. Investigations into Mark painted him as an unremarkable retiree, divorced, and out of the spotlight.

Dustin hadn't initially suspected anything amiss about Mark until the Clements family's inquiry into his ex-wife hit a dead end. A divorce was one thing, but her complete disappearance was another. Either she had gone off-grid to a place where no digital

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09:30

footprint was required, or someone had meticulously altered both Mark and his ex-wife's identities.

The one person who had frequent interactions with Mark was none other than Brielle. Dustin couldn't fathom the coincidence, even warming to the thought of it.

Noting Brielle's distraction, Dustin chose not to broach the subject but instead presented her with gift boxes. "Bri, this is for you."

Brielle, pulled from her reverie by his words, focused on the gift boxes before her. Not one, but two.

Dustin was a gentleman. He would never leave a lady giftless, especially when meeting two. If Aubree were present, she wouldn't feel slighted.

"Go on, open it."

Dustin had given many gifts before, but presenting something to Brielle felt different, special somehow.

Brielle unwrapped the gift to reveal a diamond that nearly blinded her with its brilliance. "Mr. Lynch?"
The m diamond was easily worth millions,

its purity unmatched, and its cut was the work of a master. Infinity

Brilliance, the global diamond

authority, would never offer anything but the exquisite.

"It's too valuable, I can't accept this."

"Keep it. Aubree has one, too."

Dustin's tone was nonchalant, the

unlit cigarette still between his fingers. Brielle felt less inclined to • Brielle

refuse and resolved to return the favor with a gift of her own at some point. "Alright, thank you, Mr. Lynch."

Dustin chuckled, his eyes twinkling. "We've got bigger ones at home. If you ever

travel abroad with me, you can toss these away."

Brielle's lips twitched in a half-smile.

The world of the wealthy was beyond her imagination. "I heard Infinitym Brilliance owns a private jet decked out in diamonds?" She had read about it in the news, finding it

outrageous, but with the way Dustin casually spoke about diamonds, it

seemed plausible.

"Yeah, grandma always said girls love sparkly things. She wanted to use that jet

to pick up my sister when she finally came home. But, it's never been used."

His sister was still missing.

Chapter 668

Brielle found herself envying a stranger for the first time in her life.

Had the little princess not been lost, she would have grown up adored by many. She would have had a doting grandmother, loving parents, and a brother who always kept her in his thoughts.

But alas, fate can be cruel.

Aubree was still in the restroom, leaning against the corridor wall, fresh from throwing up in front of the mirror. She had rinsed her mouth but still felt terrible. It was like a fire was burning in her stomach, and countless ants were crawling over her body.

She was about to leave when she overheard a familiar female voice. "Andrew, maybe we should head back. Your wound hasn't healed, and I'm really worried about you."

It was Tessa's voice.

Andrew had already removed the bandage on his head, requiring only five stitches. He insisted on not wearing a bandage, so the doctor took it off. His hand was more seriously injured, and the doctor had even removed a piece of glass from it.

Andrew had insisted on coming here for drinks, and Tessa, fearing for his safety, had followed him every step of the way, her voice tinged with tears. "Andrew, how about we go try on wedding dresses tomorrow?"

Andrew was leaning against the wall, smoking. At the mention of wedding dresses, he paused, his fingertips still. He stood nearly six-foot-three, and even the male models passing by couldn't match his charm.

Annoyed by Tessa's suggestion, he pushed open the door to a private booth and went in.

Tessa sniffled, worried that her makeup would run after crying. She decided to step into the nearby restroom, but the sight of the person inside made her pupils shrink.

Aubree!

Aubree raised an eyebrow and let out a cold laugh. It was as if that smile provoked Tessa, whose anger flaring up instantly. "What are you laughing at? Didn't you hear? Andrew and I are going to pick out a wedding dress. Our wedding is just days away, and you're certainly welcome to attend."

Tessa thought about the video, her eyes gleaming with triumph. "Oh, by the way, I forgot to ask

you, how does it feel to be gang-banged? You saw the video, right? You were crying so pitifully. I didn't realize you were so slutty. Here you are at the bar again, looking for men. It seems last time's company wasn't enough for you. Do you need me to arrange some more for you?"

As soon as Tessa finished her taunt, Aubree pushed her, using her foot, not her hand.

1/2

Tessa fell onto the corridor floor, her face turning pale. Aubree stepped on her hand,

grinding it fiercely. When Tessa cried out in pain, the sensation of ants crawling vanished from Aubree's skin.

Ah!!

"Aubree! I'm going to kill you!" Tessa yelled in fury, but Aubree had already started throwing punches and kicks.

Andrew came out, seeing a crowd had gathered. Tessa was on the ground, receiving kick after kick from Aubree, with footprints marking her cheeks and chest.

"Aubree!" Andrew shouted, pulling her away.

Tessa, sobbing pitifully, looked up at him and slowly stood, nestling into his embrace. With Tessa's build, she was not one to win a fight.

Aubree, having vented, felt her stomach wasn't so painful anymore. She didn't glance at Andrew but turned to leave.

Andrew's scalp was tingling with

anger. He tried to grab her, but Tessa held him tightly Andrew, it hurts so

much." Tessa was truly in pain, finding it difficult even to breathe.

Andrew's expression chilled. He swept her up and carried her into his private booth. "Jaired, keep an eye on her for me."

No sooner had he spoken than he turned to chase after Aubree. "Aubree!" He

caught her at the corner.

Aubree no longer seemed afraid of him as before, just disgusted. Even the touch

of his fingertip was revolting to her.

Andrew pulled her into his arms and

into the men's restroom, barking

"Everyone out!" The men inside were

startled. They quickly made

themselves scarce once they recognized him.

With the door shut, the space became sealed. Andrew trapped Aubree against the door, one foot wedging hers in place and one hand pinning her arms behind

her, rendering her immobile.

Aubree was restrained, her face

going pale. Andrew's free hand grasped her chin, but the action caused his wounded hand to throb with pain. He didn't care and kissed her fiercely. Aubree shook all over, biting down on his tongue, drawing blood from both their mouths, but Andrew didn't stop, hungrily devouring her lips like a man possessed.

Chapter 669

Aubree felt like she was about to hurl, stars bursting in front of her eyes. His lips entangled with hers, leaving her gasping for air. The intense battle slowly morphed into a grinding friction.

Andrew's forehead rested against hers, and as the image of that pretty boy from the other day flashed in his mind, a surge of anger swelled in his chest. With one swift motion, he ripped open her blouse, but the bite mark on Aubree's shoulder caught his attention.

He had never left such a mark on her before, and in that instant, it felt as if his pupils were about to explode. "Who did this?! Aubree, who left this mark?!"

He was like a furious lion, and with his height advantage, he scooped her up and seated

her on the bathroom counter.

Aubree kicked out in panic, but his question drained all the strength from her body.

Who left it? How absurd. Wasn't that a question he should be asking Tessa?

Aubree had no energy left to argue, meeting Andrew's bloodshot gaze with a weak smile. That smile seemed to stab right into Andrew's heart, and he desperately wanted to slap her.

This whore had been defiled. She had actually slept with someone else. The thought of her casting that hazy, seductive look beneath another man filled Andrew with a burning rage, and he grabbed her hair. "Are you that cheap? Are you that desperate for a man?!"

The last vestiges of color drained from Aubree's face, his words echoing Tessa's accusations. She was on the verge of tears yet stubbornly held on. "Yes."

Andrew's breath trembled, and in a swift motion, he hoisted her over his shoulder and marched into a private booth. Soon, several men entered the booth, offering their 'special services.' For the right price, they would follow a woman back to her place or directly to a hotel upstairs.

"Aubree, I never realized just how desperate you were," Andrew sneered. "If you need a man that badly, I can find one for you. Why did you have to go outside and pick up such sleazeballs? They're not even clean."

Aubree's eyes widened with fear at the sight of the strangers in the booth, wanting to shrink back. But Andrew held her tight. "They look pretty good, don't they? As good as that pretty boy. If you like, I can let them have you right now. How about that?"

Aubree trembled, unable to utter a word.

Andrew's heart was scorched with rage when he saw her tremble. He gestured to one of the servers. "You, come here, kiss her."

The man hesitated, saw Aubree's pitiful, tear-streaked face, and felt a twinge of

compassion. But in Tequila Sunset, everyone knew Andrew, the notorious heir to the Clements family.

Swallowing nervously, the man cautiously stepped forward, reaching out to touch Aubree's cheek. Aubree reacted as though stung, tears streaming down her face as she desperately tried to recoil.

Andrew just grabbed her ankle, pulling her back, and sneered, "What's the matter? You said you were desperate, didn't you?"

Aubree was beyond words, shaking uncontrollably. The man reluctantly followed Andrew's orders, pinched Aubree's chin, and moved in to kiss her.

Aubree turned her head away, her nails digging deeply into the sofa, struggling to push him away. She bent over, wanting to vomit, but nothing came out. She wished she could vomit her very heart out!

She wanted nothing more.

Seeing her reaction, Andrew felt an unbearable prickling sensation. He barked, "Get out."

The man had only put on a show. It was clear that Andrew was only trying to scare Aubree. At Andrew's command, the man quickly let go.

Andrew pulled Aubree into his embrace, his grip on her chin unrelenting as he continued to kiss her.

Aubree could no longer struggle, the pain spreading from her heart indescribable. What did she even love about Andrew?

She loved the way he stood by her, his valor, his looks, and his role as her savior. She loved the thrill he brought into her life, all the poetic moments they shared.

She thought being with Andrew

would lead her to the ultimate

m

paradise, but she was pushed into the deepest hell. She thought love could mend her regrets, but ironically, love itself created more.

The man who had always shone

brightly in her heart, fierce and wild,

suddenly became unrecognizable,

seared beyond belief. This

realization made her wish she could

just die.

Andrew felt her stop struggling, and his expression softened. His heart

unexpectedly warmed.

He didn't understand himself. He

should have been disgusted with

Aubree, tainted with the touch of

another man. But as his anger faded,

what remained was an aching

tenderness.

He pulled her closer, his lips finding the mark on her shoulder, kissing it ever so

gently.

Chapter 670

He'd leave marks on Aubree too, but they were the kind of marks you suck into the skin-they'd fade in a few days, not like these bloody ones that screamed of a wound. He had never torn into her with such fury. What was it about the pretty boy that she liked so much?

Aubree huddled up, her skin broke out in goosebumps, and her tears soaked her clothes. She wanted to slap him, but her hand felt like it was made of lead:

The jerk had built her a fairy tale, only to shatter it mercilessly. Her sincerity was a joke to be trampled on. Her affection became trash, the kind you step on and complain about it being underfoot.

She couldn't even muster the strength to push him away. She was no match for Andrew when it came to brute force. Her teeth chattered as she felt an arm wrap tightly around her waist and press her down onto the couch.

Andrew's head was buried in the crook of her neck, his voice hoarse. "What happened to you?"

Aubree's pupils shrank slightly, her emotions a mix of laughter and tears. It was always like this. A slap followed by some sweet words, and she'd been domesticated to comply.

She felt sick to her heart, yet her body couldn't resist Andrew. She wanted him to treat her like before, to hold her tight and ravish her with mad desire.

Pathetic.

This body was tamed and no longer her own. She was utterly powerless before him.

Why was she the only one stuck in hell? Why were Andrew and Tessa still doing fine, planning a wedding, and stepping over her to pluck the fruits of love?

It just wasn't fair.

Andrew's kisses trailed down her neck, his breathing growing ragged, his voice tight with clenched teeth, "Break up with that pretty boy!" Then, come back to him.

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A pang shot through Aubree's heart, and she gave a wan smile. "Are you sick or something?"

Andrew felt a dry, stabbing sensation spreading from his heart to his limbs. "Aubree, I'm not disgusted by you. You should be grateful."

He let go of her and patted her face gently. "Does he know you've been in my bed for

years?"

Aubree slowly got up from the couch, feeling a flicker of energy return. "I've been with you for so long, and that makes me the one who's tainted, right?"

11.40

You say that one more time?!" Andrew's eyes flared with anger again. You think I'm dirty?

Aubree was his first, and he had indeed relished the experience of unlocking doors to new worlds. But marrying Tessa was non-negotiable. They both knew that from the start. He couldn't fathom Aubree's sudden change of heart.

I've only ever been with you. How many have you been with? What right do you have to

call me dirty

Aubree was buttoning up her shirt, fighting the urge to cry. "Four."

Andrew thought he had misheard, his eyelashes fluttering in disbelief.

Aubree just looked straight at him, a light laugh escaping her. "Four. I am dirty, so don't touch me again."

Andrew stood up abruptly and

slapped her across the face. The blow turned Aubree's cheek aside. It didn't hurt. It seemed no matter what he did to her, she couldn't feel the pain anymore, just a dead numbness

"Slut!" That was all Andrew left her with before he stormed out.

Aubree sat in the empty lounge, the

silence enveloping her punctuated only by her breathing and the

"drip-drop" of tears hitting the floor.

Outside the lounge, Andrew punched a wall, his breathing erratic with fury. Blood

coated his knuckles, reopening old wounds.

Passersby watched fearfully, but no one dared to stop and ask what was wrong.

Andrew rubbed his reddened eyes, feeling their sting one moment and his nose

tingle the

next

Everything was off.

Returning to the lounge, he found Jaired still holding onto Tessa, who sat on the couch, crying silently.

Jaired, seeing Andrew return, felt like

his head was about to explode, m

re finally back, man. She's been

"You're finally

crying so much, she's nearly flooded the place."