

Master 681

Chapter 681

Just a few words seemed enough to let Brielle's imagination fill in all the remaining details, but Brielle was exceptionally cautious and serious when it came to matters involving Max. She wouldn't suspect him into the proverbial lion's den without hard evidence.

She also opted not to contact him over the phone because she understood all too well that when two people were in love and at odds, even the slightest disturbance could set the other off.

Even the pause between breaths, hesitation could easily be misconstrued. Hurt could be easily inflicted through a screen, so it was always better to ask questions face-to-face.

"I'm his girlfriend."

After Brielle said this, she saw a flash of oddness cross Annie's eyes. "Max has a girlfriend?"

Brielle couldn't tell whether Annie was acting or genuinely unaware of her presence in Max's life. Since she didn't feel any hostility from Annie, she didn't rebut every word with relentless counter-arguments. "Yeah."

Annie looked down, a smile in her eyes, but her words carried a hint of confusion. "How could he have a girlfriend?"

Realizing the inappropriateness of her comment, she quickly looked up. "Sorry, I didn't mean anything against you. It's just that my godfather never mentioned Max having a girlfriend."

Brielle kept a smile on her face, her tone even. "Well, now you know."

"The scarf last night..."

Annie paused for a few seconds before tentatively continuing, "Did you knit the scarf Max wore?"

"Yes." Brielle had no intention of lying. She was curious to see what Annie really wanted to say.

"I'll bring it back to you this afternoon. I didn't know it was your handiwork." Annie bowed slightly, a sincere gesture.

"No need. I gave it to Max, so it's his to do with as he pleases." Brielle's tone remained steady as she reached the private elevator.

Annie pressed the elevator button for her. "When Max wakes up, I'll let him know you were here."

*Thanks."

Brielle stepped into the elevator. Her brow furrowed only when the doors began to close.

In the hallway near the emergency exit, Annie couldn't suppress a laugh, tugging at her own face. She was acting more and more like Brielle.

Max was not actually in the resting room, but she was certain Brielle wouldn't check. And even if she did, Annie had a hundred ways to clear her name. She licked her lips with the tip of her tongue.

Initially, Annie was reluctant to take on this task. After all, she had genuinely earned her teaching position as the youngest female professor. She had no desire to play house with these people.

+ Harvard and was the

Her life was full of thrills and excitement. She never considered others. She even found Alivia's hypocrisy somewhat distasteful.

But after agreeing to cooperate, the thrill of acting in front of everyone was exhilarating. She planned to work hard to drive a wedge between the couple, to drive Ricardo away from Brielle, so that she could treat Brielle like a pet.

Annie's treatment to pets were exceptionally cruel. She would pluck the feathers from a parrot that prided itself or feed a noble Persian cat rotten dead rats instead of kibble.

Pets were nothing more than cheap tools to satisfy her whims. She never saw Brielle as a person.

Brielle didn't leave Dorsey Tower immediately. She knew how exhausted Max had been lately. She stopped by a nearby hotel to pick up a

what's up hearty chicken soup, intending to deliver it herself. But just before stepping into the elevator she got a call from Dustin. "Bri, with your friend? She was crying her eyes out all night like it was the end of the world, and now she's all perky, ready to shoot a film. Is she bipolar or what?"

Before Brielle could respond, Aubree retorted in the background. "Mr. Lynch, could you not diagnose someone with bipolar disorder to their face, please?"

Aubree's voice was hoarse, barely

audible, indicating she had indeed cried most of the night. Brielle felt a tightness in her chest. With only three days left to Andrew and Tessa's wedding, many had received their

invitations, and knowing Tessa, she'd

likely send one to Aubree, too.

After ending the call, Dustin sent a message. [I'm not being an alarmist, but she's really not okay. You better

keep a close eye on her these next few days.]

He sent a message to prevent Aubree from eavesdropping.

[Bri

she was calling out for Andrew all night long.]

Chapter 682

Brielle's chest ached with numb pain. Worry gnawed at her insides at the thought of Andrew, that jerk, getting married soon. She feared Aubree might do

something foolish out of despair. So she hurriedly left the soup she was carrying on Max's office desk, and dashed off to Aubree's shoot.

The set was closed off, but most of the crew were staff from Stellar Stage Entertainment who recognized her, allowing her easy access.

She spotted Aubree acting opposite Ricardo, but her gaze drifted towards Dustin. He stood with his arms folded, an odd fit against the dingy backdrop of the set. Yet, even in such rough surroundings, his presence hinted at a man born to wield power.

"Bri.

Dustin arched an eyebrow, smiling at her with his charming, flirtatious eyes.

"Mr. Lynch, did you take Aubree home last night?"

"She's your friend, isn't she? I wouldn't neglect her. After I dropped her off, she cried all night, clutching her face. Just look at her eyes."

Indeed, Brielle could see the puffiness in Aubree's eyes, but it happened to fit the role she was playing—a girl tormented and forlorn—so it wasn't out of place.

Dustin stepped closer to Brielle, his voice low enough for only the two of them to hear. "Desensitization tests? What's that about?"

Brielle opened her mouth, but naturally, she couldn't spill Aubree's secrets. The more people who knew, the more danger Aubree would be in.

Dustin wasn't one to pry excessively. Seeing Brielle's silence, he understood there must've been a reason. "I've got things to handle later, but I dropped by last night because I had a few questions for you. Let's sit for a bit."

Unsure of Dustin's questions, Brielle joined him on a pair of chairs set aside on the set.

"Bri, do you know Mark?"

Surprise flickered across her face. Of course, she knew him. "He's the head of Sunflower Children's Home, the man who raised me until I was brought back to the Haywood family at age ten."

She noticed Dustin's demeanor shift from teasing to serious as she spoke. "I had someone check into him. He's divorced now, a retiree."

"Yes, he has a kind heart."

"Not to hide anything from you, Bri, but I've mentioned before that my sister went missing back home. The latest lead we have involves Sunflower Children's Home. It might be inaccurate, but there are many doubts surrounding the home. Our people haven't been able to locate Mark's residence, and even his ex-wife has vanished."

Brielle felt bombarded with too much information, momentarily stunned. After a minute to process, she recalled a past mix-up.

Mark had called her once, claiming that a top-tier family had lost their little princess, who was possibly amongst a group of girls from the home. Brielle and Lillian had both been candidates for a DNA test.

1/2

15

the results revealed an as the daughter of the Haywood family, while Brielle was an orphan with

According to Mark someone had abandoned Brielle at the orphanage's doorstep, nearly frozen to death. Mark had sent a fortune to save her, which led to his wife leaving him. So, as an adult, Brielle kept in touch with Mark and treated him like family.

She never expected the so-called top-tier family to be the family behind Infinity Brilliance-what a twist of

"Mr. Lynch I was worried for Mark's safety, so I had him relocated from Beaconsfield. I can give you a contact number. Hopefully, you can find your sister soon."

Dustin looked at her, a soft chuckle escaping him. "Alright."

He handed off the number to his people, mentioned other leads to follow up on, and promptly left.

Brielle watched his retreating figure, envying the princess who was always being sought after by her

samity. She herself was like an unwanted weed sprung from nowhere.

Meanwhile, at Dorsey International,

shortly after Brielle left, Max arrived at his office. He hadn't rested long at Premier Palace and had taken several cold showers to stay sharp. His skin was still icy to the touch, his expression as if frosted over.

Entering his office, he saw the soup on his desk

Annie came in with a cup of coffee,

spotting him, and hastily offered, "Max, I noticed you've been working hardso hard, so got you some soup from the hotel. It's the chef's special. You look a bit pale. Give it a try."

Chapter 683

Max wouldn't touch anything prepared by another woman, so he gently pushed it aside. "No thanks, just focus on your tasks at hand"

Annie picked up the soup with a nod. "Shall I take this and offer it to someone else? Here's your coffee."

"Coffee's handled by Patrick." His voice was indifferent as he settled into the leather office chair and booted up his computer.

Annie didn't press any further, carrying the coffee and soup out of the office. She had become well-acquainted with the top brass by now. Back at her desk, she slid the bowl of soup towards her neighboring colleague.

"Max girl whipped this up. He didn't want it. Have at it, will ya? My stomach's off this morning; can't stomach a sip."

With that photo of Brielle and Max's kiss making the rounds, Annie's colleague definitely knew about Brielle. Brielle had become something of a celebrity within Dorsey International. The company chat had been buzzing for days.

When Max was still remotely handling business from abroad, he was held in near-mythical regard. In the flesh, he was practically untouchable. His interest was strictly on work and nothing else. Who would have guessed he'd plant one on an employee right there against the office wall?

The memory alone was enough to set hearts racing. It wasn't them Mr. Dorsey kissed, but witnessing it felt like a whirlwind, sending shivers down their spines.

Mr. Dorsey clearly fancied Ms. Brielle, but why did he turn down her homemade soup?

Annie's decision to offer the soup to this particular colleague was no coincidence. She knew the woman loved a juicy bit of gossip, especially about the higher-ups. True to form, the woman lifted the lid,

snapped a photo, and flung it into the group chat with hundreds of employees. [Can you believe my luck? Sipping on soup made by the boss future lady herself.]

A wave of question marks flooded the chat, and the colleague, unable to keep a secret, spilled the beans. [Ms. Brielle made it for the boss, but he passed it off to Annie. She said she wasn't feeling it and gave it to me, hehe.]

When the M&A folks in the chat saw this, one, feeling a touch irked, forwarded the screenshot to Brielle.

Brielle was on set with Aubree at the time. She pursed her lips upon seeing it.

Her colleagues seemed miffed, chattering nonstop. [What's this about Annie not having an appetite Haywood, everything okay with you and the boss?]

Brielle lifted her hand and massaged her forehead, without making a reply. She genuinely didn't know what

to say.

Furthermore, she was unclear of Annie's intentions. All she saw was that Annie portrayed herself impeccably. However, seeing Annie by Max's side, exhibiting a temperament and appearance strikingly similar to her own, she couldn't help but feel a sense of unease stir within her heart.

Silence fell briefly in the staff chat before the sleuths began to theorize.

[They must go way back. Could Mr. Dorsey be with Brielle because of her and Annie's similar looks?]

The conjecture set the rumor mill spinning. Just as the conversation was picking up steam, the chat was abruptly disbanded, leaving everyone's comments hanging and unanswered.

The admin had dissolved the group.

Patrick, sensing the matter settled, handed Max his phone. "Sir, all taken care of"

Max was in the midst of a video conference, his demeanor icy, his face frosted over. He finished up in silence and then looked up. "Is Brielle still at Stellar Stage Entertainment?"

Patrick nodded, "Seems like it."

Max reached for his coat, ready to take the initiative, but after a few steps, a shadow crossed his eyes.

Brielle had fled after that accidental

slap and had not sent a message or called since. From his perspective, it hardly seemed right to chase after her. If Brielle cared even a bit, she wouldn't be so coldly

indifferent.

A restlessness flickered across his features. Whether psychological or not, he felt a fever brewing.

"Patrick" He called out, and Patrick was at his heels in an instant. Tell Brielle I'm working sick. Wouldn't listen to anyone who tried to stop me.

Chapter 684

Patrick's lips tightened, suppressing the laughter in his eyes. "Sure thing, I'll let Ms. Brielle know right away,"

Max returned to his seat, his long, lush eyelashes casting a shadow over his dark eyes, betraying a hint of barely visible hurt.

Brielle was waiting for Aubree to wrap up for the day. She noticed that Aubree had paused while the makeup artist touched up her makeup, so she placed her handbag on the table and stepped forward to help:

Aubree's eyes were indeed swollen. Brielle sighed as she looked at Aubree's reflection in the mirror. "Cried a bit, huh?"

Today's scene happened to be a tearjerker, so the swollen eyes didn't hinder the schedule.

Aubree couldn't muster a word. Her throat was too sore, and she pitifully pointed to it. Brielle stepped out to fetch a cup of water for her. With the makeup artist present, Brielle refrained from offering advice, simply stating, "How long do you plan to cry over him? You gonna keep this up forever?"

Just the mention of his name and the sight of his face was enough to bring on the tears. What was the point of a love that could only lead to breakdowns?

To Aubree, Andrew represented disappointment, embarrassment, and a void of darkness. Once upon a time, she would've broken all her pride for Andrew's love. But what about now?

It didn't take long for the touch-up, and sensing they needed privacy, the makeup artist tactfully stepped out. The door had barely clicked shut when Brielle let out a sigh. "I'm worried you'll do something foolish." From childhood, the people around her always seemed to be leaving. It felt like only Aubree had stayed by her side all this time. Sometimes, Brielle even wondered if she was cursed with some fate of solitude.

Aubree rubbed her eyes, her voice hoarse and heavy with sorrow. "I got their wedding invitation last night. They're getting married in three days."

A sharp look crossed Brielle's eyes. Tessa had not missed her chance to capitalize on the situation.

"Bri, I'm thinking of getting revenge."

After a sip of water, Aubree's voice became clearer, her eyes churning with something fierce.

Brielle frowned, knowing all too well that Aubree was spineless in front of Andrew. How would she seek revenge with her swollen eyes and frail body?

"Bri, you've done enough. The Rowland family's down. Let's not bother with Tessa anymore I'll do her myself." Aubree's grip on the cup tightened, her eyes icy.

True love was trampled underfoot until numbness took over, while insincerity was what got people desired.

Brielle didn't know what Aubree was planning. She only wanted Aubree to be alive. Whatever happened, Brielle would stand by her.

With Aubree's affirmation, Brielle got into her car, ready to leave the set. As she started the engine, she nearly hit a crew member, slamming on the brakes in alarm. "Are you okay?" She opened the car door, stepping out to check on him, only to see the man wearing a hat, his hands covered in scars. The box he was carrying had fallen, spilling various parts needed on set

Was he an employee?

Brielle bent down, noticing his twisted ankle as he struggled to walk. She quickly tried to help pick up the parts

"I got this!" The man's voice cut through. He was trying to hide his identity, but Brielle recognized him. It's Spencer.

His face was pale and flushed, frantic to gather the parts back into the box, but his injuries to his foot and hand made him stumble and fall. His hat tumbled off. There he was, sprawled unexpectedly at Brielle's feet. His cheek bore a wound, likely from a fight, and a bandage adorned his forehead.

The once high-and-mighty rich guy now seemed lower than a common laborer.

Brielle wanted to speak but didn't know what to say

Spencer's lips were tightly pressed, his eyes red with the struggle to pick up his things. Brielle could guess he was still prideful and was avoiding work at high-end spots, fearing recognition by his fair-weather friends. So he came to these small sets for temporary work. But these jobs were fiercely competitive, and a few hot tempers could spark bare-knuckle brawls.

Spencer, who had always had an easy life, had no idea that ordinary folks sometimes fought tooth and nail for a job worth a few thousand bucks. In these back alleys, dignity was the cheapest commodity.

Despite her distaste for Spencer, Brielle couldn't bring herself to kick someone when they were down. After all, her restlessness had caused her to hit him.

"How much do you want for compensation?" After gathering all the parts, she asked nonchalantly. Spencer's pupils shrank, a mix of humiliation and discomfort. "Are you insulting me?"

Brielle couldn't help but chuckle.

"Spencer, you think this is an insult? This little scratch is nothing compared to what you've done to me. If I were you, I would put my dignity aside in such times of survival." Even if someone threw money in her face, she would quietly pick it up and buy a couple of toasts. After all, that was what she did back in the orphanage-nothing was more important than filling her stomach.

Chapter 685

After thelle Boished speaking, she watched as he picked up his hat from the ground and placed it on his head this loup was more pronounced as he started to leave.

You're not seeking compensation, but if anything else goes wrong with your foot, don't come crying to me she called after him.

Spencer paused, feeling pain searing through his whole body, and tears suddenly sprang to his eyes as he bit his lips hard. "Get lost I don't want your money, he spat out bitterly.

Brielle was taken aback by his prideful outburst. If that was how he wanted it, then she wouldn't insist on INVING

Not far from where he started walking off, Spencer's pain became too much, and he sat down on the curb. His ankle was swollen, and other injuries were beginning to throb.

Sweat beaded on his forehead, and as he saw Brielle's car turn down a side road, his eyes reddened with emotion. It only he hadn't gotten involved with Lillian and had realized from the start that it was Brielle he liked, he might not have made so many foolish mistakes.

It was too late to have regrets now.

Just like she had said once, if he wasn't a Dorsey scion, he probably would never have been able to be in her orbit. She had climbed her way to the top, becoming the CEO of Stellar Stage Entertainment, swiftly reorganizing the company's corrupt core, and commanding respect from everyone.

Such a radiant figure should have been his wife.

Spencer's tears flowed more freely as he wiped them away awkwardly, gathered the strength to pick up his case, and headed into the studio.

Meanwhile, Brielle's car was at a crossroads. She glanced at her phone-no messages, no missed calls. Her heart felt empty as she waited for the green light, then decisively drove towards Dorsey International. He should be awake by now, right?

All she wanted was ten minutes to talk, particularly about the situation with Annie.

In the rearview mirror, Brielle caught a glimpse of Spencer's hobbling figure, and her expression darkened. She had to admit that Michael Dorsey played hardball, ousting Spencer from the family without a penny to his name. Even with his grandson injured like that, Michael didn't bother to check in, seemingly content to let Spencer fend for himself.

Brielle knew this wasn't her fight, but it left a chill in her heart all the same. If Michael could be th ruthless with Spencer, he wouldn't spare Max either when the day Max would completely disappoi really came.

Brielle gripped the steering wheel tightly. She didn't realize that the atmosphere at Dorsey International's top floor was one of brooding silence.

Patrick had tried calling her several times, but each attempt was met with a disconnection. It wasn't that no one answered. The calls were intentionally cut off.

He sneaked a glance at Max, murmuring cautiously, "Perhaps Ms. Brielle is just preoccupied."

Max's lips were pressed into a thin line, and his eyes eventually revealed a trace of scorn. Was she too busy to take a single phone call?

Amidst the silence, Patrick's phone rang. His face brightened, hoping it was Brielle. Instead, it was from the sanitorium. He dared not meet Max's gaze as he answered the call. After a brief conversation with the doctor, Patrick hung up.

Max could no longer sit still and stood up to leave. Patrick hurriedly followed, not daring to ask where they were going

Max's presence was chilling, his usual warmth fading back into the persona of the impassive CEO of Dorsey International.

Desperate to break the ice, Patrick

sought another topic. "Sir, we've

located the hacker who attacked the

Beaconsfield network. He's been on O

the World Cyber Center's wanted list for a while. He's notorious for launching attacks overseas and is listed as a top enemy. But no one knows what he looks like. Ever since his first offense, he's never

slipped up. Remember the data chaos on Wall Street? That was his doing. His identity is always changing; no one can pin him down."

In an age where the internet reigned supreme, a top hacker could orchestrate events from behind an screen, never needing to show his face. For years, he had stayed well-hidden. Perhaps he was even close by, yet nobody knew he was a wanted fugitive. Patrick talked at length, only to notice Max staring out the window, lost in thought, his hair hanging forlornly.

The golden boy of Infinity Brilliance was quiet and out M had a luster to his sadness, but Max's colorless. His gaze was fixed on the outside world, lost in his thoughts. Patrick suddenly regretted the conversation, feeling a sour twist in his heart. Maybe, he thought, the CEO shouldn't be with Brielle.. Ms. Brielle just wasn't the right match for him.

Chapter 686

Brielle tapped her foot impatiently as she waited for the traffic light to turn green, her fingers racing over her smartphone to text Max quickly. She was concerned he might've knocked off early from work, and she wanted him to hang tight until she got there.

The rush hour was in full swing, with the streets choked by cars, turning what should have been a fifteen-minute drive into a half-hour crawl. The message sent notification popped up, and she gripped the steering wheel tighter. Her mouth felt dry, as if she'd stuffed it with cotton balls.

Both she and Max were trying so hard to reach out to each other, to clear the air, but it was like the signals between them were jammed.

Murray's hands flew over his laptop keys, his cheeks flushing as he caught a whiff of perfume from the woman standing behind him. He tried to keep his composure as he spoke. "Miss, as you can see from the data here, hacking into Brielle's phone was a piece of cake. Someone had already planted a Trojan horse in her system, which made my job a walk in the park."

Annie was munching on a piece of candy, and the sweet scent wafted into Murray's nose due to their proximity. Without bothering to gauge his reaction, she perked up at his explanation, throwing her arms around his neck in excitement.

"Isn't that just perfect? Who's the genius who planted that thing in Brielle's phone? That's why you pulled this off with such ease. They can't contact each other now, so I guess the misunderstanding just got bigger."

"In theory, yes, but we can't rush things," Murray cautioned, his face turning a deeper shade of red as Annie clung to him.

"Murray, you're a star. Picking you up was the best decision I ever made. You're way more useful than Ricardo. He only knows how to brawl and shoot."

Her praise made Murray's eyes light up. He was about to return the embrace and wrap his arms around her waist when she added, "But Ricardo is still my favorite."

His enthusiasm deflated, and his eyes fell. His voice grew husky with disappointment. "Miss, what's our next move?"

Annie circled his neck from behind, her gaze fixed on the incomprehensible data on the screen. "We'll just play it cool for now. They can't communicate, the misunderstandings are piling up, and with me coying up to Max, they're bound to break up soon. Though Max doesn't seem like the type to say, 'it's over, so I'll have to push Brielle to be the one to call it quits.'"

Annie finished her thought with a soft shake of Murray's neck. "Pretty smart, huh?"

Murray looked down, his voice rough. "You're always the smartest, Miss."

Annie released him and began to rant about Alivia with disdain. "That's what I'm saying they're all so boring. It's just a breakup. Why make it so complicated? They're all useless."

Annie, who shared a passing resemblance to Brielle, sat on a lofty window seat, chewing her gum, a look of confusion in her eyes. "Murray, do you think I could go ahead and seduce Max? He's quite the looker, and it wouldn't be a loss for me, right?"

No one could ever get a bead on Annie's moods. She was fickle. Her affections changed as quickly as her whims. But when it came to Ricardo, she was consistently drawn to his ruthless streak

Murray's body shuddered at her words. He slowly approached her, knelt on one knee, and took her delicate foot in his hands, pressing it to his chest. "Do you want this now, Miss?"

Her smile stiffened, and her foot brushed against his chest as she considered "Let's role-play then. You be Max, and I'll be Brielle. How about that?"

Murray bowed his head, kissing the top of her foot with reverence, and murmured. "As you wish."

Half an hour later, Brielle's car pulled into the Dorsey International parking lot. She reached the top floor and found Max absent. Even Patrick was nowhere to be seen.

The place was still buzzing with people working overtime, but ever since the staff chat had been disbanded, everyone knew to keep tight-lipped. When they saw Brielle, they remained silent.

With no one in sight and calls going unanswered, Brielle's irritation spread like wildfire.

Dorsey International was a dead end,
so she had no choice but to retreat to
plate
her car. However, her license pl
had somehow made it onto the
internet, and now Amelia's fans had
surrounded her.

Amelia, with her carefully crafted public image, had a substantial m following. People encircled Brielle, their faces inflamed with righteous indignation.

"Apologize to Amelia! Don't think your title as President of Stellar Stagen Entertainment gives you any right to act out! We all know Stellar Stage Entertainment is just a sinking ship!"

"Director Amelia has worked so hard to get where she is, and you, as a fellow woman, have insulted her!"

"Brielle! Make a public apology!"

Brielle was caught in the middle of the crowd. Her expression turned icy

Had she insulted Amelia? It seemed Amelia was stirring up a storm online again.

Chapter 687

As Amelia's fans swarmed around Brielle, lurking journalists were also in hot pursuit. Brielle's license plate had been leaked online long ago, and in this age of information, there were few secrets left. The route to Dorsey International had been a gauntlet of seemingly endless traffic, with countless eyes peering from behind steering wheels, tracking her every move. Now that Brielle was alone, the more zealous followers saw their chance to confront her. They were practically frothing at the mouth with the opportunity to tear

her to pieces.

Brielle wondered what Amelia had posted online to set off such extreme behavior among her supporters. She was unable to get to her car, so she had no choice but to retrace back into the lobby of Dorsey International. Security at Dorsey International was tight, and they weren't about to let this mob inside.

As she sat in the lobby, a receptionist quickly brought over a cup of coffee. Brielle murmured thanks as she watched the fans outside lose their minds, arguing with the security guards.

She rubbed her temples and finally took a moment to check out Amelia's latest post. The post was almost laughable.

Amelia had played her cards right, releasing her own depression diagnosis and several photos of alleged domestic abuse.

John hadn't abused her, so those photos must have been staged with makeup - a smear campaign, plain and simple. Brielle hadn't pegged Amelia for having such cunning.

Amelia was now woman scorned and depressed, standing strong after divorce who wouldn't sympathize with that?

Amelia knew the entertainment industry and how to play the media like a fiddle. In this era, public opinion was a powerful current, sweeping people along in its tide, ready to strike at whomever it was directed against. Amelia had mastered the art of killing with a borrowed knife.

Amelia's latest post didn't outright name Brielle, but the insinuation was clear at the end.

[Since my divorce, I've been trying to escape the shadows of that time. I thought John would disappear from my world, but he's back. I'll continue my treatment, and you don't have to worry. Through my personal experience, I want to advise all single women out there not to get too close to men and not pity them. Instead, let's focus on bettering ourselves, or we'll just end up jealous and fighting over a man who's not worth it during our best years.]

The post was somehow a hit online. The final sentence was a jab at Brielle, suggesting she was causing trouble over jealousy about John.

The outrage on the internet was palpable they wanted nothing more than to confront B her.

throttle

Brielle's car was now out of the question, and she could only watch as the fans attacked it like lunatics. She reported the incident with practiced ease, confident that the surveillance cameras would reveal the culprits who would be footing the bill for damages.

She took a mask from the receptionist, slipped out through a side exit, and hailed a cab. But as the taxi wove through the streets, she found herself unsure of her destination.

The driver glanced in the rearview mirror and asked, "Miss, where are you headed?"

Belle was about to say the Premier Palace, but something made her pause, a bitter taste forming at the thought she had a meeting with Mason that evening to discuss Book, and heading to Premier Palace would just mean being shackled to her computer again.

Robben her the eyes, she made her decision. "Pearl Estate, please."

As she looked at the angry crowd outside, her eyes momentarily clouded with doubt before a chill passed through them, the tested Tiffanie to hold off on any action.

ane replied quickly. Why? Amelia's already sicced her fans on you. If one of them gets extreme, you could get hurt)

et the media stom rage brew a bit

longer. The wilder the fans get now, the more devastated they'll be when the truth comes out The woman NO they idolize claims to shun men and stand strong but actually looks for male company every other night. Let's wall two more days. The media frenzy will peak, and then release the video. Amelia will fall hard.]

Meanwhile, Amelia sat in a private café across from the long-absent Alivia. Alivia stirred her coffee gently, a picture of delicate grace.

Amelia was almost obsequious in her politeness. "Ms. Alivia, look, the internet is tearing Brielle apart. I heard her car got wrecked, too,"

Alivia didn't need to lift a finger against Brielle. Ultimately, Michael had promised that no matter what Brielle achieved, she would never be a part of the Dorsey family.

Michael had shared a secret with her,

one that was enough to keep her

content to watch from the sidelines. Anniest With Annie still pushing hard, all Alivia had to do was stir the pot a little

With

more, and Brielle would crumble under the pressure.

Chapter 688

Alivia's face was a canvas of smiles as the corners of her mouth curled up.

"Amelia, that move of yours was quite clever, but I really can't call the shots on the script. Once my brother sells it, there's no turning back For now, you've got to take down Brielle, hit Stellar Stage Entertainment where it hurts, and stall their production. Once the script is back in my brother's hands, then you'll your chance. Alivia said with a wink.

Amelia managed to meet Kenzo by leveraging her connection with Alivia. As the youngest head of the research institute, Alivia's value had skyrocketed. Securing an audience with her was no simple task.

Amelia considered herself incredibly lucky. With a simple ask through a friend, Alivia had agreed to pull strings for her

"Now that you've spoken, I won't slack off where Brielle is concerned," Amelin declared with venom. "And to think she's hooked with my ex-husband, the shamelessness of it all!"

The mirth in Alivia's eyes intensified as she set down her spoon. "Right. Once the script is back with Kenzo, I'll convince him to sell it to you."

Amelia had her sights set on Kenzo's script, convinced it was a surefire award- winner and a golden ticket for her own prestige. So, when she learned that Stellar Stage Entertainment had snapped up the script, her blood had boiled.

"But Ms. Alivia, you'll have to watch out for Brielle. She's a loose cannon. I'm worried she might seduce Kenzo. Why else would he sell the script to her?"

Amelia had expected Alivia to panic at her words. Instead, Alivia's response was soft and soothing. "How could she ever be worthy of my brother? I've only encouraged him to lead her on a bit. If he can make her fall for him and then coldly cast her aside, that would be sweet revenge for me. My brother has always been protective of me. He would never let such a woman tarnish the Barnes family name."

Amelia felt relieved. She figured if Kenzo truly fancied Brielle, she wouldn't have the guys to target Stellar Stage Entertainment anymore.

Brielle's lack of solid backing was her downfall. Her only claim to fame was as Spencer's cast-off fiancée. She had not even crossed the threshold of the Dorsey family home before being tossed aside.

Amelia smirked at the thought. No matter how pretty the package was, without connections, Brielle was a plaything in the entertainment world. John must have been desperate to partner with someone like her.

Inwardly scoffing, Amelia wished John would remain in his dark corner forever. If John could, she'd make sure he and his allies were dragged through the mud. "Stay in his

After parting ways with Alivia, Amelia's steps were light with triumph. The more the internet lambasted Brielle, the lighter her heart felt.

Brielle had been so defiant, Amelia had anticipated a counterattack. Yet, silence was all she got. Brielle was probably waiting for the storm to pass.

Amelia wouldn't grant her that peace. The quieter Brielle became, the more Amelia encouraged online trolls to provoke her. Soon, Brielle's social media was flooded with thousands of comments.

"Thought you were tough? Now, playing the shrinking turtle, are we?"

A valedictorian? Are you sure you didn't cheat your way to the top?"

"Shame on you for bullying another woman suffering from depression. I'm disgusted. Maybe we should call Beaconsfield College and have them revoke your diploma. They must feel disgraced to claim you as an alumna."

Brielle's quiet was a stark contrast to the online furor. After a meeting with Mason, she crafted a detailed action plan and sent it his way.

Marveling at her thoroughness, Mason couldn't help but exclaim, "Teaming up with you was the best decision of my life."

Brielle was drained. She had meticulously analyzed their entry strategy into the market and identified points of a counterattack,

Mason and his team of tech experts
trusted her implicitly. They urged her
to rest the moment
they received her
plan, noticing how weary she was. Gone was Brielle's usual vivacity. She
only spoke up when it was necessary
to correct a misstep. The meeting's usual ease had evaporated.

Afterward, Mason took a moment to check in on Brielle's personal life. "Are you going through a breakup?" he asked, noting the resemblance to his own pre-breakup demeanor.

Chapter 689

But Mason just couldn't fathom why Tiffanie could be no heartier than to not even pick up the phone. Was she giving him the silent treatment before breaking it off for good? Or had he disappointed her on bed?

It was a touchy subject that he wouldn't dare ask Belle to probe into, He'd have to wait until he could ask Tiffanie face-to-face.

Brielle, upon hearing this, zoned out for a moment, She wasn't exactly heartbroken, but the feeling gnawing at her was uncomfortably close.

The texts she'd sent to Max had all vanished into the ether, and the one she'd sent out two hours ago, as a feeler, still hadn't been answered.

Brielle had really believed that Max liked her, but his current evasion was making her unexpectedly nervous. Moreover, that scarf she'd seen on Annie only added to her swirling thoughts.

If only Max would give her some kind of sign, she'd be bold enough to fight for him a little harder. But if he truly saw her as just a stand-in, she doubted she'd even have the strength to take another step.

"Brielle, you should really get some rest," Mason advised, noting her pallor. "If there's any news on Book, I'll let you know right away."

Brielle mustered a weak smile. "Thanks, I'll rest up in a bit." Though once they'd hung up, she did little more than sit on the couch, lost in thought.

As the sky outside darkened, and she watched the city lights flicker to life, a familiar loneliness crept over her. She was reminded of the holiday decorations at Premier Palace, the fairy lights that had adorned the place, and the wreath on the door that had brought a sudden sting to her nose.

Just out of a soothing shower, Max, too, was gazing at the shimmering city lights, his mind a whirlpool of thoughts. A lit cigarette dangled loosely from his fingers, the fiery ember nearing bare skin, but he seemed blissfully lost in the distant radiance, unaware of the encroaching burn.

He rarely smoked, only when he was feeling particularly restless. As he lifted his eyes in the midst of the hazy smoke, a flicker of emotion crossed his face, and he closed his eyes halfway in a chilling calm.

Patrick entered and stood respectfully behind him. "Sir, I've spoken with Beaconsfield College. They'll release Ms. Brielle's exam details to the public tomorrow," Patrick announced.

Max's eyelids twitched, and he acknowledged the news with a detached "Hmm,"

Patrick opened his mouth as if to say something more but thought better of it. A hundred words from him couldn't measure up to a single word from Ms. Brielle. But the problem was, Ms. Br

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After multiple calls, she'd hung up each one with a cold finality. She had the energy to confront her fans but couldn't spare a single text message.

Patrick stood silently for a few more minutes before turning to leave, only to hear Max's voice. "Patrick, do you think she wants to break up with me?"

Max had never been in love before, but he knew this much: indifference often heralded the end. This realization made his lips tighten. His expression was as cold as ice.

The cigarette burned to his fingers, finally snapping him back to reality as he stubbed it out in the ashtray.

When he had decided to be with Brielle, the thought of breaking up had never crossed his mind. In his mind, being in love meant it was forever.

Patrick was at a loss for words, feeling for the first time that Max didn't deserve this. So he bowed his head, still pectful as ever. "Sir, love doesn't always last a lifetime with the same person. Sometimes, you start off thinking it's right, but as you go along, you realize it's not. You keep going until you find the right one."

It wasn't that Brielle was not good, nor was Max.

Everyone had a gap in their heart like a void letting in the chill of the soul. And that was why people desperately sought another heart to fit perfectly into that space.

Even if Ms. Brielle was as perfect as the sun is round, the jagged, mismatched shape of the hole in
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Max's heart might mean she just couldn't fill it. It was simply a matter of compatibility.

"I see," Max replied softly, his voice dissipating into the breeze. But from his tone, Patrick could tell he was deeply confused. The Dorsey family had never taught Max how to love or how to sustain a relationship, so he was at a loss.

Love had been endlessly depicted by poets throughout history, seemingly amounting to nothing extraordinary in the end...

"Sir, I believe when you really like someone, you can't bear the thought of them
getting
hurt."

If Ms. Brielle could make Max feel this lost, then perhaps she didn't like him
enough. There was subtlety in Patrick's words, though he didn't spell it out.

Chapter 690

His long eyelashes quivered once more as he bent his hand to light a second cigarette. Through the hazy smoke, Patrick heard him say. "But I don't want us to part ways."

The sense of loss Max felt now seemed trivial compared to the devastation of parting with her. He was a businessman, after all, and when it came to choices, he always knew how to pick the most suitable one.

Patrick was speechless, silent for a few seconds before blurting out, "Have you fallen for Ms. Brielle?"

Max ticked the ash from his cigarette with a nonchalant gesture that seemed both casual and seductive. "I probably don't know that... thing"

He said 'probably' not definitely!

He never admitted to loving Brielle.

Affection was like a storm brewing in the heart. It often made it easy for him to embrace someone, But love seemed cliché, like a chemical reaction following reproduction. It felt dizzying at the start and then faded away, leaving nothing but a trail of failed marriages.

None of the Dorseys' marriages were happy. Didn't Victoria love Everett? Didn't Faith love Ryan? That was how cheap and selfish love was.

"I just like having Brielle around, it's like...

Max couldn't think of a good comparison. He initially thought of saying it was like having a v well-behaved pet, but comparing Brielle to a pet seemed disrespectful. After all, in their circles, pets were just tools to be ordered about and discarded at will.

But he had never thought of her that way. He liked Brielle's boldness, her shyness, her openness. This 'pet' only showed her soft belly in front of him, blushing at his every word. Even when he had her pinned beneath him in bed, she was so compliant it was unreal, letting him do as he pleased.

He lost interest in smoking, crushing the half-burnt cigarette out. Patrick knew it was bedtime, so he tactfully turned and left.

Max cleared the air of smoke before lying down in bed. Brielle's scent lingered faintly on the sheets. It was not strong enough to lift his spirits, but it deepened his sense of loss.

He did like Brielle, but her affection probably didn't even measure up to half of his

own.

Well, let it be.

Brielle herself didn't sleep well, having gone through an entire day of busyness without eating. Her stomach ached throughout the night, and she tossed and turned. When she awoke, daylight flooded the room.

She was about to get out of bed when a sharp pain in her stomach struck. She quickly swallowed a couple of antacids, then clutched her stomach and slumped onto the sofa, waiting for the pain to subside.

Her phone was abuzz with notifications. With one hand over her stomach and the other holding her phone, she scrolled through them. Her newly created Twitter account had exploded with comments overnight.

"Shameless! John's script is a rip-off of Amelia's, and Stellar Stage Entertainment is backing this trash!"

Boycott Stellar Stage Entertainment! Boycott Brielle! Boycott John!"

"Domestic abuse, infidelity, plagiarism-Stellar Stage Entertainment and John can go to hell!"

"Everyone at Stellar Stage Entertainment is garbage!"

"Brielle and John are having an affair. Maybe she's the one he cheated with. Go to hell, home wrecker!"

Brielle's frown deepened as she opened Amelia's page to find a new post.

"Just learned my ex-husband might have taken my script. I'll provide evidence

this afternoon, and Ms. Brielle said she'd serve me court papers-where are they? Stellar Stage Entertainment, wait for your day in court."

If the public decided Stellar Stage Entertainment's debut script was stolen from Amelia, it would be the end for them there was no coming back. Amelia was intent on dragging both Brielle and Stellar Stage Entertainment through the mud, down into the sewers!

Brielle's gaze hardened. She had planned to deal with Amelia in a couple of days, but Amelia was making bold moves. Taking a deep breath, Brielle noticed a text from the police station and promptly returned the call.

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The officer on the line said they had identified the fan who had vandalized her car and asked how s wanted to proceed.

"The damages should be paid for, or 11l sue."

*Ms. Brielle, the perpetrator is a

student. She likely doesn't have the means to pay and comes from an challenging background-her father works in construction, and her mother's ill, with a hospital debt of over two hundred thousand

Brielle cut him off. "I'm not concerned

with the offender's background. I'm only protecting my legal rights within the scope of the law. If hardship becomes a tool for leniency, what justice does the law serve?"