

Chapter 871

Neil shook his head, then said gravely, "Mr. Taylor is doing fine. I'm sorry, Ms. Kate. Mr. Taylor didn't ask for any of his family members."

"Why doesn't Father want to meet us? Even now, why is he still refusing to meet us?" Kate cried hysterically and stomped off in frustration.

I watched her departing figure rather curiously but said nothing.

Right then, Neil brought Ashton and me to a separate room, apart from the rest of the house. He had a few cakes and drinks brought in, then left us to our own devices.

I turned to face Ashton. "Shouldn't we get going? We've already met Mr. Taylor, after all."

"Why are you in such a hurry to leave? What about Mr. Fuller's matters?" A voice rang out just as the door burst open. Alarmed, I froze in my seat. When I looked over to the speaker, I found myself staring at Holden.

Holden was leaning against the door frame, clutching a sheaf of documents in one hand. He wore the same careless attitude with an accompanying smirk on his face, looking utterly irresponsible.

Ashton had also turned to look at Holden. However, he pursed his lips and said nothing.

Holden strode in casually, then placed the documents he'd been holding onto the table before us. Fixing his gaze on Ashton, Holden said, "Dad got me to hand this over to you. Everything's written clearly inside. If you're concerned about any missing details, you may invite a lawyer over right now to take a look at it. If not, then sign it."

A quick glimpse of the documents revealed it to be a contract by the Moranta Foreign Trade Association.

Ashton merely cast an unworried glance at it, then signed it without a second thought.

Holden raised an eyebrow. "Impressive," he remarked, examining the contract. "All right then. If there's nothing else, I'll look forward to working with you, Mr. Fuller."

Ashton nodded and replied solemnly, "Please thank Mr. Taylor on my behalf. I won't let him down."

At that, Holden nodded in response. "Mr. Fuller, at the rate your business is expanding, are you planning on achieving a complete monopoly?"

Ashton remained silent.

Just as Holden was opening his mouth to speak, Neil charged into the room. “Mr. Holden, Mr. Taylor has just passed away.”

The news landed like a bolt of lightning. Holden stood as if rooted to the spot, then roughly shoved the stack of documents towards Neil. “Hold this!” he muttered brusquely, then sprinted out of the room.

Neil flashed us an apologetic smile. “Mr. Fuller, I’m terribly sorry. Mr. Taylor’s sudden passing has thrown the Taylor family into a frenzy. I’m afraid we won’t be able to continue hosting both of you. I humbly seek your understanding.”

Ashton waved away his apology, then said soberly, “We’ll head upstairs to say a final farewell to Mr. Taylor then.”

Neil agreed.

The entire crowd had since migrated to Archie’s bedroom, spilling over into the hallway. Some family members were fussing by his bedside, while others were wailing with grief. A few stood stoically in the shadows, their faces ashen as tears streamed quietly down their faces.

Upon seeing Neil approach, Kate once again stepped forward and tugged at his sleeve. “Neil, has Father’s will been written yet? Did he leave any instructions before he died?”

Kate's voice penetrated through the fog of sorrow that lay over the room. Besides, the impending answer to her question was of great interest to everyone present.

Neil's calm gaze swept over the room. Then he said mildly, "Mr. Taylor did say that if anything happened to him, Mr. Holden would be left in charge of his affairs. The lawyers will be over to read out Mr. Taylor's will in a while."

"What?" Kate scorned, evidently displeased. "Why did Father ask a fool like Holden to take charge of his affairs? The Taylor family isn't short of members. Why did Father choose that bastard? Isn't his existence enough of an embarrassment to the Taylors?"

A murmur spread across the room. The other members of the Taylor family gradually rose up with one voice to oppose the appointment of Holden.

Neil, however, looked unfazed. Placidly, he announced, "I know that there may be some disagreement to Mr. Holden being in charge of the Taylor family. However, this is Mr. Taylor's last wish. He has already transferred all of his belongings to Mr. Holden. If anyone opposes this arrangement, they're free to leave the Taylor family and thereby cut off all ties with the household. If you wish to stay, you'll remain under the head of the Taylor family. You'll have to obey Mr. Holden then."

Neil's proclamation immediately quelled the Taylor family's desire to revolt. Kate, however, remained looking rather vexed. She looked sourly at Holden.

Not long after, the lawyer arrived.

At the sight of his dark suit, the room seemed to light up in anticipation. Each one seemed eager to find out what Archie had bestowed upon them with his passing.

The lawyer seemed to be on familiar terms with the Taylors. After a respectful bow to Archie, he settled down, retrieving a set of documents from their briefcase. He then addressed the waiting room in a measured tone. "My condolences to all. Archie lived to a ripe old age and was able to get all of his affairs in order before he passed. I have here in hand Archie's last will and testament. I will read it out to all of you shortly."

A hush fell over the bedroom. After glancing at his audience, the lawyer continued, "Dear members of the Taylor family, if these words are being read to you, I would have already departed. Having been the head of the Taylor family for decades, I'm well aware that all my things must be in order before I leave. I won't have any of our family members behaving disorderly in my passing and becoming a laughingstock to the media and other families." The will opened briefly with these statements, emphasizing Archie's responsibility and the Taylor family's wellbeing without much emotion.

Chapter 872

The lawyer paused and took a sip of water from the glass that Neil had thoughtfully prepared for him before continuing. “For the sake of the Taylor family’s future development, I am leaving all of the decision-making rights concerning the Taylor family to my son, Holden Taylor. Holden will be the sole manager and distributor of the Taylor family’s enterprises and assets. This may not be a popular decision, but it was carefully made with the growth of the Taylor family in mind and must be strictly obeyed...”

Minute details regarding the distribution of property and details about the Taylor family’s enterprises comprised the rest of the will. Various expressions clouded the faces of those gathered in the room. Kate glowered at Holden, a mixture of hatred and resentment on her face.

The threat that Neil had issued on Archie’s behalf, however, was still fresh on everyone’s minds. Regardless of their dissatisfaction, none of the Taylor family members was willing to renounce the Taylor family name and the benefits that accompanied it.

I believed that Archie had wisely foreseen the numerous objections that Holden’s appointment would meet with. He’d thus instituted this clause in anticipation. However, the fact remained that Archie was no longer present to dictate things. The Taylor family might formally recognize Holden’s

leadership, but there were sure to be ripples of displeasure beneath the surface. The path ahead of Holden looked set to be a bumpy ride.

After Ashton and I had said our goodbyes, we got ready to leave.

“Mr. Fuller, may I have a word?” Holden shouted, sprinting after us. He caught up, panting and obviously overwhelmed by the entire proceedings of the morning.

Ashton waited patiently for Holden to catch his breath before remarking icily, “Holden, we can always talk another day. I believe that you have more urgent matters to deal with than ours.”

As soon as Ashton said that, he grabbed my hand and stalked off, pulling me along. We left Holden standing there, looking after us rather dazedly.

The moment we got into the car, I turned to Ashton with interest. “Why did Archie select Holden to be his successor out of his numerous other family members?”

Ashton immediately retorted, “Why did you pick me out of all the men in this world?”

I was dumbfounded. What kind of question was this? What sort of answer was Ashton expecting me to give?

Fine! I thought, slightly miffed. Then I slumped down in my seat. I’ll stop asking questions.

Back at the hotel, the phone was ringing incessantly. When I answered, sobs poured through the line. “Mrs. Fuller, I know you’ve already helped me a tremendous amount. I shouldn’t be asking you for more, but I’m really at a loss now. You’re the only one I can turn to! I’m still short of forty thousand for Renee’s operation. Can you lend me that amount? I’m begging you, Mrs. Fuller. I know it’s utterly shameless of me to keep asking for your help, but there’s no one else I can turn to. Please help me.”

It was Mrs. Brooks – Sasha’s mother.

I frowned slightly. I wanted to refuse her, but my heart suddenly softened with a twinge of pity. “Mrs. Brooks, haven’t you raised enough funds for the operation? Why are you suddenly short of another forty thousand?”

She choked, “It’s all my fault! I shouldn’t have told my jerk of a son just before I was about to pay the remaining forty thousand! He stole the money and gambled it all away! Why wasn’t I the one who fell sick instead? What should I do now? Good Heavens!”

Sasha's mother incoherently rambled on, clearly on the verge of a complete breakdown. Parker was a notorious gambler, as Joseph had once uncovered. However, I didn't expect him to be quite so base as to steal money set aside for his sister's lifesaving operation. He clearly cared about nothing else other than himself and satisfying his own lusts.

I replied slowly, "Mrs. Brooks, I can lend you the money, but this will be the last time. The money doesn't concern me. I'm willing to give the money as long as it will save her life. However, I sincerely hope you won't squander it, or always rely on others to bail you out."

She thanked me profusely, her voice hoarse. My heart ached for her, but we each had our own tribulations after all.

When Ashton finally emerged from the bathroom, I had just hung up and phone and was busy transferring the money to the account that Mrs. Brooks had given me.

Ashton glanced at me, then asked in an unruffled manner, "Shall we go out together tomorrow?"

I considered, then shook my head. "Aren't there a ton of things waiting for you back at Fuller Corporation? Now that we've paid our obligatory visit to Mr. Taylor, when are you planning on heading back to the office?"

Ashton tossed his towel aside, then replied gruffly, "We won't be going back for a while. We have to attend Mr. Taylor's funeral first."

That had slipped my mind entirely. I lowered my eyes with a mix of resignation and frustration.

Looking at me, Ashton gently encircled me with his arms. In a gentler tone, he said, "Why don't you tell me what's bothering you?"

I didn't plan on concealing what had just transpired over the phone. With a few brief sentences, I outlined our conversation, then looked at him sheepishly. "I just transferred forty thousand to them. You won't scold me for that, will you?"

A smile hovered on Ashton's lips. "Why would I scold you? I'm pleased that my wife is a kind-hearted, charitable woman. If we can resolve an issue with money, it shouldn't be an issue at all. Forty thousand isn't too much to fork out for a good conscience!"

I leaned against Ashton's warm body, stroking his toned arms. "Thank you," I whispered gratefully. Whenever I counted my blessings in life, I made sure to count Ashton twice.

I didn't think of myself as an exceptional individual. As a matter of fact, Ashton's affection for me was a result of good fortune rather than any inherent merit of mine. Whether it was destiny or pure dumb luck, he was mine nonetheless, and I was thankful for that fact.

My mind wandered back to the events at the casino, and I abruptly probed, “Wasn’t Abe in A City? Why did he suddenly turn up in Moranta? Were you on the verge of signing a contract with him in that private room?”

Ashton looked at me, a smile playing on his lips. “When did my wife get to be quite so clever?”

Chapter 873

I looked at him and waited for an answer.

He smiled and said, “Mr. Taylor has already passed both the Kingston area and foreign trade area of Moranta over to me. Abe has no way of staying in Venria anymore since the country has become too strict, so all he can do is escape into Moranta. Logically speaking, his father was friends with Mr. Taylor. Since he wanted to help his old friend, he sent me to deal with Abe but still ended up choosing me in the end.”

That was why Holden had seemed so unsure in the private room just now. He wasn’t completely sure whether he was on Ashton’s side yet. Instead, he was checking out Ashton’s abilities. If he hadn’t used my father as a trump card, Holden might not have ended up helping Ashton.

Before the contract was signed, what Holden said to Archie had been the deciding factor. Archie choosing Ashton over Abe was probably because Holden knew that the person who could help him the most after Archie's death was his true ally.

Ashton alone wouldn't have seemed so useful to Holden. However, if the Moore family was included, it was an automatic win. My father no longer joined in a lot of events, but he definitely still played a prestigious role in our society.

Ashton looked at me calmly. "Aren't you mad that I used your father's name in my case?"

I shook my head with a smile. "I'm happy as long as I can help. It's one of the ways I can come to terms with having someone as talented as you."

He smiled back and kissed me on the cheek. "Silly girl. You're more talented than any woman could ever become. I'd choose you over anything and anyone."

The man was simply flirting, but all of his words found their way into my heart.

Everyone should avoid saving their compliments toward the ones they love. After all, if it makes them happy, it will be worth it in the end.

It wasn't exactly cold in Moranta, but due to the high population, the sky was almost always grey and cloudy.

Ashton had to leave the hotel rather early. After Holden took over the Taylor family, he was working together with Ashton since he needed his help quite often.

I was rather bored since I was simply lying on the bed. After a while, I got up and left the hotel. Since I was in Moranta, I naturally had to visit the attractions.

The streets were flooded with people hurrying here and there. On the contrary, my languid, relaxed stride seemed out of place.

Some people would occasionally look my way, clearly confused.

Nonetheless, I pressed my lips together and simply ignored their stares.

Suddenly, a beggar on the roadside caught my attention. It wasn't as if I had never seen a beggar before, but that one beggar looked a bit familiar to me.

The beggar returned my stare with a slightly furrowed brow. His stare was originally careless, but once he met my eyes, he jolted slightly in shock before smiling at me.

That smile immediately reminded me of where I had seen him before. Ashton and I saw him at the casino that day, and he was surrounded by a bunch of burly-looking men.

What happened to him? I wondered. Why did he end up as a beggar?

I couldn't help but frown. Yet, I couldn't manage to feel any sympathy from those who dug themselves into such a hole. After simply glancing at him, I turned and started walking away.

I continued my stroll but started to feel someone following me. With a frown, I looked back only to see the same beggar from before. My frown deepened, and I pulled out some cash I had on me and placed it on the ground. "I don't have that much cash on me now. Just take this and leave me alone, please."

Despite that, he kept staring at me with the same foolish smile on his face.

I didn't know what he wanted, so I asked, "Is that not enough?"

He shook his head and kept smiling at me until I started to grow visibly annoyed. Finally, he opened his mouth. “Ms. Stovall, don’t you know who I am?”

Of course, I knew who he was. I looked at him with a frown still on my face. “This money is enough for you to eat some proper meals. Stop gambling and get a proper job.”

Despite knowing my words would simply bounce off of someone like him, I still felt like I had to say it.

Nonetheless, He was still smiling like a fool. “I don’t want your money. My mom told me to thank you because you’re a good person.”

I frowned again. “Your mom? Who is she?”

He tilted his head in thought before answering, “Well, she’s my mom. Who else would my mom be?”

I felt like he was just teasing me at this point and couldn’t help but say, “What I meant to ask is, how does your mom know me?”

He chuckled, and for some reason, it started sounding creepy to me. “My sister’s name is Sasha Brooks.”

That name had left a significant impression on my brain at this point. I instinctively froze in shock for quite a few seconds.

Finally, I asked, "You're Sasha's brother?" How can her brother be someone as reckless and addicted to gambling as this man?

Chapter 874

He looked at me, still chuckling slightly. "Yes. I know my sister jumped from the roof of Fuller Corporation. You seemed to think her life was only worth two hundred thousand. She may have been young and easy to cheat, but I'm not that innocent."

As I looked at him, I started to feel terrified. "What exactly do you want from me?"

He looked around before saying, "Ashton seems to be very concerned about you. If I kidnapped you, he'll probably be willing to pay a huge ransom."

I was not the slightest bit curious at the words he said. On the contrary, I was rather surprised.

After I calmed down, I looked at his dreadful appearance and said, “Your sister killed herself. It had nothing to do with the Fuller Corporation. If it wasn’t because of her kid getting in trouble, then she may not have even gotten the two hundred thousand. If you dare lay a finger on me, you’ll only end up in jail.”

His chuckle was beginning to grate on my eardrums. “Don’t try to scare me. Do you think I have no idea about all those crimes you guys have done? You rich people think it’s enough to chase us off with money, but all your money was taken from people like us. You’re all just scammers.”

His spiel was not in the least bit logical. I frowned, knowing that he was probably already too far gone. The logical part of me was warning me not to mess with a crazy person.

Since I had been strolling without much thought, I hadn’t realized that there weren’t many people around me now. Outside of K City and A City, Ashton hadn’t organized any bodyguards for me. All I could do was try to get away on my own.

“I don’t care if you believe me or not. Your sister committed suicide. I’m sure you know much better than me because you and your parents had already ruined her life. She could no longer live her life like a regular young lady anymore. The three of you are the real reason behind her suicide.”

His once foolish chuckle descended rapidly into a dark frown. Then, he glared at me and yelled, "I'll kill you!"

As he spoke, he suddenly pulled a knife out from between the thick folds of his coat and rushed toward me. With widened eyes, I could only stare helplessly as he approached me, completely unprepared for what was about to happen.

I felt like I had been plunged into the depths of despair and had no way of escaping.

His knife was getting closer and closer to me. My limbs felt like they were made of paper; amidst my fear, I was simply a puppet without strings, unable to escape even as my mind screamed at me to run.

"Go to hell!" he yelled.

"How dare you, Shane?" A sudden shout shook me out of my stupor, and I remained stationary in my shock. After a few seconds, I suddenly heard a man's scream.

After I finally calmed down enough to look in his direction again, I was in yet another state of shock. The man who had been waving a knife in my direction was currently pinned to the ground, being beaten up by two men.

Holden stood next to me, looking at me like I was an idiot. His handsome features were laced with his usual reckless cynicism.

“Did this really scare you that much?” He chuckled coldly. “And here I was thinking that Zachary’s daughter would know better. I guess I was wrong.”

His words were clearly meant to mock me, but I didn’t take it to heart at all. Now that I was finally safe, I sighed in relief.

I raised a hand to wipe away the sweat that had beaded out of my fear. Then I looked at him and said, “Thank you.”

He seemed like he didn’t even want to talk to me as he looked at me with disdain in his eyes.

I knew he was looking down on me for my cowardice. Nonetheless, I didn’t feel like getting on his good side either, so I chose to fall silent.

Meanwhile, Shane was already practically beaten to a pulp on the ground. He was curled up in the fetal position and begging, “I’m sorry, Mr. Holden! I’ll never do it again! Please spare me!”

Holden glanced at the two men and indicated for them to stop punching Shane.

They stopped and stood to one side.

Holden narrowed his eyes and walked toward Shane. He then kneeled down and looked at him in disgust. “This is my first and last time warning you – leave her alone, or I’ll chop off your hands. You like gambling, don’t you? I wonder what you’ll do without your hands. Will you be gambling with that rotten mouth of yours?”

Shane was just as much of a coward. At Holden’s threat, he nodded frantically and said in fear, “I won’t lay a finger on her again! I’m so sorry for messing with you, Mr. Holden! Please let me go!”

The disgust on Holden’s face deepened, and he stood up while wiping his hands with his handkerchief. After that, he kicked Shane in disdain before saying, “Get the hell out of here and never show your face in front of me ever again.”

Shane scrambled up as soon as he heard that and ran off with his tail between his legs.

I sighed in relief and looked around. It seemed like I had to hail a taxi back to the hotel. Walking was simply too dangerous.

Holden cleaned off his slender fingers and turned to look at me. “Do you need me to send you back?” He was clearly hinting at me to quickly get out of here.

I shook my head. “No, but thank you!”

After that, I turned to walk away in the direction that I had come from. For some reason, Holden started to follow me. I turned back in surprise and asked, "Mr. Holden, is something wrong?"

Chapter 875

He glared at me and replied, "What, do you own this road?"

I shook my head. "Of course not."

"There you go," he said with a shrug.

I sighed. This man really is weird, I thought to myself. After walking for a bit, I heard my phone start to ring. Strangely, it wasn't with me.

I looked around before realizing that my phone was with Holden's two men.

Those two men read Holden's expression and caught on quickly, taking my phone out of my bag and passing it to Holden.

I widened my eyes and looked at him. He answered the phone expressionlessly. "Hello, Mr. Fuller. This is Holden."

Ashton!

“Holden, what are you doing?” I said in slight anger. What’s with this guy? How can he just answer someone else’s call like that?

I reached out in an attempt to snatch my phone away, but Holden raised the phone out of my reach. Ashton said something, and Holden abruptly ended the call. He looked down at me. “Can’t reach it?”

I tried to suppress my anger. “Holden, that’s my phone. Did your mom never teach you proper manners? Don’t you know you shouldn’t take things without the owner’s permission?”

His expression suddenly darkened. Suddenly a little frightened, I looked away.

Smack! My phone got smashed on the ground mercilessly. He threw it so fiercely that my phone got shattered almost instantly. I started to feel kind of bad for all my phones. It seemed like none of them ever had a peaceful death.

I was shocked silent by his sudden rage and looked at him in fear and confusion.

He narrowed his eyes, clearly suppressing his own anger. “Yeah, my mom never taught me manners. Are you going to try and teach me or something?”

Upon that, he approached me dangerously. I stumbled back as he stared at me in disdain. “Only someone as cheap as Ashton could ever fall for a woman like you. You just got lucky.”

I was enraged by his sudden insult. “What’s wrong with you? Why can’t you just talk things out like a normal person?”

Then, I knelt to pick my broken phone up. However, that man nudged me with his foot, and I lost my balance. After that, he simply stalked away angrily with his two men.

I was more confused than scared now. That guy is just plain crazy, I thought to myself.

Now that my phone was shattered, I clearly couldn’t use it anymore. Besides, I had given all my cash to Shane, which meant that I could no longer hail a cab back.

Since Holden hadn’t walked too far off, I called out, “Mr. Holden, please wait!”

He stopped walking and turned to look at me with the same cold stare.
“What?”

“Since you broke my phone, I can’t hail a cab anymore. Could you please get someone to send me back?” While Holden wasn’t really the nicest person ever, I believed he was still a gentleman. Since I had the guts to ask, he shouldn’t turn me down. Right?

Wrong. He looked at me coldly and said, “What the hell does that have to do with me?” Then he walked away with his henchmen, leaving me alone.

I almost choked in frustration. How could someone be so heartless?

I was forced to walk back to the hotel. Luckily, it wasn’t too far away. In the meantime, Ashton was already sitting on the sofa when I got back with a rather displeased expression on his face.

I glanced at him and said, “I just bumped into Holden. He snatched my phone away like some lunatic and even threw it on the ground. Now it’s broken.”

He was reading, and I couldn’t really see his expression clearly enough to determine what mood he was in. I walked toward him since he hadn’t replied me and sat down right next to him. “What about you? Since you went out so early, you must have had a lot of work to do.”

All of a sudden, he flung his book down and walked into the bathroom. I sat there in disbelief that he was ignoring me. Why is he so angry?

As I remained on the sofa, he finally emerged from his shower. Patiently, I asked, "Ashton, what's wrong? I met Shane just now. I nearly got stabbed, but Holden showed up in time. He may be an a**hole, but luckily he's not completely ruthless."

Ashton continued to look at me with a deep frown on his face. He seemed to be holding his anger back. I was still completely confused as to why he wasn't answering. Is he angry or upset about something?

After a while, he went back to reading his book, and I decided to just go to bed after taking a shower.

After walking around all day, I had to admit I was pretty exhausted.

The moment I stepped out of the shower, I spotted Ashton on a phone call. He passed the phone to me the second I walked out and picked up his book as if nothing happened.

I took the phone and heard Cameron on the other side. She was saying frantically, "Scarlett, Summer's having another fever. I don't know why, but she has been having fevers throughout this whole month. She's fine after taking some medicine, but then she starts burning up again after a few days. It's really starting to worry me."

Chapter 876

I wasn't really sure what to do. Since I had to stay in Moranta for the next few days, I couldn't very well go all the way back and send her to the hospital. "Mom, can you ask one of the maids to take Summer to the hospital? She may just be going through a bad case of seasonal flu. Maybe she'll get better after a while," I told Cameron.

"Alright. I'll arrange for someone to take her to the hospital tomorrow. Your dad and I have been so busy nowadays we can barely catch our breath. Come back after finishing your business at Moranta, okay? Don't go to A City anymore. Come back to K City and learn how to manage the companies. Your dad and I are getting old, so you and Emery will be taking over soon. Since you're both so young, it'll be much easier for you two to take the reins. I'm sure the companies will do much better with you two in charge."

It surprised me to hear that they were planning to pass both the Moore Corporation and the Anderson Corporation over to me. Almost instinctively, I replied, "Mom, you know I don't like all that business stuff. Nick and Emery are both skilled enough to take over. I still have stuff I want to do in the future. You can slowly give up the company bit by bit, but there's no rush."

Luckily, Cameron seemed to respect my decision. She sighed and replied, "You know, you will have to take over sooner or later. You're from the

Moore family, after all. There are some things you can't just push to others."

I knew she was just reminding me out of kindness. Hence, I replied with a short hum, reluctant to say much more.

However, my mood got much worse after the phone call. I had never even thought of those things. In the midst of all this new information, I couldn't help but feel slightly rattled. I turned around to see Ashton still reading.

I felt like I had to coddle him a bit. After all, I had run out by myself and got my phone broken by Holden. I even got back pretty late, so it was inevitable that he would worry.

Because of what Cameron said, however, I was already in a rather unhappy mood. I decided to just crawl into bed. Maybe it was because I was worried, or maybe it was because I was already tired from walking around all day, but I fell asleep rather quickly.

After some time, I woke up to some loud noises. I soon realized that Ashton was making those noises on purpose. He was practically slamming his books down and even made a racket when he was filling a glass of water. His typing was usually pretty quiet, but today he was stabbing each key as if he had a personal vendetta against his keyboard.

I wasn't planning on saying anything at first since I knew he was doing it on purpose. Sometimes, men could really be more immature than I could imagine. He was just trying his best to get my attention.

How could I have not realized? At the sight of my indifference, he somehow dug out a calculator and started repeatedly pressing one of the buttons. The mechanical beeps kept coming as he continued pressing.

I finally sat up and looked at him. "Ashton, can you stop being so childish?" He was almost forty, so I couldn't believe that he was still so immature.

He glared at me. "How am I being childish?"

I nearly choked on my spit. "So you think you're being an adult right now?" In order to wake me up, he had already banged, beeped, and tapped everything that could make a noise in the hotel room.

He looked at me and suddenly lowered his head, chuckling so hard his shoulders started to shake.

Ever since I'd met him, we never showed our weaker or childish side to each other. Despite having been married for many years, I sometimes felt as though we'd just started dating. We had been all caught up in misunderstandings and jealousy until now when we could finally start interacting more comfortably.

I watched him as he finally stopped laughing. “What did you go out alone for?” he asked me.

I thought about it for a while before answering, “I’ve never been to Moranta, so I thought it would be fun to take a quick walk. I was getting bored staying in the hotel room after all. I didn’t know I would get into trouble, much less bump into Holden.”

He leaned next to me and sighed, looking a little pitiful. “Next time, please let me know your whereabouts no matter what. Worrying so much about someone hurts more than you’d think.”

I couldn’t help but feel a little sorry for him and nodded. “I’ll always let you know where I am from now on, okay?”

A relationship always ended up boiling down to two people missing each other all the time. The simplest definition of love was probably having someone apart from your parents love and care for you.

I suddenly felt his hand on me and looked at him with wide eyes. “Ashton, what are you doing?”

He had already pushed my nightdress up to my thigh. With a gentle gaze, he asked, “Aren’t you going to pay me back for what I’ve gone through?”

Chapter 877

I stared at him in surprise before shaking my head, feeling a blush creeping up on my cheeks. “No, I...”

Plenty of times, however, that sort of stuff always ended up happening in between all the pushing and pulling...

Archie’s funeral was on Saturday.

I had roughly guessed Ashton’s schedule for our short trip to Moranta. First, he had to come over and visit Archie. Apart from that, he also wanted to break into the Moranta market. There were many things that couldn’t be done back home, but Moranta was considered a self-governed territory. Add that to the agreement he had with the Taylor family, and it was much easier to do things here than back in the country.

Early on Saturday morning, Ashton and I dressed in formal black outfits in order to attend Archie’s funeral. By the time we reached the Taylor residence, the whole front yard was already full of people.

There were plenty of people who had come to pay their respects. The atmosphere was heavy with pitiful sighs.

After saying our prayers, Holden called for the attendees to line up in two lines in front of the casket.

I didn't recognize most of the other Taylor family members, but Ashton had told me about their situation before. Archie had four wives. His first wife had passed away a decade or so ago due to an illness and was also from a well-off family. After that, Archie took over the Taylor family thanks to this first wife's help.

That first wife gave birth to two daughters, much to Archie's chagrin. These daughters both turned out to be rather outstanding. One of them married into a rich family, and the other owned her own business overseas. With the Taylor family name behind her, she had made quite a name for herself.

That meant that Archie's first two children were no longer part of the Taylor family.

Archie's second wife was a famous celebrity from the nineties. She had never been taken seriously by the other Taylor family members because of her background but managed to improve her reputation after giving birth to a son and a daughter. The Taylor family was one step closer to having an heir, but this heir got into a car accident a few years ago and became wheelchair-bound.

Such was the fickle fate of rich families.

As for Archie's third wife, apparently, she had been a reporter when she was younger and got married to Archie when he was already well into his fifties. Not many people were willing to believe that such a young woman

married such an old man simply out of love. One wanted money, while the other wanted youth and beauty. Since they were both already adults, no one could really say anything despite the age gap.

That reporter gave birth to two sons and one daughter. The sons were both Holden's age, but they were both quite the black sheep of the family and didn't have a very good reputation among their community. That was why Archie sent both of them overseas. He put in quite a lot of effort to try and set them straight, but it seemed as if that didn't really happen in the end. Hence, Archie ended up making Holden, who was from his fourth marriage, the heir of the Taylor family.

His daughter from the third marriage was Kate, who Ashton and I had seen before. She was almost forty and quite spoiled due to the Taylor family's upbringing. As a result, she was arrogant and had never fallen for any sons from other rich families. She had always stayed in the Taylor residence, and it was starting to seem like she always would be since she had no plans to get married.

If that wasn't the case, she wouldn't have been so shaken up after hearing about Holden becoming the Taylor family heir.

Archie's fourth wife wasn't even his wife. After all, she never even married Archie. She was simply a woman whom Archie had had a one-night stand with. Not every woman who he slept with had a chance to actually marry into the Taylor family.

Ashton didn't tell me too much about Holden's mother. All he told me was that she was a woman he had spotted accompanying Archie at

Gastronomia once. She was probably a prostitute who accidentally got pregnant.

After Ashton and I finished paying our respects, Holden glanced at me. It was a glance full of disdain, but since he had never exactly shown respect to me, I was already used to it.

Holden then looked at Ashton and said, "Mr. Fuller, could we have a word?"

It seemed like they were about to discuss some business.

Ashton glanced at me and said, "Wait for me in the yard, okay? I'll come and find you in a bit."

I nodded.

The Taylor residence was quite extravagantly furnished. There was an elegant pavilion as well as a large koi pond and even a fake mountain display. The yard was practically designed to look like all nature had to offer was gathered in one place.

I could, sort of, understand why all of Archie's wives could bear spending their time together so peacefully. As long as they didn't actually love him, they could have the time of their lives living in an extravagant mansion with the money to buy whatever they wanted. Ultimately, they had all the freedom they needed.

There were so many shows that centered around a bunch of women fighting over some old guy. Now I kind of knew why. Rather than fight over his love, they were probably fighting for his money and power. To be honest, I simply couldn't wrap my head around any other possibility.

Chapter 878

“Holden is a bastard child, to begin with. If my two younger brothers weren't situated overseas, he wouldn't have had the right to be a part of the Taylor family.” A voice rang all of a sudden. I froze for a split second before turning toward the source of the voice to see a mother-daughter pair sitting in the courtyard.

It was Kate and her mother, Archie's third wife, who was approaching sixty years old, but she probably took great care of herself because she only looked to be slightly over forty.

On the contrary, it was Kate who looked older than her years, probably because she was often plagued with worries and problems which then reflected on her appearance.

Her mother looked at her calmly and chided, “You should be focusing on running those companies in your hands. It doesn't really matter who's managing the Taylor family. We'll still live our lives as they are. Don't tell me you're afraid that Holden will drive us out of the family?”

Indignant, Kate scoffed coldly. “You’ve always been so passive. If only you fought harder, my brothers wouldn’t have been stuck overseas when Father died. Holden is a nobody. His mother was just a filthy escort who used her body to conceive him. What’s more, she’s such a promiscuous woman. Who knows whether Holden really is Father’s child? But Father handed the reins over to him just like that. Wasn’t he afraid that he’d destroy our family? We’ll be a laughing stock to everyone from now on. They’re going to say that the Taylor family is being controlled by an outsider. Ugh... I really can’t stomach the thought of it, Mom!”

Her mother sighed softly and looked at her with a small smile. “My child, why are you so quick-tempered? It doesn’t matter whether or not he’s a Taylor anymore. He’s only in his twenties. How long do you think he can keep his position? Be patient, alright? You’re not the only one who can’t accept him as the head of the Taylor family, and you’re certainly not the only one who wants to see him go down.”

Kate was taken aback and whipped her head to look at her mother. She was silent for a while before asking, “Mom, do you mean there’s someone else who’d take action?”

Her mother maintained her gentle and pleasant smile. “The Taylors family business is far-reaching. Besides, we’re not the only Taylors. There are still your uncles, all of whom are waiting for your father’s funeral to create a scene, so be patient and just take care of the companies in your hands. Your brothers will be back soon. Your father mentioned before to let them join Taylor Corporation to help Holden in running the company. You’re all young and have a whole future ahead. Don’t wear down your own potential

by being impulsive. Wait out the storm, and you'll be able to reap the most benefits because brute force is not always the way to go!"

As though realization dawned on her, Kate nodded subtly and looked at her mother with awe. "Mom, as always, you're the calm and rational one. Thank God you reminded me, or I would've attracted unnecessary attention to myself by kicking up a fuss."

I watched the mother and daughter with mixed emotions whirring in me. This was probably the power struggle in wealthy families. It seemed like money and influence were all that mattered to them.

Realizing that I shouldn't have eavesdropped, I turned around to leave. Upon seeing Holden standing behind me, I was so startled I instantly broke out in cold sweat.

Then came Kate's voice from behind. "Mom, I think there's someone there!"

I froze in shock. Crap. Did they discover that I'm here?

Right then, Holden abruptly grabbed my arm and led me around the yard, taking me straight to the loft. After making sure that we weren't followed, he released my arm and said with an expressionless face, "Ashton's waiting for you in the lounge room."

Seeing as that was all he said, I nodded and was about to leave.

Right before I stepped out, his voice rang again. “Regardless of what you heard, if you know what’s good for you, you’ll watch what you say.”

This was a reminder as well as a warning.

I nodded in understanding and replied, “Don’t worry. I didn’t hear a thing.”

After all, I had no interest whatsoever to participate in the internal strife between the rich.

He looked at me impassively and chuckled mirthlessly. “I hope so.”

Pursing my lips, I spun on my heels and left.

The Taylor residence was enormous. Hence, it took me a long time before I found my way to the lounge room. Ashton was chatting with someone, so I approached him quietly. Glancing at me fleetingly, he tugged me closer and introduced me before ending the conversation.

He studied me and asked, “Where did you go?”

“The backyard garden. I was just taking a stroll.” I paused and queried, “Are we going home yet?”

“According to the rules here, the guests who are here to mourn should stay back for lunch and send Mr. Taylor out together with his family.”

I nodded and didn't comment.

After having lunch, Archie's coffin was finally brought out of the Taylor residence. It was a grand and large-scale funeral. Many guests made their way to the cemetery to pay their final respects. Only after the coffin was lowered into the ground did everyone go their separate ways.

I was slightly taken aback to see Abe at the cemetery. Dressed in a black suit, he was shrouded in his usual cold and sinister aura. The somber atmosphere and gloomy weather only seemed to amplify that bleakness in his eyes.

Chapter 879

When Holden saw him, other than exchanging customary pleasantries, he didn't have much of a reaction.

Seeing him approach Ashton and me, I subconsciously hid behind Ashton as fear clutched at my chest.

“Mr. Fuller, what a coincidence. We meet again!” he said with a minute smile on his face.

Ashton kept a poker face as he met the other man’s gaze. “Mm, we meet again. I thought you already left Moranta.”

Abe released an abrupt laugh. “Of course not. This land is where I was given a new life. If I left just like that, how would I be able to see the two of you again?”

Ashton shot him a chilling glance but remained silent.

The corner of Abe’s mouth lifted into an arrogant smirk. “It seems like you don’t really like talking to me, Mr. Fuller. It’s fine. Time is on our side. We have many more opportunities for a good chat!”

Without waiting for a response, he walked away.

I sighed in relief and quickly said, “Let’s go, Ashton.”

Ashton nodded, then cast a glance at Holden, signaling that we were leaving. With that, he looked at me and said, “Let’s go.”

I followed after him and inadvertently peeked at Abe, who was supposed to leave. Instead, he stopped to stare unblinkingly at Ashton and me as though plotting some sort of conspiracy.

Terror gripped my heart, and I subconsciously grabbed Ashton's arm tightly. Noticing my reaction, he put his arm around my waist and lowered his voice to say, "Don't be scared. I'm here."

I nodded meekly and continued walking alongside Ashton with my heart in my throat.

After we got into the car, my nerves finally relaxed. I watched as he started the car and asked, "When will we return to K City?"

He put the car in drive and calmly focused on the road ahead. "Tomorrow," he replied, then looked sideways at me. "What did Abe do to you in Venria?"

I shook my head. "Nothing. After we were taken away, he didn't hurt me because of my relationship with Armond, but he was very cruel to Nora and the other women. Abe treated their bodies as carriers for transporting kyanine to Western Europe."

He took my hand and gazed at me earnestly. "Don't ever leave without a word again, okay? No matter what happens, we'll face it together. Don't decide things all by yourself, alright?"

I nodded. Realizing that he was still driving, I exclaimed, “Eyes on the road!”

He smiled and shifted his gaze back to the road.

After a moment of silence, he handed me a box. Slightly bewildered, I turned to him and queried, “What’s this?”

“It’s from Holden. He wanted me to tell you that he’s sorry,” he clarified and placed the box on my lap.

I started opening the box, but when I thought about that insufferably arrogant man, I couldn’t help but grumble, “It’s hard to believe that an egoistic man like him is actually capable of saying sorry. But what exactly can he offer me? It’s not some kind of explosive, is it?”

Ashton chuckled deeply and observed, “You don’t have a very good impression of Holden, do you?”

I pursed my lips. “Oh, please. That’s putting it nicely. My impression of him is simply terrible. I…” I paused abruptly when my gaze landed on the phone inside the box. After hesitating momentarily, I remarked, “I’m surprised he had the courtesy to get me a phone. Scratch that, I’m shell-shocked.”

Rummaging through my bag, I found the memory card I retrieved from my old phone the previous day and inserted it into the new phone. Gripping the

phone, I found that I quite liked how it felt in my hand. “What brand is this? I don’t think I’ve ever seen it before.”

Ashton shot me a sideways glance and answered, “It’s a new brand called Rino. It seems to have just been released in Moranta and is probably considered high-end. It’s also AI-based.”

Nodding in realization, I began to study it but didn’t find anything special. It just looked like it could be used as a projector to watch movies, which seemed rather cool to me.

After logging into my WhatsApp, a succession of messages flooded my phone within a short amount of time. They were all from Ashton when he was searching for me the previous day. Looking at the hundred or so unanswered messages, I was dumbfounded and suddenly understood why he was so angry the previous night. He must have been worried sick during the one hour of being unable to reach me.

I turned to look at him and laughed softly. “Ashton, next time, just stop calling if you can’t get through my phone. I could’ve just left my phone on silent mode or simply didn’t look at it. If I’m ever in danger, I’ll be sure to call you right away.”

He gave me a sidelong glance and scoffed childishly. Then, he sighed and cast me a helpless look. “No matter what happens, don’t just turn off your phone or switch it to silent mode. I’ll be very worried when I can’t reach you.”

I giggled while watching him. Honestly speaking, I really enjoyed his care and attention. Looking at the messages on my phone again, I noticed that some were from Nora, which were sent not too long ago.

Nora: Scarlett, are you in Moranta? Armond went there too, yesterday. Help me keep an eye on him. If he has the guts to look for other women there, tell me immediately, and I'll fly right over to kill him myself!

Chapter 880

I burst out laughing and typed back a reply: Ok. I'll definitely keep an eye on him for you.

Ashton raised a brow at me when he heard me laugh. "What's gotten you in such a good mood?"

After sending the message, I explained, "It's Nora. She said Armond is in Moranta, and she wants me to keep an eye on him. She said that she'd fly right over and kill him herself if he messes around with other women."

Ashton abruptly hit the brakes, causing the car to screech to a halt. Then, he snapped his head toward me. "Armond is in Moranta? Since when?"

Seeing the grave expression on his face, a sense of foreboding filled me. “Nora messaged me last night, so he probably arrived yesterday.”

Ashton’s brows drew together. Then, he put the car in drive and was about to turn the car around.

Having no idea about what was going on, I peered at him with concern lining my features. “What’s wrong? Did something happen?”

Boom! Suddenly, there was a muffled noise. Before I could understand what was happening, Ashton’s expression turned grim. He was initially going to make a U-turn, but the car lurched forward right then.

“Ashton...” I barely got one word out when the car swerved violently, making me feel like I was about to be thrown out at any second.

Glimpsing the solemn and anxious look on Ashton’s face, I suddenly realized that the situation might be more serious than I thought.

Ashton kept ramming the brakes, but the car went out of control and abruptly veered off course.

Realizing that the car was about to crash into an obstruction ahead, Ashton turned the steering wheel with all his might in an attempt to avoid it, but it turned out to be useless as the car still collided into the concrete wall.

The impact was so strong that I nearly flew out of my seat. When the ringing in my ears finally stopped and I regained my bearings, I looked at Ashton and saw blood trickling from the corner of his mouth.

Half of his body was hit by slabs of concrete, and he was injured.

“Ashton! Ashton!” I twisted my body and leaned toward him, reaching out to touch him as I called out his name several times. Finally, he opened his eyes and looked at me. In a weak voice, he urged, “Go, quick. Find Holden. He can save me.”

Soon, I realized that there were several black off-road vehicles approaching not far behind. Ashton’s frantic voice sounded again. “Go now. Otherwise, both of us won’t be able to leave.”

The cars behind were closing in. I knew that if I didn’t run, not only would I fail to save Ashton, both of us would end up in trouble.

Within a few seconds, I twisted the other way and crawled out of the car. Then, I stumbled toward a wall not far away and hid behind it.

The black vehicles pulled to a stop and a few hulking men in black got down.

I watched as they pulled Ashton out of the car. To shield me, Ashton's entire body was pinned down by the car and sustained heavy injuries. The men completely disregarded that as they roughly dragged him into a black car that was parked behind. Then, one of the men stepped forward. With a glacial expression, he took out a cigarette and drew a few puffs before flicking the cigarette butt next to Ashton's G Wagon. I didn't realize it earlier, but the collision had damaged the car's fuel tank. Upon closer inspection, I also noticed that the car tires were completely flat. Thus, the reason Ashton suddenly lost control of the car was because someone had shot the tires.

As soon as the cigarette butt came in contact with the gasoline on the ground, flames sparked to life and spread toward the car. As though carried by a strong wind, the flames quickly engulfed the whole car.

It was going to explode soon. I glanced at the car that cost millions with pursed lips. Drawing in a deep breath, I turned and left in the other direction.

However, I didn't go very far, only putting distance between the explosion and myself. Once I confirmed my safety, I directly called the police. Originally, I wanted to call Holden, but I didn't have his number, so I could only try the numbers Zachary had given me. The call was picked up after only several rings. "Ms. Stovall!"

It was someone Zachary had arranged for me in Moranta. Breathing a sigh of relief, I explained, "Ashton and I were hunted down. He's injured and was just taken away. The car has been burned down. Can you find Ashton as soon as possible?"

There was silence on the other end for a few seconds. Then, he answered, "Okay, but we'll probably come over to ensure your safety first."

I nodded and agreed.

Because I didn't have Holden's contact, I could only wait until the person arranged by my father to come over. A middle-aged man arrived after a while and made sure I wasn't injured before informing me, "The police will be here soon, and they might bring you to the station to take your statement. I've sent someone to search for Mr. Fuller, but it seems like the other party made careful plans in advance. I'm afraid we'll have to regroup and strategize our next move."

I nodded and tried my best to stay calm. "Okay. Ashton told me to look for Holden at the Taylor residence. Maybe he knows how to save Ashton."

"Understood."

The person my father sent to protect was called Boris Irwin, the subordinate he entrusted in managing the assets in Moranta. Over the years, everything here was basically handled by him.