

Chapter 981

Naturally, this eighteen-hour car ride was exhausting.

Boris prepared water and bread for Brandon. I started to eat next to the car, and Brandon followed suit. “There are about twenty-seven families in this village. However, the population is considerably higher. Every family has seven or eight children. I’ll bring you around later. If there aren’t any problems, I’ll contact a doctor as soon as possible to start the surgery,” he said.

I was slightly confused and frowned. “The surgery can take place so soon? It isn’t easy to find a suitable bone marrow and kidney donor,” I said in surprise.

He ignored me and gobbled up the rest of the bread and gulped down a few mouthfuls of water before proclaiming, “Let’s go!”

The villagers stayed on the hillside. Perhaps it was because of the recent rain, but the roads were flooded with mud and water. One step in and our shoe would sink in, making it really difficult to walk. Soon, our pants were also covered with dirt.

Brandon was used to it. When he saw Boris and me struggling, he frowned and said, “Don’t walk clumsily. Find places where there are rocks or where people walked before you and step there.”

I nodded and raised my head. There were still a few hundred meters to walk. We were not driving because it was impossible for the car to move in the mud. On such rainy days, only bullock carts were used.

Boris and I followed him for a while. We noticed that the sky was darkening. Luckily, our phones still had battery and we used the flashlights to light our way.

We arrived after much difficulty. Both Boris and I were covered in mud to our knees and our shoes were full of water and dirt. It was extremely uncomfortable. Brandon stood outside a house and shouted, "Is there anyone home?"

A black stray dog was leashed to the door. When it heard someone coming, it started to bark fiercely. A rope was tied around its neck but I was still frightened as I stood next to Boris.

The house they were standing in front of was built with red bricks and some parts were covered in black tiles. It was built in a slipshod manner and from afar, it looked like it was going to collapse at any moment. There was a patch of concrete floor in front of the house with a black coal stove on top. There was also a thin weather-worn film on top. When the wind blew, one corner of the film that had been stained black would flap and produce noise.

A hunchbacked man walked out of the house. He had probably heard someone shouting outside. He pushed the old wooden door open and

stuck his head out to see. When he saw who had come, he smiled to reveal a row of yellowed teeth and said, "It's you, Mr. Dumphy."

He rushed to greet us. He was wearing black clothes that gleamed with an oily sheen. I peered closer at it and noticed that the clothes were originally grey and had fur. They were dirty from constant wearing and all the fur had become matted and coated by layers of dirt which was the source of the oily sheen.

"I brought friends with me to visit your house. Are you done working?" Brandon spoke to the man in the local dialect. The man nodded hastily.

He replied gruffly in the local dialect, "Yes, we're done. Come in and sit. It's freezing outside."

Brandon led us into the house. When we went in, I was immediately stunned. The house was only about twenty square meters, but there were seven or eight children and a frail woman huddled around a coal stove. They were cooking something on the stove.

The fifteen-watt lightbulb provided a dim glow. I could barely make out the contents in the steaming pot. It was some vegetables and a few slices of meat.

A few children noticed that there were guests. They quickly stood up. When they realized that they were lining up against the wall, they scattered.

Brandon was accustomed to this. He spoke to the children in the local dialect. I could not understand what he was saying and took a seat next to the stove. I placed my hands near the stove to warm them up. His stocky legs stood in front of the fire and took up most of the space.

The man shot the woman a look and she stood up. She looked at me and spoke stiffly in the local dialect, "Sit next to the fire here and warm yourself."

I hastily tried to reject her but she had already stood up and spoken to the children. They gathered at a small wooden table nearby. The woman scooped out some vegetables from the pot into chipped bowls and placed them in the middle of the table. The youngest child looked to be about three or four years old while the oldest seemed to be about ten years old. They held up their bowls and scooped rice in before digging in.

The man told Brandon that we should sit and eat alongside the children. Brandon turned him down and said, "We've come for a reason. When the children received their check-ups, the doctor realized that one of your children has a compatible blood type with my friend's daughter. She's sick and needs a bone marrow and kidney transplant. We discussed it with you previously and if you're okay with the price we're offering, let's make the arrangements. The little girl is waiting for the surgery!"

Chapter 982

I was taken aback by how direct Brandon was. However, I did not expect the man to reply without much hesitation, "Fine, we'll accept whatever price you're offering. Although this child is young, she will finally be of some use. She wasn't born for nothing after all. My wife is pregnant again and we need money badly. Please help us to spread the word. My house is also old and needs to be fixed. It's been leaking recently and it's extremely uncomfortable to live here. If anyone else has similar needs and has money to pay us, please bring them here."

I instinctively clenched my hands together. I looked at him and choked out, "Hello mister, we are talking about getting your daughter to provide bone marrow and a kidney for my daughter's transplant."

The man nodded and smiled without surprise. "I'm aware. There have been people like you who've come before. Don't worry, it's my daughter's honor to be of service to you. There's nothing to be afraid of."

I found it difficult to breathe, and I thought that it was due to the small size and intense fumes of the coal stove. For a moment, I could not say anything.

They did not care about the child's body or health at all.

Brandon seemed used to this situation. “Fine. Ms. Stovall will get to know your daughter. Once they’re comfortable, you’ll pay you tomorrow. In order for your daughter to undergo the surgery, we’ll have to take her to the city for a few days. Are you okay with this?”

The man shook his head and said with a smile, “No problem. You can take her anywhere.”

The woman looked at us silently. It was clear who wore the pants in this family.

Boris had been quiet the entire time. After hearing what they said, he said to the man, “Can I trouble you for a clean set of female clothes?”

The man was slightly stunned. He quickly nodded his head and quipped, “Yes, I’ll go right now!” He turned to the woman and barked, “Go find some clothes for them.”

The woman stood up and went through a door. Brandon chatted with the man. I scanned the group of children eating around the table.

They were wearing ill-fitting clothes. Some were wearing layers of dirty t-shirts while others wore thin fur clothes. They were trying to dress warmly

as best as they could. It seemed that they had put on all the clothes they could find, but it was evident that it was not enough for them to stay warm.

My eyes landed on a small girl who was squeezed in the corner. She looked to be about three years old and her face was flushed due to the cold. She was busy chewing on food. Due to the cold weather, her nose was running and she wiped her mucus away with her sleeve. However, she did not wipe it all away, and it was spread all over the sides of her mouth and the utensils in front of her.

I could not help but frown. The woman walked out holding a set of clothes and said to me, "Try it on."

I nodded and thanked her before asking, "Can I borrow a dry pair of shoes from you?" My shoes and pants had been completely ruined on my way here. Moreover, it was extremely uncomfortable to wear drenched shoes in such freezing weather.

The woman nodded and rummaged through a cabinet. She took out a pair of new cloth shoes. From its design, I guessed that she had made it herself.

Boris frowned at how thin the shoes were and asked, "Do you have anything thicker?"

The woman paused before shaking her head. "They're all like this!"

I smiled and received the shoes with thanks. I put them on and sat down next to the fire. Ashton had called me, but the poor signal had prevented me from picking up. I could only text him to say that I was not returning home tonight.

The seven-hour journey was too long.

Brandon spoke to the man for a while. He turned to me and said, "Take a look at the child, Ms. Stovall. If all is well, we'll return to A City. Your daughter can be transferred over too. This child doesn't have any identification documents at the moment. Thus, we can only hold the surgery in A City."

I was slightly shocked. I looked at the man walking over to the smallest girl and wiped her mucus away with his sleeve. He grinned at me and said, "Take a look, Ms. Stovall. She might be young but she's obedient. She's not afraid of pain either. I think she meets the requirement?"

The child had no clue why the adults were talking in such a manner. She stared dazedly at me in befuddlement. She probably had not had enough food as she stole a look at her father, then stuffed some vegetables into her mouth. The sauce on the vegetables dribbled all over her.

Chapter 983

I nodded. My mind was still a wreck.

By the time the children finished eating, the sun had long disappeared below the horizon. The matriarch lay down some mats in the small house. Brandon explained that this situation could not be helped and urge us to make do. We were going to return the next day.

Boris was afraid that I could catch a cold at night. He forced the woman to bring out all the blankets in the house. Alas, it was still not warm enough and I snuggled next to the children.

In the middle of the night, my freezing feet kept sleep at bay. I curled into a ball. At this moment, a young girl's voice called out. "Ma'am!"

I wondered if my mind was playing tricks on me and did not react immediately. But I soon heard the little girl's voice again. "Are you asleep, Ma'am?"

This time, I was sure that the child was addressing me. I got over my astonishment and replied, "No. What's up?"

I sat up and noticed that the little girl was squatted next to me. “Mommy told me that I have to go with you tomorrow. She said we’ll have delicious food in the city. Can you bring my sister too? She also wants to go to the city,” she said.

Her words took me off guard. I pulled her closer to me and wrapped her cold body with a blanket. “Why do you want your sister to come with us?”

The child did not move. Although she felt frightened, she responded, “Ma’am, you smell so good. You smell much better than Mommy.”

I could not help but smile as I waited for her reply.

However, she seemed wholly distracted by my scent. I asked again, “Little girl, why does your sister want to go to the city? How old is she?”

She focused on my question this time. “She’s seventeen years old. Mommy says that she’s old enough to get married. She buried herself in her education, but Daddy won’t let her study anymore. He wants her to get married but she doesn’t want to. Mommy locked her up in the barn because of this. I feel so sad for my sister. She hasn’t eaten in days. But, Mommy will starve her to death if she continues to reject the marriage proposal.”

The child’s words stunned me and I did not know how to respond. Soon, I collected myself and asked, “Can you take me to see your sister?”

She nodded and stood up. Despite being barefooted, she seemed ready to walk out. I pulled her back and whispered, "It's cold outside. You should put on more clothes and wear shoes."

She seemed blasé as she replied, "It's fine. I'm not cold. My siblings and I have gone barefoot in colder winters than this. Mommy says that we won't be cold once we get used to it."

I pursed my lips but did not comment further. I followed her out and she pulled me towards a door. She removed the lock and whispered, "Are you asleep?"

Sounds of rustling could be heard from within, followed by the voice of a young girl. "Not yet."

The little girl pushed open the door. It was pitch dark inside but she stepped in without hesitation. I was slightly hesitant, and she turned to say to me in hushed tones, "Don't come in. It's very dirty in here and is full of poop."

She turned back and said into the darkness, "I brought the lady as you wanted. Beg her to take you to the city too. Then, you won't have to get married."

I fished out my phone and turned on its flashlight. I swept the room with the light and was stupefied. It was just as the little girl had said. The small hut was full of poop and hay. Puddles of rainwater could not be discerned from puddles of urine.

The girl that was locked inside was dressed in thin clothes. All she had on was a short-sleeved shirt and black track pants. She must have worn it for years because the knee area had been patched up multiple times. The pants were too short as they rose above her ankles. The girl was leaning against a cow but when she saw us, she retreated even further. She shielded her eyes against the light and whimpered, "Don't force me anymore, Mom. I'll die!"

The little girl next to me hastily said, "She's not Mommy. She's the lady that came to our house and said that she's going to take me to the city. She's really pretty!"

The captive girl narrowed her eyes. Her youthful face was pale and her lips were chapped from dehydration. She gaped at me and said with unexpected composure, "Are you the one who wants to take my sister to the city so she can sacrifice her organs for your daughter?"

The way she put it was distasteful. However, upon further pondering, she was right. I pursed my lips and nodded. "Yes. Please don't worry. I'll take good care of her."

She sneered at me. "Of course, you should. They might not be aware, but I am. Amy is only five years old, but you're making her give up her organs. She might even die under the knife. Since you're spending tens of thousands to trade her life for your daughter's, taking care of her is the least you should do."

Chapter 984

The girl's words cut deep. I pressed my lips together silently. I did not see a point in rebuking her. Initially, I was confused as to why Brandon would bring us here. But now, I was starting to see the light.

After a while, the girl looked at me and continued, "I know my sister can save your daughter. So, let's make a deal. I want you to promise me something."

I knitted my brow and replied, "I'll consider it if it's reasonable. Otherwise, I'll have to refuse."

"Take me along with my sister. I can't wait for my death here. My mother wants to marry me off to a moron and I don't want to live a life like that. I don't need you to do anything for me. As long as you take me to the city, I'll leave you alone and you won't have to see me ever again. I just want to get out of here. I don't want to spend my life here."

There was ambition and earnestness in the girl's eyes. I could tell that she was truly desperate. My younger self would have pitied her and immediately agreed.

But, I hesitated. After all, this place was utterly alien to me, and so was this girl. I had no idea what went on between she and her parents. Before I could figure out why they were keeping her prisoner, I could not interfere recklessly as an outsider. The consequences could be dire.

I looked at her and said calmly, “I can take you. But, I have to know why do you want to leave this place and why are you being locked inside here? One more thing, will your parent allow you to go off like this. Without your parents’ permission, I could be causing trouble for myself by taking you with me. If you really care for your sister, you shouldn’t use her as a bargaining chip. You know that we’ll pay for your sister’s sacrifice. This is a fair transaction. However, you have requested my help and my moral side would likely oblige. If everything is in check, I’ll agree to that!”

She hugged her bony body and smiled coldly as she scoffed. “You city folk sure know how to extol morals. You disregarded a life once you ascertained that it’ll be able to save your daughter. How cruel is that! Fine, drawing the lines clearly shows that you’re a rational person. I’ll tell you everything.”

I was not an unreasonable person. However, once I finished hearing what the girl had to say, I was rather shocked. Her name was Ann and she was the eldest daughter in her family.

In this remote mountain village, there were not many other ways to earn money other than tending to the fields. However, four or five years ago, the country’s plan to increase led the villagers to come up with a new way to earn money. They would pad their pockets by having more children.

At some point in time, a few outsiders came to take some children away. In return, they paid the parents tens of thousands in living expenses. Since they were all village children, many did not have identification documents. However, some children were sent back, while others were not.

Those that came back were considered lucky. Even though their health had deteriorated, at least they were back. The families of those that did not return would receive a few hundred thousand. It was as though they were paying for the life of that child, but the fate of that child remained a mystery.

Every family had about seven or eight children. Hence, the loss of one or two did not make much of an impact because they could always give birth to more. As such, no one cared about the children if they returned and fell sick or found out from them about what they had been through.

Several families moved away from the village after they made more money from this trade. The families that stayed either had not met a generous buyer or the wives could no longer give birth anymore and they did not have the heart to trade in their healthy children for money. Thus, it was easier to spend their days tending the field.

As I listened to her explanation, my heart went out to her. She sneered at me and derided, "Don't you think those people are ridiculous? You saw for yourself. My mother had nine children and I'm the oldest of the lot. The older ones like me are of no use for the trade, which is why she wants to marry me off and gain a small sum of dowry. She served me up to a moron for a measly amount of money. If I hadn't gone to school and seen how children from other places lived, I might have resigned myself to my fate. But, I have seen how the other children of my age live, and the kind of families they have. I can't stand it. It's not fair that she gets to decide how the rest of my life goes and seal my fate by sending me to my doom. I want to leave this place and never come back."

Chapter 985

I pursed my lips. Seeing her resentful expression, I felt complicated, not knowing how to console her. Yet, it didn't seem like she needed my consolation either.

After a while, I spoke up, "I totally understand how you feel, and I empathize with you, but this is just your side of the story. Besides, I shouldn't stir up trouble in this place."

Hearing that, she sneered, "Whatever! I know it's just your excuse. It's fine if you're unwilling to help me out, but I will never marry him. I am the master of my fate; no one gets to decide my future for me."

It was late already, and my phone almost ran out of battery. I left the cowshed, with Amy following suit as she locked it.

After hesitating for a while, I asked, "Isn't there anything to eat at home? Why didn't you prepare some food for your sister?"

The little girl replied, "Nope, there's nothing to eat. We don't even have leftovers if my mom doesn't prepare food for Ann, so she could only starve."

Back in the room, I couldn't seem to sleep.

Ann's words kept playing in my mind. No wonder Brandon was so familiar with this village. It turned out that it was not his first time visiting this place. I wondered how many children had died at this man's hand.

That night, I didn't manage to sleep well. At dawn, when I almost drifted off to sleep, I was awakened by the sound of people quarreling noisily from outside.

Ronald and the children were not in the house. After getting out of bed, I smoothed out my clothes and saw that wet shoes were dried by the fireplace. Just then, Amy came rushing in with her tear-stricken face. She dragged me out of the house though I was still putting on my shoes. "Ms. Stovall, please save my sister. She's almost beaten to death by my mom."

In my daze, I followed Amy out to find Ann sprawling on the ground outside the cowshed. The cow dung soiled her shabby clothes. The poor young lady was rolling over the ground as her mother hit her with an iron rod. Since it rained yesterday, there were blackish water puddles of rainwater mixed with coal all over the ground. It seemed like Ann was injured; her already scruffy clothes were smeared with blood.

"You're a burden to the family! It's a waste of food to feed you. You should be grateful when we let you live until now. How dare you injure your brother! I'll beat you to death! That will teach you a lesson!" The woman, who behaved meek and submissive yesterday, unhesitatingly struck her daughter with the iron rod.

Amy was pleading with me earnestly, and it was heartbreaking to see Ann whimpering in pain. I wanted to stop that woman, yet Boris halted me. He slightly shook his head at me, signaling me not to stir up trouble for myself.

Ann was in a terrible condition, yet Ronald, the man who was supposed to be here to stop his wife, was nowhere to be seen. I crouched down before Amy and asked, "Amy, tell me what happened? Where is your father?"

The latter was crying her heart out seeing her sister being beaten up. "Ann injured my brother. My dad just sent him to the hospital. My mom said she is going to kill Ann if anything happens to my brother. Ms. Stovall, please save her!" she choked out.

At that moment, I was stumped, for it was not my place to meddle in the siblings' conflict. Fortunately, that woman grew tired of beating Ann. Pointing at the young lady, she scolded, "If you weren't worth some money. I would've beaten you to death. Don't you ever try to run away from the village! If anyone dares help you escape, I will chop them with a cleaver. I have accepted the dowry from the Leeroy family, so you have no choice but to marry their son!"

Ann glared at her mother, her eyes full of hatred and hostility. "I won't let you ruin my life! I'd rather die than marry that retard! And also, I never regret injuring your son because he deserves it! He has always bullied me. I won't let you use the dowry for his university fees. He is nothing but a useless prick, and he will never succeed in life! I'll wait and see you guys rot in this slum!"

“You little b*tch!” the woman cursed. “How dare you curse my son! Do you really think you could change your fate just because you’ve received an education? Dream on! You only deserve to be someone else’s maid. I know you’re very ambitious, but don’t you ever dream of abandoning us for the city! And you even dare to curse my son! Hmph! I will make sure you live a miserable life!”

I was at a loss seeing how the mother was swearing like a trooper at her daughter. Despite having blood ties, the two were at daggers drawn. That woman was treating her daughter like her enemy.

I thought every parent would love their children and wish for the best for them. Yet, this woman in front of me didn’t even deserve to be a mother.

Chapter 986

Ann was badly beaten and left to die in the cowshed. After that, that woman pretended as if nothing untoward had happened as she bragged with the onlookers about how good she was in disciplining her daughter.

Her other children kept their heads down, their bodies shivering in fear. They were badly frightened to see their mother hitting their eldest sister with that iron rod. As for Amy, the little girl was sobbing, yet she dared not utter a single word.

After dismissing the crowd, that woman invited us, “My husband asked me to prepare food for you. You should join us for lunch. Today is that little bi*ch’s big day, and we will be inviting the village folks to the house. Why don’t you guys stay for dinner before leaving?”

I was still in a state of shock while Boris uttered a response, accepting the invitation. Seeing Amy holding my hand, the woman smiled broadly. “Ms. Stovall, it looks like Amy gets along pretty well with you. That’s great!”

I forced a smile in response. At the same time, my heart was overwhelmed with mixed emotions.

I had no idea if that woman knew Amy was going to become my daughter’s organ donor. Does she know how painful it is to donate bone marrow? Has she ever thought of how helpless her daughter will feel on the operating table? Does she even care about what her daughter will be facing?

Or, perhaps she doesn’t care at all. All she cares about is the money she can get from “selling” her daughter.

The village had a poor signal. Thus, I didn’t receive a reply message from Ashton since last night. That afternoon, Brandon had a walk around the village while that woman was busy preparing lunch.

It was no longer raining. The woman asked her children to sweep the water off the small patch of the cement floor and carried the small table and chairs out of the house. Since the table couldn't fit all of them, she asked the children to borrow a table from the neighbor. When everything was set, she started serving lunch.

Meanwhile, Amy was holding my hand, whispering in my ears, "Ms. Stovall, Ann asked if you could bring her along with you?"

I was at a loss for words. After all, I was not a local. I couldn't possibly take Ann away with me. Even if she sneaked out with me, I was afraid the villagers might find out about it before we even get to leave the village.

Amy was upset when she saw me frowning my brows. Nevertheless, she sneaked out to find Ann. Although I knew the sisters would be disappointed, I still didn't agree to their request.

After all, I was pregnant with a baby. I couldn't afford to put myself and the baby in danger. If I stirred up any trouble, Boris alone might not be able to protect me.

Soon, Ronald was back in his motorbike. Riding the pillion was a tall teenager with tanned skin. His gaze was cold and... lecherous?

How could a teenager have such a nasty gaze? I must have seen it wrongly, or I'm just overthinking. I furrowed my brows and shook the thought off my mind.

Meanwhile, Ronald helped the teenager get off the motorbike. His wife rushed up to the teenager and carried him on her back as if she had done it a million times. "Oh, my baby boy, what did the doctor say about your injury? Are you alright?"

With his brows knotted, Ronald said unhappily, "Ann wanted to end our family line when she kicked our son hard in the nuts. Fortunately, the doctor said he will recover. Carry him into the house and take good care of him. I'll go find Ann and teach that little b*ith a lesson!"

I was shocked to hear such nasty and humiliating words from a father.

That woman couldn't agree more with her husband. "The Leeroy family will be here soon. If today was not her big day, you would've beaten that b*tch to death for what she did!" she said viciously.

Ronald opened the gate of the cowshed. He didn't enter but berated his daughter at the entrance, "Ann Weeder, you almost ended our family line! He is your brother! How could you do that to him?"

Ann's laughter, which carried with it a tinge of bitterness, was heard from inside the cowshed. "Why didn't you ask me the reason for me doing that to him? He is your son, but am I not your daughter? Do I deserve to be treated like dirt? Ronald Weeder, you treat your son as if he's the king, and

we are his maids. You wouldn't hesitate to exploit and sell your daughters for him. Karma will get you!"

Ronald paid no heed to his daughter's words. He uttered harshly, "Don't cause any more trouble! It's your fate to marry that intellectually disabled son of the Leeroy family. Your life will only be meaningful after you get pregnant and give birth to a boy. You have no choice but to marry that man, or you can choose to die out there. There is no place for you anymore in this family."

Is that what a father is supposed to say to his daughter? In the cowshed, Ann let out a bitter laugh that sounded sorrowful to me.

After scolding his daughter, Ronald went back into the house. He even smiled at us when he walked past us. At that moment, I felt awful.

Chapter 987

Being frightened, the rest of the girls stood meekly by the side as Ronald entered the house. Then, they continued helping their mother in the kitchen. I could already tell their fate; these poor little girls would eventually end up like Ann.

I'm not a saint. Even if I could save Ann, I couldn't possibly save the rest of the girls.

The few families in the village had all come to the house. There were two dishes—Shepherd's pie and Caesar salad. Since there were not enough seats, the guests took turns eating at the table. After that, the women gather around and shot the breeze while taking care of their children.

Brandon was back soon. One of the villagers came up to him and asked, "Mr. Dumphy, do you still have other clients? I have five children, and all of them are very healthy."

Brandon frowned slightly while he replied, "Not for now. Don't worry. I will inform you guys when there is a need."

These people have no scruples about selling their children for money! I could barely contain myself when Boris whispered to me, "Don't think too much. Everyone has their own way of living. They might be forced, or they do it as a matter of course. This is none of our business. Remember, you need to take care of your safety."

Hearing that, I pursed my lips and lowered my head.

After the meal, the bridal car—a dusty white van arrived to fetch the bride. In fact, if it wasn't for the flower garland that was dangling from the rear-view mirror, no one would know it was a wedding car.

Soon after, Ronald dragged Ann out of the cowshed. Everyone was shocked by the bride's slovenly and disheveled appearance.

Ann looked at me when she was being dragged into the house. She didn't call for help nor make any resentful remarks. Yet, I felt unsettled under the young lady's innocent gaze. At that instant, I was eaten up by guilt.

Gazing at me, Boris advised, "Ms. Stovall, we're only here for Amy. That's none of our business. We shouldn't interfere at all."

Hearing that, I pursed my lips. If Ashton was here, perhaps I could do as I wished. Yet, even if I could save Ann, I couldn't possibly save the other girls that might end up just like her. They could rely on no one but themselves to change their fate.

Soon, Ann came out of the house in a threadbare red suit and black pants. Her messy hair was now neatly combed, styled with a bunch of flowers.

Ronald and his wife helped her out of the house and handed her to the two men waiting to fetch the bride. Grabbing her arms, the two men brought her into the van.

The crowd all had bright smiles on their faces to express the joy of witnessing the wedding. No one seemed to have noticed Ann's sorrow. Or rather, no one cared about it.

After the van drove off, only then did the woman let her other daughters have their food and instructed them to clean the house after the guests left. Then, she and Ronald started exchanging inexhaustible pleasantries with Brandon and me.

Before we left, Brandon handed Ronald an envelope with about twenty thousand cash inside. "Take this money first. If the operation is successful, Ms. Stovall will thank you again."

Holding the envelope, the two of them were elated as they thanked me profusely.

I was at a loss when suddenly, I felt warmth in my hand. I lowered my head to see Amy stuck her hand in mine. The little girl asked, "Ms. Stovall, are we leaving now?"

My heart ached to hear that. How horrible this family must be when even a five-year-old kid would want to leave without any hesitation.

"We're leaving immediately." With that, I led Amy to where our car was being parked, leaving Brandon to communicate with Ronald and his wife.

The road was in poor condition, with the muddy and uneven road surface. When we reached the car, Boris opened the boot and took out the presents we bought on our way here. He handed one of them to Amy and the rest to the girls who followed us to the car.

Being a man of few words, he got into the car after distributing the gifts. Through the girls' eyes, I could see their reluctance to part with Amy and their envy for her, for the latter could finally leave the family.

When Ronald saw the gifts in the girls' hands, he cast his eyes at me and made a meaningful remark, "There is no use in giving those gifts. They can only count on themselves to change their own fate. Let's go. We need to head back to A City."

In the car, I sat with Amy in the rear seat. The little girl was excited as she kept casting her eyes outside the car window. It seemed to be her first time riding a car. From the smile on her face, I could tell that she was happy.

Chapter 988

When the village vanished from sight, I heard Amy heaving a sigh of relief.

Instead of feeling sad, the little girl was relieved to leave her parents. I felt my heart being tied into a knot upon that realization.

There was a better signal as the car drove onto the highway. Instantly, Ashton's messages popped up on the screen, asking me where I was and what I was doing.

I gave him a call, and it went through in no time. "Why couldn't I reach you the entire night? Who are you with and where are you?" he asked with his voice full of concern.

After answering all of his questions, I shifted my eyes to Amy, who had fallen asleep next to me, and fell silent. After some hesitation, I spoke up, "Ashton, I found a kid whose blood and tissue type is compatible with Summer's, but... but she's only five years old."

The other end of the line was silent. Feeling agitated, I quickly explained, "It's not what you think! I didn't do anything illegal. I'll bring her back to A City, and then only we decide what to do. Wait till I come home and talk to you about it, okay?"

Ashton was a highly moral and ethical man. I knew he wouldn't agree to let a five-year-old kid donate her organ to Summer. After all, Amy was too young, and her body was still developing. The risk of being a living donor was high. Even if she was a matching donor, she might have to face the possible sequelae and negative effects of organ donation.

Nevertheless, I had decided to take Amy with me after seeing the harsh treatment the girls received in her family. It would be better if she could stay with Ashton and me. Even if we couldn't adopt her, she could still live a better life in an orphanage than in that village.

I didn't know if it was the right thing to do. I couldn't save Ann, yet I had the chance to help Amy escape that village.

After a long silence, Ashton said in a solemn voice, "Scarlett, I know you're worried about Summer. But, promise me you won't harm anyone, alright?"

I nodded. "Alright. I promise you. Trust me!"

"Of course, I trust you," Ashton said in a loving tone.

I knew Ashton was worried that I might lose rationality and throw propriety to the wind. I was now stuck in an insoluble dilemma. On the one hand, I would do whatever it took to save Summer. On the other hand, if Amy happened to be the perfect donor, I might not have the heart to sacrifice that little girl to save my own daughter. Both of them were innocent kids. I knew that once Amy underwent the transplant surgery, the damage done to her body was irreversible.

I chatted with Ashton for a while before ending the call. That was when I noticed Amy was looking at me with her bright eyes. Thinking the little girl was hungry, I said softly, "We'll arrive home soon. Are you hungry?"

She shook her head while holding the bread and the bottle of water. Gazing at me, she asked, "Ms. Stovall, we've come a long way. Why haven't I seen the van that took Ann away? There are a lot of cars on the road, but none of them is that van. Where did she go? Can I still see her again?"

Hearing that, I was at a loss. Initially, I thought Amy was curious about the outside world, looking at the passing scenery outside the window. It turned out the little girl was looking for the van that took her sister away.

At that instant, I couldn't help but feel upset. "Amy, your sister is going to become someone else's wife," I said as I suppressed my emotion, "she has married into another family, but I don't know where they live."

Hearing my reply, Amy lowered her head, fixing her eyes on the bread. I fell into silence, not knowing how to console the disappointed little girl.

Just then, Boris, who was behind the wheel, said, "Ms. Stovall, you should get some rest. There are still a few hours of journey. I will wake you up when we arrive."

Feeling perturbed, I couldn't sleep. "Boris, does this happen in all the villages here? How could they treat their children so differently?" I asked.

That woman's eyes were full of love for her son when she carried him on her back. In contrast, her daughters lived no better than a rat in that house.

Keeping his eyes on the road, Boris let out a sigh. "There are a lot of people suffering in this world. Everyone has their own hardships and perils in life."

Everyone was born with different destinies. Those who were born with a silver spoon in their mouth could live a good life. Whereas those who were born in a family living in uncivilized and remote villages should be grateful when they could even survive.

It was already late at night by the time we arrived at the villa. Ashton was sitting near a space heater in the living room with a book in his hands, waiting for my return.

Chapter 989

Boris left after he sent us back home. Holding Amy's hand, I led her into the villa. Ashton stood up the moment he saw us. Seeing the man with a strong aura, Amy took a step backward and hid behind me.

With a gentle smile, I comforted the little girl that she need not be afraid of Ashton.

Gazing at me, Ashton asked, "Have you had dinner?"

I shook my head. "I didn't eat anything during the eight hours journey. Have you eaten yet?"

“I’m waiting for you,” was his reply. Then, he shifted his gaze to Amy.

Seeing that, I introduced Amy to him, “This is the kid I told you. Her name is Amy. We’ll let her stay in the house for a couple of days.”

Ashton nodded and sighed. “Since you’ve brought her here, have you thought of what you are going to do with her in the future?”

I shook my head. To be honest, I had no idea what to do with Amy. I was not against bringing her with me after seeing her parents’ harsh attitude toward their daughters. I couldn’t save all of them, but taking Amy with me was the least I could do.

Seeing my response, Ashton didn’t say anything. He made his way to the kitchen and called out, “Wash your hands, and we’ll have dinner. I’ve made your favorite dishes, see if they suit your liking.” Seeing my response, Ashton didn’t say anything. He made his way to the kitchen and called out, “Wash your hands, and we’ll have dinner. I’ve made your favorite dishes; see if they suit your liking.”

Feeling surprised, I led Amy as we followed him into the kitchen. The man was serving the food from the food thermos. Those were all my favorite dishes! I took Amy to the sink and washed our hands before we settled down at the dining table.

Just then, I received a call from Zachary. Boris must have told Dad about Amy.

I answered the call and asked, “Dad, have you had dinner?”

Zachary hummed a response over the phone. Then, he spoke up, “Boris has told me about the five-year-old kid. I know you’re a soft-hearted person, but Summer’s condition is getting worse. The cancer cells have spread to other parts of her body. She needs a transplant as soon as possible, or her other organs will be affected too. By that time, it will be impossible to save her life. I have discussed it with your mother. We will give the girl’s parents a sum of money and let her stay in K City. Your mother and I will take care of her. Don’t worry. The Moore family can definitely afford to raise a child. If she suffers any sequela from the surgery, we will find the best doctor to treat her. Scarlett, Summer can’t wait any longer. You need to make that decision.”

I knew Zachary was right. Yet, I wouldn’t forgive myself if I harm an innocent child. I would live the rest of my life with guilt.

Noticing I was staring blankly into space, Ashton waved his hand before me. “What are you thinking about? Let’s eat now.”

I nodded. As the call was still going on, I heard Zachary’s voice saying, “Tomorrow, your mother and I will discharge Summer from the hospital. We will then bring her to A City. Before that, take good care of the kid. I’ll meet you there.” With that, Zachary ended the call.

I was a little distracted as I watched Amy savoring the food before her. Ashton placed the cutleries in front of me and reminded me, “You should eat more. Boris said you barely ate anything yesterday. You’re a mother now, and you should take good care of yourself.”

I nodded. Hearing Ashton's words, Amy turned to look at me. "Ms. Stovall, my mom is also pregnant. Is there a baby in your tummy too?"

With a faint smile, I helped fill her plate with food. "Yes. There's a baby in my tummy."

Hearing that, Amy curled her lips into a bright smile. The kids were indeed pure and innocent. They would just smile when they were happy and cry when they felt sad. After tucking the little girl in bed, I returned to the bedroom. While hugging me, Ashton asked, "How did you find that village?"

His question threw me off balance. I never told him about Armond giving me the name card. Thus, it wouldn't make sense that I managed to get into contact with Brandon.

After thinking for a while, I lied, "My dad told me about the village. He asked Boris to go there with me."

Ashton fixed his eyes at me, his eyes darkened. "Scarlett, there should be trust between a husband and wife. You told me this, do you remember?"

Ashton's serious attitude made me feel even more guilty. I kept my head down to avoid his eyes while my hands wrung. I didn't mean to hide it from him. It was just that he was too wary of Armond. He would definitely get mad if I told him the truth.

With that in mind, I was all the more determined not to tell him about the name card. I looked up at him and uttered, "Ashton, it's true. This is why I called you to stop my Dad from coming to A City. As you know, he is old now, and I don't want him to be in trouble because of me. You heard it when I got the information from him. You even got mad at me for not telling you when I decided to come to A City. Have you forgotten about that?"

Ashton's gaze turned cold. He sneered, "You came up with all these to lie to me. I guess it will be a disappointment to you if I don't buy your story."

With that, he turned and entered the washroom. The sound of running water ensued. The man was angry, or rather, he was infuriated.

Chapter 990

I felt on edge as I wasn't sure if Ashton knew about me finding Armond. Initially, I planned to tell him the truth when he came out of the washroom. However, I was too tired that I soon fell asleep.

The next morning, Ashton was gone when I woke up. Later, I received a message from Zachary, telling me that they had boarded the plane, heading to A City. After freshening up, I went to Amy's room to find that the little girl had long woken up. She was sitting primly on the bed, waiting for me.

In fact, the more considerate she was, the guiltier I felt. The little girl was still wearing rags and tatters. I helped her wash up and we went to a mall. Since it would take at least four hours to fly from K City to A City, there was ample time for me to buy her some new clothes.

Amy was excited since it was her first time shopping in a mall. At the same time, being diffident, she wouldn't let go of my hand. In no time, I bought her a few sets of clothes. Wearing the new clothes, she asked meekly, "Ms. Stovall, are we using the money that you are going to give my parents to buy me new clothes? Actually, I don't need that many clothes. I wish to save the money for my parents."

My heart ached at her words. She was still thinking about her parents despite them exploiting her for money. "Don't worry. These clothes are a gift from me. You don't need to pay for them," I reassured her.

The little girl was relieved. Holding my hand, she asked, "Then, when am I going to save your daughter?"

I was slightly bewildered at her question. That was when I remembered that Amy, a five-year-old kid, was old enough to understand what was going on. Besides, her parents never avoided her when they talk. She must have known the reason for her coming to A City.

I shook my head and replied, "There's no hurry. Before that, we can spend some time and have fun in the city."

Amy nodded firmly, her eyes brightened up.

Gazing at her happy face, I asked, "Amy, are you willing to leave your parents and live with me?"

Amy was slightly confused. Nevertheless, she gave my words some thought. "Ms. Stovall, if I stay with you, will you give my parents a lot of money?"

I nodded. "Yes."

Amy lowered her head and fell deep into thought. Finally, she made her decision. "Fine. As long as my mom and dad can get a lot of money, I will stay with you," she said seriously.

To the kids, no matter how terrible their parents were, they would always regard them as their dearest family. After all, blood was thicker than water.

Soon, we left the mall. Just as we were about to get into the car, I heard someone calling me.

I turned around to find it was Hailey. That was when I recalled she was back in A City as well. The young lady trotted toward me and asked, "Are you here shopping?"

I nodded. Noticing the shopping bags in her hand, I knew she was out shopping as well.

Hailey was dazed when she noticed Amy standing beside me. With a doubtful look on her face, she asked with a hint of certainty, “Did you contact Armond? He gave you the information?”

I was surprised by her shrewdness. “How did you...”

Hailey’s face turned pale. She cast her eyes at Amy and then at me. Then, she gasped out, “I did a heart transplant before. My heart belonged to an innocent kid. I suffered from depression after the heart transplant.”

The young lady was clasping her chest. Her forehead was covered with sweat, while her face contorted in pain. I immediately held her arms and supported her. The latter grabbed my hand while she said through gritted teeth, “Don’t make the same mistake as I did. That will only make more people suffer!”

Not losing any time, I called the ambulance. Afraid that she might not stand until the ambulance arrived, I asked a random guy on the street to help carry her into my car. After that, I drove her to the nearest hospital.

As soon as the doctor at ER took over Hailey, I received a call from Zachary. “Scarlett, where are you? Summer’s condition suddenly deteriorated, and we’re sending her to the hospital. I need you to bring that kid to the hospital now. I have contacted the hospital to give her a preoperation check-up.”

Suddenly, Hailey's words rang out in my mind. Casting my eyes at the helpless Amy, I felt torn by conflicting emotions. I was on the verge of losing my mind.

I was stumped when Zachary kept urging me over the phone. Eventually, I only told him of my location.

After hanging up, Amy and I looked at each other.

I couldn't bring myself to tell her what she would be facing later. "Ms. Stovall, is that lady sick?" the latter asked.

I nodded. Then, I made her sit on the chair and asked, "Amy, later, the nurse will need to draw your blood. Will you feel scared?"

Amy took a glance at the ER. "Will I feel pain like that lady just now?" she asked hesitantly.

I shook my head. "No."

Hearing that, the little girl heaved a sigh of relief. "Then, it's fine. Last time, a man came to draw my blood in my house. It's not painful at all, so I was not scared."