

Chapter 576

I lifted my head and looked at Ashton. He did not seem to be bothered by Joe's reaction.

I thought of consoling the drunk man but was afraid that I might burst into laughter.

Ashton grabbed my wrist and pulled me back. "Let him be. He'll be fine when he's sobered up."

I whispered, "Does he always get drunk?"

Ashton tapped his slender fingers on a glass of water and placed the glass by his sensuous lips.

"Sometimes," he said. He then looked at me and realized I was staring at his lips. He put down the glass, smirked, and let out a deep grunt.

That had instantly snapped me out of my daze. I cleared my throat and tried to hide my awkwardness. "Oh."

My heart was still racing like mad even though I had looked away. What is he? God of lust and seduction? Argh!

Joe had soon quietened down. He collapsed on the couch and fell asleep.

Ashton looked at him for a while before saying, "Come. Let's go home."

I nodded. But before leaving, I asked, "Should we send him home?"

Ashton shook his head. "Let's just bring him down to his chauffeur."

He stood up, placed his arm around Joe's neck, and held that drunk man's wrist. "Let's go."

At the entrance of the Imperial Hotel, his chauffeur came up and carried Joe by his arm. He then left after thanking Ashton for his help.

Ashton left his car in the car park, so he looked at me and said, "Wait for me. I'll go and get the car."

“I’ll go with you.” The car park in the hotel was large, and it would take him some time to get to his car. I just wanted to accompany him.

But he stopped me. “It’s cold outside. You wait for me in the lobby. I’ll be here soon.”

He then called one of the front desk staff members to bring me in.

At his insistence, I returned to the lobby and waited.

Suddenly, Jackson appeared with a woman in his arm, and I was surprised.

A line formed between my brows. I had never seen him with a girl before. After seeing how close he was with Nick, I assumed he had no interest in women. I was utterly dumbfounded by what I saw right now.

The hotel might be enormous, but it was not difficult for me to spot a familiar face from afar.

He was stunned for a moment after seeing me in the lobby. He let go of the woman, walked in my direction, and smirked. “Don’t tell me you came here alone.”

“I’m here with Ashton.” I could not help but turn my attention to the woman beside her. “She is...”

He grinned, “A friend who helps me release my tension. I heard you let Summer and Jared go to W City. I told you Macy doesn’t want Summer to be a part of the Crest family. Do you still remember?”

I nodded. "I know, but some things are beyond our control. Besides, Jared only brought her to W City to have some fun. That's all."

"And you think the Crests would not take this opportunity to approach Summer?" Jackson sneered, "Jared might be a gentleman, but you can't assume people around him are just as nice."

Somehow, I felt he knew something that I was not aware of. "What do you mean?"

A corner of his lips quirked up. He once again wrapped his arm around the woman's neck. "Well... I don't know. My instinct tells me something's going to happen. You know what, Scarlett? I feel we're slowly drifting apart."

"I don't understand what you're trying to say, Jackson." Why do I feel like I don't know this man anymore?

He grinned but kept mum. He raised his hand and pointed, "You better go and check on your man. A bitch is trying to tackle him right there."

I knitted my brows and turned around. Ashton had arrived, and he parked his car right at the entrance of the hotel.

A woman approached him as if she was trying to flirt with him.

I paused for a moment before turning my attention to Jackson. "Let's have dinner when you're free."

He raised his brows, grabbed the cigarette from the woman's hand, and puffed at it. "Sure. You make the arrangement then."

His unruly behavior rendered me speechless.

I turned around, walked out of the building, and overheard Ashton's conversation with that woman.

The woman clung tightly onto him and said in a shivering voice, "I've been with you for two years, Ashton. You should know I'm so much better than Scarlett!"

It was Rachel's voice. I could recognize it from afar. She seemed to be drunk as she kept leaning against Ashton.

Ashton had always been a gentleman. Otherwise, he would have flung her away without hesitation.

Ashton controlled his anger and raised his voice. "Get off!"

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Rachel refused to give in. She continued to inch closer. "Look at me, Ashton. I'm so capable in so many different aspects, and I can definitely bring your career to greater heights.

"I'm the one for you, and we'd be a power couple!"

The constant pulling and dragging had caused the strap of her skimpy dress to fall off her shoulder, exposing her back in public.

It was not difficult to imagine what Ashton could see from the front.

Most of the guests came here for entertainment, and they for sure were drawn to the drama. While some praised Rachel's beauty and body, some were obviously having dirty thoughts on their mind.

Ashton gave her a disdainful look and gritted his teeth. "Please watch your behavior!"

He had enough of her drama and just wished to get out of here. He looked around and tried to see where I was.

As soon as he saw me standing in the lobby, he heaved a sigh of relief and shoved Rachael aside.

He walked toward me and said in a deep voice, "Why didn't you wait for me at the entrance?"

"I met an old friend and had a chat with him earlier." I did not tell him it was Jackson.

Ashton raised his brows. He grabbed my hand and walked me out of the hotel.

Of course, Rachel would not let us off so easily. She gave us a sullen glare and sneered, "Ashton, take a good look at me? Am I not as pretty as her? How about my body? I have everything she has, and I can do everything that she can't!"

She became so agitated that she instantly pulled her dress down, baring it all for Ashton. She pulled his hand and it on her breast. "Touch me, Ashton. I can do a better job than her on bed!"

Her move had instantly caught everyone's attention.

Ashton's expression turned even more grim. He swung his hand so hard that Rachel fell onto the ground.

Rachel staggered and knocked her head against the corner of a table.

Perhaps that was a wake-up call for her. She raised her head and looked at Ashton before taking a glance at the people around her.

The moment she realized she was half-naked, she instantly pulled up her dress and covered herself.

Despite regaining her consciousness for just a short while, she was still quite drunk. All of a sudden, she started laughing.

Tears welled up in her eyes, but she continued laughing while gazing into Ashton's eyes.

She pointed her finger at me and accused, "What have you done to seduce this man, Scarlett Stovall?"

Rachel then stared at Ashton. “And you. Why are you so obsessed with her? Don’t you know there’s something between her and Marcus?” she scoffed, “We might not come across her scandals in the news, but you should know what kind of woman she is! You’re okay with that? Don’t you care how filthy she is?”

Before I could react, Ashton was already standing in front of Rachel and strangling her.

Rachel’s face instantly turned red as she could hardly breathe.

Ashton’s eyes darkened. “It looks like you’re tired of living.”

Ashton exerted more pressure on her neck.

The crowd was struck dumb by what they saw. Some of them gasped, and some mumbled behind their back.

Rachel had definitely stroke Ashton the wrong way, and he was ready to get rid of her.

Upon seeing people taking pictures with their phones, I ran toward him and brushed his hand off Rachel. “Calm down, Ashton. Let’s go home.”

It would be disastrous for him if this incident made headlines.

No matter how capable a man was, his reputation would shatter in no time if the world knew he acted violently toward a woman.

For years, Ashton had survived all sorts of conspiracies in the corporate world. It was not worth tarnishing his reputation just because of a woman.

He retracted his hand, took out a few banknotes, and stuffed them into her busty chest. He smirked and said, “Here are some tips for you. Thanks for your offer, but I don’t simply lay my hands on women like you. The tips I gave should be enough for you to call yourself a cab.”

The way Ashton humiliated her must have hurt her more deeply than the physical pain he caused earlier.

The color drained out of Rachel’s face instantly.

By openly equating her to prostitutes, Ashton had completely trampled her ego and pride.

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She looked fixedly at Ashton and let her tears rolled down her cheeks.

Indifferent to her tears, he put his wallet in his pocket, held my hand, and walked away.

As I trailed after him, a heart-wrenching wail came from behind. I glanced back and saw several people gathered around Rachel.

Even in an upscale nightclub, there would be all sorts of people hanging around, including shady characters.

With Rachel's good looks and her revealing clothes, I was afraid that she might be in danger.

When we reached the exit, I stopped in my tracks.

Puzzled, Ashton turned around and looked at me. He did not look angry anymore. "What's the matter?" he asked.

I pondered for a while before voicing out my concern. "Ashton, she needs someone to send her home."

He frowned at my words. "Scarlett, she doesn't deserve your sympathy."

I could understand why he was angry with Rachel. It was because her harsh words had crossed the line and struck his nerve.

And I was where his threshold lay; he was enraged with her because of her disrespect for me.

Seeing that he was about to leave, I stopped him and said, “I don’t sympathize with her predicament, but Ashton, she’s a staff of the Fuller Corporation whom you had complimented during the annual general meeting. If anything happens to her, it might affect the company as well. We can find someone to bring her back just to make sure she is safe.”

Do I pity her? Maybe.

I did not know much about Rachel at first. If I had not heard what Isabelle had told me before, I probably would not care about her safety tonight.

But now that I had known what happened to her, I could not help but pity her. Besides, it was normal for her to be attracted to Ashton since he was such an outstanding person.

Life is still long; there would be more women who are going to be attracted to him. Besides, I’m sure that Ashton knows better than me in handling the women who fancy him.

After a long moment of silence, he let out a sigh and eventually complied. He called a bell boy over and gave out some instructions. Then, he turned to me and asked, “Are you happy now?”

I nodded with a smile and held his hand. “Yes. Let’s go home.”

When we were both seated in the car, Ashton did not start the car first. Instead, he turned towards me and locked his eyes on mine. “Scarlett, it seems as if you bear no animosity towards her.”

“Huh, who?” I asked, perplexed.

“Rachel.”

I paused for a while and replied, “Hmm, actually, there is animosity between Rachel and me. It’s just that I know that you love me, and you care about me. So, I don’t really mind other women admiring you because I know that you will come back to me eventually.”

He looked at me meaningfully. “You really trust me so much?”

I nodded, holding his gaze. “Ashton, we are in our thirties now. That’s about one-third of our lives. We’ve gone through many things, and we have certainly learned our life lessons. For me, I have learned to take notice of what’s more important in life.”

He went silent for a long time before starting the car and drove home. We did not speak for the rest of the ride.

There was nothing wrong with what I said in the car, but he seemed to be too quiet after that.

It was always winter whenever I was in K City. Maybe because I did not get to spend much time here. The first time I was here, I lost my child and almost drove myself crazy.

Four years later, I came back to this city again. No one had changed, except me; my state of mind was no longer the same.

It was already late at night by the time we were back at the villa. After I switched off my phone and left it charging, I went straight to the shower and went to bed after that.

Meanwhile, Ashton was buried in work. It seemed as if he did not want to go easy on the White Corporation as he was still pressing ahead with his plan to sabotage it. Since the company had lost plenty of its properties by now, Marcus was probably even busier than Ashton.

By the time I woke up the next day, Ashton had already left. I reckoned it was almost the end of the year.

Ashton had been busy all year round. I initially thought that Ashton might have less work to do after his company's annual general meeting.

But it seemed like it would be hard for him to have a good rest now.

It had been sunny in K City for a few days recently, but it started to snow heavily today. After Flora had finished cooking the breakfast, she did not proceed to do other household chores as usual.

Instead, she stayed in the kitchen, wiping the countertop that had been wiped countless times.

I was not in the mood for food, so I turned to her and asked, "What's the matter?"

Taken aback by my sudden question, she paused for a moment before replying, “Madam, it’s almost the festive season. Do you have any plan yet?”

Oh, she wants to ask about her schedule during the festive season. Normally, it would be Ashton who arranged her schedule, but recently, he was so busy that he forgot to do so.

I thought for a second and asked, “Flora, do you normally go back to your hometown during the holidays?”

She nodded and smiled. “Yeah, I would normally go back to my hometown for a few days.”

“Have you bought the ticket?”

She shook her head. “I haven’t got my schedule yet, so my son and my daughter-in-law are still waiting for it before buying the ticket for me.”

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After a moment of consideration, I replied, “Flora, you can go back anytime you want. It’s only me and Ashton in the house, so it shouldn’t be too much of a problem.”

With a smile on her face, she nodded. “Okay. Thank you, Mrs. Fuller.”

As I glanced around the kitchen, I realized that I had forgotten to take my phone from the bedroom, so I looked towards Flora and said, “Please help me to get my phone upstairs.”

I had left it charging for the whole night. It should be fully charged by now.

After she brought it down to me, I switched it on and browsed through the trending topics on social media. As expected, it was mostly about the holidays and many people were looking forward to it.

Besides, there were many sales happenings on online shopping platforms. Looking outside the window, it was still snowing currently. I figured it would be inconvenient to go out today.

Hence, I decided to stay at home and do some reading instead.

I was about to fall asleep when I received a call from Jackson at noon.

I answered the call, and before I could say anything, he had cut me off. “Scarlett, where are you?” He sounded anxious.

“In the villa,” I replied. But, again, before I could continue, his voice had come from the other side. “Summer has gone missing in W City. Has Ashton told you about it?”

Immediately, my mind went blank, and my ears started to ring.

Jackson called my name several times on the other side of the line, but I did not hear him.

Flora came to check on me when she heard the sound of my cup smashing to the floor.

“Mrs. Fuller? Mrs. Fuller?” Flora called me a few more times before I finally snapped out of my trance.

Looking around aimlessly, I still could not digest what he had said.

She looked at me worriedly. “Mrs. Fuller, are you okay?”

I shook my head, unable to respond. Jackson’s words earlier echoed in my ears. He said that Summer is missing.

I wanted to get up, but before I could get to my feet, my knees buckled, and I fell back into my chair.

“Mrs. Fuller, are you okay?” Flora asked.

I shook my head again. I remembered that I had not hung up the call, so I reached for my phone.

Putting it to my ear, I parted my lips, trying to speak, but my mouth went dry, and my words died my lips.

“Scarlett, are you alright?” Jackson’s worried voice rang from the other side.

I tried to speak again, but I was so choked up that I could not do it at the moment. Seeing my condition, Flora was so worried that her hands started to shake.

She then went to bring me a glass of water. “Mrs. Fuller, have a sip of water first. Don’t panic.”

I nodded and drank the water. Even the water was difficult to be swallowed.

After a long while, I finally found my voice back. I picked up the phone and asked, “Jackson, what did you say just now?”

My voice was still a bit hoarse.

Jackson said, “Scarlett, don’t panic. I’m not sure what happened exactly there. But perhaps you can travel to W City to investigate.”

“Okay.”

The first person I wanted to call was Jared.

After I hung up the call, I immediately dialed his number. But no one picked up the call.

I continued to call several times but to no avail. So, I called Emery.

Fortunately, she answered the call quickly. “Hi, Scarlett. What’s up?”

“Do you know anyone from W City? Can you help me to check on the Crest family there?”

She was taken aback by the agitation in my voice for a moment. “Okay. I’ll do it immediately.”

After a pause, she asked tentatively, “Scarlett, anything happened?”

“I have no idea as well. Jackson told me that Summer is lost,” I confessed.

She gasped. “What? When did it happen? I did not hear anything from my side. Doesn’t Summer have a video call with you every night?”

“Yes. But for the last two nights, I did not call her because Ashton and I came home late. So, I figured I should call her today instead. But when I called Jared just now, no one picked up the phone,” I replied, eyes brimming with tears.

As I spoke, I began to choke up once again.

Emery sighed on the other side of the line. “Scarlett, don’t panic. We haven’t known anything yet at the moment. Let me call and ask first. I have friends in W City. I’ll find someone to get more information for you.”

I nodded and hung up the call. I could not wait for a minute longer to book the flight ticket to W City. It had been more than ten days since Jared brought Summer to W City.

It’s about time for me to bring her back now.

I drove out of the villa and headed straight to the airport. Ashton called me again and again. I saw his calls, but I had no intention of answering any of them.

Arriving at the airport, I checked in and boarded the plane. Before departure, the air stewardess reminded us to switch off our electrical gadgets.

I took a look at the message sent by Ashton: Scarlett, before you do anything else, answer my call first. I’ve sent someone to find Summer.

I shut down my phone regardless. As the plane took off, I felt my heart shattered into a million pieces.

There were wounds that will never heal. And Summer was my lifeline. After years of being with her, I had treated her like my own child. I’ve lost my child before; I can’t bear to lose another one.

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Four hours later, the plane landed. This was my first time here in W City. As one of the most vibrant cities in the nation, W City was as bustling as the capital city, but they were distinctively different from one another.

K City was notable and sophisticated while W City was glitz and glamor.

Besides, the weather in W City was different, too. Unlike K City, it would snow two times per year, at most three.

After getting off the plane, I dared not waste a second longer and hailed a cab to the Crest Residence. It was not snowing in W City, but most of the trees at the side of the road had withered. The scenery outside was underwhelming.

The Crest family had been one of the most prominent families in W City for a long time. Moreover, owning a huge mansion in an upscale location undoubtedly attracted the attention of the public.

When I told the driver to drop me off at the Crest Residence, he could not believe his ears. Staring at me, he asked once again, “Miss, are you sure your destination is the Crest Residence? Are you a friend of the Crest family?”

I pursed my lips and looked outside the window. “No.”

Taken aback by my answer, he proceeded to remind me kindly. “The upper class like the Crest family normally has a high standard in choosing their daughters-in-law. It’s rather inappropriate for you to go to their house uninvited.”

Hearing his words, I realized that he had regarded me as a frivolous woman who wanted to marry the rich.

Pursing my lips, I refused to explain myself to him.

When the car came to a stop in front of the Crest residence, the driver turned to me and apologized, “I’m sorry, Miss. I can only send you here. Outsiders are forbidden from going inside. If you wish to enter, the entrance is right over there, and you should inform the security guard before going in. The Crest Residence is really big, so you need someone to drive you inside.”

I nodded and paid him before getting off the taxi.

As mentioned by the taxi driver just now, this mansion was spacious. Visitors should get permission from the Crest family first before they sent a car to fetch the visitors in.

After I told the security guard the reason I was visiting, he looked at me, unsure. “Miss, I think you should give them a call first to pick you up.”

I fished out my phone and saw that I had more missed calls and messages from Ashton.

But I did not call him back. Instead, I dialled Jared’s number again. Luckily, he answered my call this time.

“Scarlett,” he greeted.

Staring at the gate, I said, “I’m outside the Crest Residence now. Bring Summer to me. I’m here to bring her back to K City.”

A long silence followed. The quieter he was, the more fearful I became.

I knew that I was still in denial. I came here, hoping that Jackson was wrong. Since K City was quite far away from W City, maybe Jackson did not know what exactly happened.

Maybe Summer was just out to play. Maybe it was just Jackson who heard the information wrongly and misunderstood the situation.

Jared’s silence almost gave me a mental breakdown. I could no longer stand the long silence and yelled, “Jared Crest! I said I wanted to meet Summer and bring her back. Do you hear me?”

He responded with a low voice, "I'm right behind you."

I blinked, bewildered. As I turned around and looked at him, he was standing there with his phone clutched against his ear, looking haggard.

Then, he put down his phone and glanced at me guiltily.

There was no sight of Summer beside him. I tried my best to suppress the panic rising in my heart. "Jared, where is Summer?"

He took a deep breath to compose himself and walked towards me. "Let's go in first."

A black Bentley was parked near the gate. He looked at me with a calm expression and motioned for me to go into the car. "Let's talk inside."

I pressed my lips together and went into the car with him.

I knew that the Crest family was very rich, but I did not expect them to be this rich.

It took a ten-minute ride from the gate outside to the house. Along the way, it was a large park with ponds, sculptures, fountains, and different kinds of flora. Since it was currently winter, the maple trees on the roadside were withered, scattering the ground with their leaves.

As I continued to look at the bleak view outside the car, Jared's phone rang, and he answered the call. From his tone of voice, it was probably Ashton who called.

After he talked with Ashton for a few minutes, he handed me his phone. “It’s Ashton.”

I pursed my lips and glanced at him. Instead of taking the phone over, I chose to ignore it.

Seeing my reaction, he took back the phone and told Ashton, “You should call back later.”

Ashton then spoke something, and Jared hummed in response. After he ended the call, the silence in the car ensued.

After some time, the car pulled to a stop in front of a bungalow and several housekeepers came out of the door.

When we got down from the car, one of them stepped forward and greeted Jared.

Jared nodded in response and looked towards me. “Follow me. We’ll talk inside.”

Then, he turned to the leader of the housekeepers and ordered, “Prepare a room for Ms. Stovall.”

The man nodded and left.

Entering the house with Jared, I saw more than ten people sitting in the living room, and they were predominantly middle-aged. There were also two elderly who sat in the middle of the room.

When they saw us coming in, some of them turned to look at us.

Then, a thin middle-aged woman stepped forward and asked, “Jared, have you found the kid?”