

Chapter 581

Hearing her words, I tensed up immediately.

I stood still as my body trembled in agitation. So, Summer is really missing?

The ringing in my ears started again. Holding back my emotions, I raised my eyes and stared at Jared as I waited for his answer.

He noticed my reaction and frowned. "I've sent my subordinates to search for her and we've also reported the case to the police. She will be fine."

Clap! I mustered up all my energy and strength to slap him. It was loud and painful.

In an instant, everyone in the living room turned their eyes on me. Some people were glaring, some were frowning, and some were watching us with much excitement.

The first one who came forward to me was a slightly chubby girl in her twenties. "Who are you? How could you hit Jared?"

I shot her a look, but I did not respond. Instead, I continued to stare furiously at Jared. "Jared, you'd better pray that Summer comes back safe and sound, or else I would use the rest of my life to destroy the Crest family."

Thud! The sound of a mug being slammed down onto the coffee table resonated across the room.

“How dare you, young lady!” The old man who sat in the middle spoke with a deep and powerful voice.

He must have been an influential person during his younger days.

Turning my gaze to the dignified old man, he looked about eighty years old but was still full of vigor and vitality.

I put up a faint smile, making myself look composed. “We shall wait and see.”

“How insolent!” The old man knocked down the mug on the table.

He was indeed angry.

No one dared to speak a single word as he glared at me. If looks could kill, I would have been dead now.

After a while, he finally averted his gaze and said, “Jared, why did you bring such a rude girl into the house? Get her out now. How dare a little girl talked back to me!”

I scoffed disdainfully. “If it weren’t for my daughter, I would not have stepped into this lowly house”

“Shut up!” The old man was enraged.

When he raised the walking stick in his hand to beat me, a man’s voice came from the door. “How are you doing, Mr. Crest?”

Furrowing his brow, the elderly looked at me thoughtfully. Meanwhile, Jared turned to the voice and frowned.

As expected, it was Ashton.

Then, he came towards us and stood in front of me. Raising his hand to lower the walking stick in the elderly's hand, Ashton said, "Mr. Crest, every visitor is a guest. Even if you don't welcome my wife, you don't have to hit her."

The old man turned grim and scoffed. "This ill-mannered lady is your wife?"

Ashton nodded with a smile. "My grandpa really liked her and chose her to be my wife. Do you like her, too?"

"Hmph!" He snorted in disdain. "No wonder you have such a wife, your grandpa did not have a good eye for a good daughter-in-law. There's nothing about her that is likable."

Ashton was not upset with his words at all. He then turned to Jared and gave him a sombre look. "Where is my daughter?"

Jared's face fell. "Yesterday, Summer said she wanted to walk Snowfluff outside, so I asked Aunt Betty to go together with her. But it suddenly rained on their way back home. Summer went missing when they were finding a shelter during the rain."

Ashton remained calm and composed. "How's the condition now?"

“I’ve contacted the police in W City, and they are investigating the case. We’ve also sent people out to look for Summer in various places in the city.”

I took a deep breath to control my anger before looking at Jared. “Is Snowfluff missing?”

He nodded.

Ashton frowned and thought for a while. “A child with a dog supposedly would not get lost easily. Snowfluff is a trained dog, so even if they’ve lost their way, it would guide Summer back home. It seems like this is not a simple missing case.”

Then, he said to Jared, “Get in contact with the police and check the ones who bear a grudge against the Crest family. And watch out for any suspicious people around the Crest Residence recently.”

Jared also realized the severity now. He nodded, took out his phone, and went out.

A hush fell over the room. Ashton glanced at the people around us and smiled politely before turning to the old man and said, “Mr. Crest, sorry for the things my wife had said. She is worried sick about our daughter, so please forgive her. We’ll drop by and visit another time. See you next time.”

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With that, he held my hand and brought me out of the house. The old man parted his mouth, seemingly wanted to say something, but no words came out.

After we were out of the Crest Residence, silence ensued all the way to the hotel.

When he turned off the engine, Ashton looked towards me and said, "It's getting late. Rest well tonight. The Crest family is finding her. I'm sure Summer will be alright."

I looked at him and felt angry suddenly. I got out of the car and went straight into the hotel.

The receptionist smiled and greeted, "Hi. How may I help you?"

"I'd like a room, please." I put my credit card and my ID card on the counter.

However, she did not take my cards. Instead, she looked at Ashton who was standing behind me.

He came to my side and looked at the receptionist. "There's no need for another room. I've booked a room for us."

Apparently, his words were directed at me.

The receptionist smiled awkwardly and handed my cards back to me. "Miss, here are your cards."

I frowned at her. "Why does a five-star hotel let customers check-in without their ID cards?"

Having heard what I said, she raised her eyebrows and looked towards Ashton, seeking help.

I gave her my cards and insisted, "Please give me a room as soon as possible."

She hesitated for a moment before she finally yielded and proceeded with the registration process.

Ashton let me be and stayed silent at the side.

After taking the room key, I entered the elevator with him, and the silence went on.

Both of us knew that we held some resentment toward one another and that we should talk it out instead of shutting each other down. But still, neither of us was willing to speak now. Humans are bizarre sometimes.

When we reached my room, I entered first and stood at the door, stopping him from coming into my room.

Stuck in between the door, he scowled and looked at me with displeasure. "Scarlett, do you have to be like this?"

I stared back and said stubbornly, "Yes!"

With that, I pushed him out, slammed the door shut, and locked it immediately.

A suite that cost a hundred thousand per night was cosy. It had a living room, a bedroom, and a kitchen. Even though it was not as spacious as the villa in K City, each room was fully equipped.

But I did not have the mood to admire them because all I could think of now was Summer. I called John and it got through quickly.

“Hi, Letty. What’s the matter?” John sounded as if he had just woken up from sleep.

I looked at the clock and it was only then did I realize that it was past midnight already.

I did not mean to disturb his sleep, but now that he had picked up the call, I might as well tell him the reason I called.

I went straight to the point. “Can you ask Uncle Louis to help me to contact the local authorities at W City? Summer has been missing for more than seventy-two hours and the Crest family are searching for her, but they haven’t found anything yet. I didn’t know what to do, so I called you.”

Speaking about Summer brought a lump to my throat again.

He fell silent for a moment before answering, “I’ll go to W City with Uncle Louis right away and I’m sure we will find Summer. Don’t worry.” He sounded fully alert now.

A wave of warmth washed over me as tears started to well up in my eyes.

“Thank you so much, John,” I replied with a hoarse voice.

When he heard me weeping, he said concernedly, "Scarlett, we are family. You don't need to say thank you."

Feeling touched by his words, tears fell down from my eyes as I bid him goodbye.

I hung up the call and felt better somehow.

Now that my anxiety had reduced, I realized that I was covered in cold sweats.

Therefore, I put down my phone, filled the bathtub with hot water, and took a bath.

After I was done freshening up, I suddenly saw Ashton standing in my bedroom. I was so shocked that I almost yelled out in surprise.

Since I had come here in a rush, I did not bring a change of clothes with me. So, I had put my clothes just now into the washing machine and came out of the bathroom in a towel.

Even though we were husband and wife, I still felt shy in front of him.

"How did you get in?" I asked, puzzled. I had locked the door already, so how could he enter again?

He turned towards me with his eyebrows knitted. "Scarlett, we need to talk."

“We have nothing to talk about. It’s already late. You should go to bed.” Ignoring him, I sat down on the bed and towel dry my hair.

He then took the towel from my hand and began patting my hair dry impassively.

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“I can do it myself,” I exclaimed and took the towel from him.

But he refused and held the towel away from me.

The anger that I had been suppressing rose again. Pursing my lips, I glared at him.
“Ashton...”

But before I could finish my sentence, he cupped my face and abruptly pressed his lips against mine.

I wanted to push him away, but it was futile. He locked me within his arms and kissed me hard as if it was a punishment from him. It made me breathless.

If he had not heard me gasping for air, he would have continued kissing.

As he released his grip on me, our eyes met for a moment, but I averted my gaze and ignored him.

He narrowed his eyes and pinched my chin forcefully. "Am I not the one who should be angry?"

He gazed at me gloomily as though he had been wronged.

I pushed his hand away and shot daggers at him. "Then you should go away and sulk. Leave me alone. I want to sleep."

Ashton could not help but laugh at my words. "Scarlett, can you please be reasonable?"

"No!" I said defiantly. I know I'm throwing a fit, but I don't care.

Seeing my attitude, he said no more and threw his coat aside before unbuttoning his shirt with his slender fingers.

As he stood there, removing his clothes gracefully in front of me, he smirked and gazed suggestively at me.

"W-why are you taking your clothes off?" I stuttered.

"I'm going to sleep, duh." As he spoke, the shirt on him was casually thrown on the ground, exposing his bare chest in front of my eyes.

I quickly looked away with my face flushing with embarrassment. It's rude to stare.

Then, I heard him chuckled.

“Ashton, you...”

By the time I turned to him, he had also removed his pants and he was now coming towards me.

I was taken aback for a second before scrambling away from him.

But before I could reach the other side of the super king-sized bed, he had grabbed my ankle and dragged me towards him.

Being trapped in his arms, I became infuriated instantly and gave him a cold-eyed stare. “What are you doing, Ashton? I want to sleep!” I yelled.

“Alright. We shall sleep,” he said gently, coaxing me into sleeping with him. “It’s already past midnight. We should rest now.”

His words sounded naughty as we lay naked on the bed.

However, he just continued to hug me. Sensing that he was not going to do anything further, I eventually let my guard down after a few minutes.

Having known him for several years, I knew that if he wanted to stay here, no one could not stop him from doing so, including me.

So, I opted to close my eyes and sleep.

That night, I barely slept. I kept jolting awake from horrible nightmares about Summer. Fortunately, Ashton was by my side. He patted my back and comforted me whenever I needed solace.

I woke up at six o'clock in the morning. Looking at the dim sky outside the hotel, I could not go back to sleep.

Even now, Ashton still had his arms around me. After a moment of hesitation, I shifted a bit, trying to get out of his embrace.

Even though I had moved as quietly as possible, I still woke him up. He opened his eyes and looked at me groggily.

Locking his eyes on me, he asked in a raspy voice, "What's wrong?"

I proceeded to sit up, but he held me down.

He probably realized that it was still early, so he brought me back to his embrace. "It's still early."

Restricted in his arms again, I reached for my phone on the bedside table.

But he caught my hand and said, "Sleep, Scarlett."

"I can't."

Hearing my words, he stared at me with his dark brown eyes and suggested huskily, "Shall we do something else?"

I kept my mouth shut instantly and shifted away from him.

But he inched closer deliberately and pressed his body against me.

In the darkness of the night, we faced each other in a state of nature. Even though we could not see each other clearly, the night brought us closer together more than anything else.

By the time we were done, the sun had risen, illuminating the grey winter sky.

I was tired and sleepy, but I just could not fall asleep with a troubled mind.

“Do you want to take a shower?” he asked huskily as he lay beside me.

I pursed my lips in annoyance and rolled over, facing away from him.

He said nothing and got out of the bed alone. Later, the sound of the running water came from the bathroom.

As he showered, I tossed and turned on the bed, feeling uncomfortable with the sweat clinging onto my body. Hmm, I always feel like this lately.

Afterward, I felt something wet underneath as well. At first, I thought it was some residue left by Ashton, so I turned on the bedside lamp and took a piece of tissue to wipe it.

But when I saw it was, in fact, a bloodstain on the bedsheet, my heart sank.

Just then, the bathroom door was opened, and I immediately covered it with the blanket.

But it was too late. He had seen the blood, too.

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Ashton's eyes darkened slightly as he walked over. His gaze fell on the bloodstain that I was trying to cover.

I had originally thought that he would move my hands away to take a look, but he did not. He simply stroked my hair and looked at me tenderly. "Go take a bath."

I nodded and wrapped myself in a towel before getting out of bed. After a quick shower, I was still worried about Summer, so I put on the clothes that I had washed and dried last night.

Ashton was in a fresh set of clothes when I exited the bathroom. It was not what he wore yesterday, meaning that someone had brought him some new clothes.

Noticing my presence, he handed me the brown bag that was beside him. "There're new clothes in here!"

I shook my head. "It's fine. I've already changed." I did not want to bother changing into another set of clothes.

Picking up my phone, I then gave Jared a call. It did not take long before he picked up.

"Scarlett!" He sounded like he had not slept last night as well.

I composed myself before I said, "Let's meet at Victoria Hotel's lobby in half an hour."

"Okay."

Ashton was studying me with a meaningful look in his eyes when I hung up. Since he remained silent, I asked, "What's wrong?"

"Let's go to the hospital later," said Ashton as he tucked my hair behind my ear.

I was taken aback but replied almost automatically, "No. We have to find Summer first."

He frowned. "Scarlett..."

"I said, we have to find Summer first." As I turned to exit the room, he grabbed my wrist and stopped me.

He frowned, mostly in helplessness. "I'll go find Summer. You'll go to the hospital, okay?"

Looking at him, I was suddenly angered. I broke free of his grasp and before I even knew what I was doing. "You'll find her? You weren't the one who raised her, nor have you invested any effort and love into her. Do you think you can pacify me just by saying that you'd find her? Ashton, does it look like I can go to the hospital with peace of mind right now? Or maybe since Summer's not your daughter anyway, so it doesn't matter if she's lost?"

Those words were said in anger and on impulse.

I regretted them the moment they came out of my mouth.

Ashton's gaze darkened and his expression grew cold. He looked me in the eye and said coldly, "Do you really see me as such a cold-blooded person?"

I kept silent, knowing that my words had hurt him. However, I was stubborn. Although I knew I was in the wrong, I did not want to apologize.

I simply lowered my eyes and bit my lip. After a while, I said, "I should go now."

Such an avoidant answer would inevitably irritate him.

Indeed, before I could take a step, he grabbed my hand and spoke in a cold, low voice. "Scarlett, am I still not comparable to everyone else around you?"

He is angry.

I could have communicated properly with him in a proper way. However, it was as if a demon had possessed me at that moment. "Yeah. Everyone else is more important than you. I can't give up on any of them, Summer, my family, and even the Moore

family. But you, I can give you up anytime. Mr. Fuller, please let me go. I need to go search for my loved one.”

Looking at his eyes dimming with sorrow, I was dumbfounded for a moment before I eventually broke free of his grip.

Without looking back, I turned and went straight out of the hotel room.

It was not until I entered the elevator that I let go of the tension in my body, wanting to slap myself for speaking without thinking.

How could I have said that without thinking? He must have been very hurt! But what's done is done. I can't take it back.

Trying my best to take my mind off this matter, I headed to the café next door and sat by the window. Jared would definitely be able to spot me here.

Jared came in accompanied by Ashton. The two had clearly spoken on the phone before this.

Looking at the two outstanding men, I smiled lightly but tried my best to keep on a neutral expression. “Mr. Crest, can I talk to you privately?”

Jared glanced at Ashton almost subconsciously, then his gaze fell on me. Ashton then pressed his lips together, walked over to another table, and took a seat.

Jared then sat across from me as the waiter came forward to take his order. He looked at the Americano in front of me and paused for a while before ordering his own coffee as well as some dessert.

After a moment of silence, Jared looked at me and said, "I'm sorry about what happened to Summer."

I stared at my dark-colored coffee and stirred it lightly for a while. After a long time, I looked at him with resolution. "I don't accept it."

I did not accept his apology.

He nodded, opening his mouth slightly, but did not speak.

"I don't care what you do or whatever connection you make use of. You have to find my daughter. Otherwise, if anything happens to Summer, I won't let you and the Crest family off for the rest of your lives."

He looked at me and frowned. "Scarlett, I'm just as anxious about this as you are."

I sneered. "So what? She's been with me for four years. I've been with her and caring for her all the time since I was always worried that something bad might happen to her. She's only been with you for less than half a month, but you dare to tell me that she got lost? Jared, do you think you've qualified? Are you even qualified to be her father?"

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Jared's face paled. Just then, the waiter brought over his order.

He took in a breath before pushing the dessert toward me. Then, he said in a low voice, "Scarlett, I must admit that this is my fault. However, the most important thing now is to find Summer."

I simply pressed my lips together and stared at him, waiting for him to continue.

"I've checked the surveillance footage and all the cameras on the roads around Crest Residence. There's still no trace of her."

He then looked me in the eye and asked solemnly, "Scarlett, do you have any enemies?"

I frowned, looking at him in shock. "Are you suspecting that someone took Summer because of their hatred for me?"

He replied, "Not many people in the Crest family know of Summer's identity, so our long-time enemies couldn't possibly have found out about her so quickly."

I sneered. Looking at him, I could not help but laugh. "Jared, I'd always thought you were pretty smart, but I'm doubtful now. If someone really wanted to capture Summer because of me, why didn't they do anything while I was in R Province for four years? Why did they choose to do it only when Summer was in a heavily guarded place like the Crest Residence?"

I paused, then continued, "Also, you said that not many people know of Summer's identity. But the Crest family has over twenty people. Do they know of Summer's identity?"

He frowned, then nodded after a while.

"So, do you seriously think that out of the twenty-odd people in your family, all of them only have good intentions toward Summer? I was born in a small family, so I don't know about whatever scheming that goes on in a big family like yours. But for so many years, you've just been hanging around Ashton and not interfering in your family business. I'm sure you know why you did that."

Summer's disappearance had happened so quickly that we had neither evidence nor witnesses. There was no way to confirm the details of what happened.

However, although I only said those words because Jared angered me, there was a possibility that this was part of the Crest family's plan.

Judging by Jared's darkening expression, it seemed as though he was starting to have his own guesses.

After a pause, he looked at me. "I'll definitely find Summer."

It was both a guarantee for me and a promise to himself.

I simply sat there in silence.

Then, John called to ask where I was. I gave him the hotel address before hanging up, then glanced at Jared before leaving the café without saying another word.

Ashton followed after me, but I simply ignored him and waited in the hotel lobby for John.

Ashton was always a prominent figure no matter where he went. Thus, many guests constantly looked over at him while we sat in the hotel's lobby.

Both of us kept silent while waiting. He was sending messages on his phone the whole time, likely to settle his work matters.

About half an hour later, John arrived with Louis.

The two men had rushed over through the night and thus looked terrible. John stepped forward and said, "Don't worry. Uncle Louis has already spoken to the police in W City. We'll definitely be able to find Summer."

Upon seeing him, my eyes started to well up with tears. The emotions that I had been repressing the past few days were finally released. Looking at him with reddened eyes, I nodded.

As Louis and Ashton conversed, a hotel room had been prepared for them.

John frowned when he noticed the weird atmosphere between Ashton and me. Before we stepped into the elevator, he asked, "Did you guys just argue?"

I pressed my lips together and shook my head, then looked up at him and smiled. "No. I'm just really worried about Summer."

He stroked my hair helplessly and tried to soothe me. "Don't worry. We'll surely find her."

Just as they entered their room, Louis got a call. The police had found a white teddy bear dog and were asking if we wanted to go over for a look.

Since we did not know the exact situation, we rushed over immediately. Our destination was an abandoned factory in the suburb of W City.

Although W City rarely snowed, it was constantly drizzling. As a result, the roads in the suburbs were muddy and difficult to drive through.

The area had been blocked off by the police. When we reached the entrance of the factory, a middle-aged man in police uniform came out to greet us.

He looked at Louis and said, "Mr. Stovall, you're finally here. We've been looking through all the traffic surveillance footage throughout W City for the past few days. Yesterday, we started a thorough search of all factories in W City. However, we didn't find any children, but a white dog. You guys can go see if the dog was with the child when she got lost."

Louis nodded as he kept silent and walked over composedly. My legs felt weak, and my heart was beating very quickly with anxiety.

The things in the factory were old and tattered. They looked to have been abandoned for a very long time.

We hurried in after the policeman, seeing many old items along the way. Although reinforcements and protective measures had been taken, many places in the factory still seemed to be falling apart.

“How did you find the dog?” asked Ashton as his eyes swept across the old factory.

The policeman who was leading the group could tell that Ashton was no ordinary person. “While we were carrying out our search and rescue, we noticed a lot of footprints around this area, so we followed them here.”