

Chapter 626

I nodded and pointed towards the hugging couple. I teased, "You've never told me about your past relationships."

I paused as Rebecca abruptly came to mind. He did say that he had never loved Rebecca.

As we made our way through the crowds, he stuck closer to me and replied, "I didn't date when I was younger."

Shocked by his reply, I stared at him in disbelief. "No! You're pulling my leg, right?"

"Back then, I was swamped with classes and essays every day. Grandpa also arranged for me to take extra law classes, so I basically didn't have time for anything else."

His explanation seems pretty reasonable. Pouting, I continued to prod him for an answer. "Didn't you have any crushes then?"

His eyes bored into mine as he replied, "I had a crush on you the moment I saw you at J University."

Stunned, I began to blush furiously.

We continued walking at a leisurely pace. Suddenly he asked, "Don't you have questions for me?"

"What questions?" Confused, I stared back at him.

"A few days ago, Flora told me that there was a lipstick mark on my shirt. Why aren't you asking me about it?"

This caught me by surprise, though I quickly recovered myself and said, "There's nothing to ask. I trust you!"

I could see that my answer had stunned him into silence. He appeared to be deep in thought, though I didn't have the mental energy to try and guess what was on his mind. I just wanted to enjoy my walk with him before his imminent return to the office.

At the doors to the office, I waved goodbye to him and didn't follow him in. I gestured for him to head on up without me.

He didn't leave but stood there, staring at me. "You go first. I'll go in after you leave."

I didn't argue with him but merely smiled at him. I felt a twinge of regret at our somewhat anti-climactic separation.

I'd only taken a few steps before I turned and ran towards him, giving him a tight hug. I said hoarsely, "Take care."

He frowned, puzzled at my behavior. "What's wrong? You don't want to go home?"

I shook my head with my arms wrapped firmly around him. "I just want to hug you."

I heard his chuckle before he replied, "Why don't you stay here with me then? We can head home together later tonight."

At this, I finally loosened my arms. I straightened out his tie with a small smile on my face. "It's fine, I'm going back now."

Lingering is a luxury I can no longer afford. This is goodbye, forever.

I initially thought of taking a plane, but eventually decided on a train ride.

The journey's going to be tedious, but I'll get to enjoy some nice views.

The train pulled away from the station. I took out my phone, knowing it would be a big mistake if I didn't at least say goodbye.

I guess texts are handy now when I can't bring myself to utter these words.

I began typing: Ashton, I'm sorry that I'm leaving without saying goodbye. I thought I'd recovered after returning from R Province. I thought I could stay by your side and have a happy life with you. But I should've known the world would be much more complicated than I imagined. I paused in the middle of typing, struck by a painful reminder. Cuts and bruises may heal over time, but they leave behind scars that will never allow us to forget the pain.

Steeling myself, I continued the message: I got myself checked at the hospital. The doctors confirmed that I can never become pregnant again. That stillborn baby cost me my dreams of bearing my own child. I can't blame you, nor can I blame Cameron. You are the people I love, and the people I call my family. I can only call this suffering my own.

Marcus told me that the baby didn't die of suffocation; it was actually deformed. What kind of a mother am I to give my baby such a painful fate? Maybe he was too eager to be my child and forgot to bring along some things with him in his rush. He fought so hard to meet me, yet I couldn't save him in the end. Ashton, I hope you can forgive me for leaving like this yet again. And I hope that you can take care of Summer for me.

This is me tapping out. I used to think that revenge could help us find peace, but I've come to realize that the only thing we gain in return is suffering. I don't want to take revenge or wish ill upon anyone, so I'm turning in the towel on my happy ending.

The train moved at a fast speed. Pristine views of the countryside flew past in a blur; the beauty was almost suffocating.

I spent a couple of slow days on the train. The journey brought me past the glittering lights of unfamiliar cities and the lush greenery of thick forests. Once in a while, we passed by a small town. Each sighting was, however, fleeting.

I thought about how my life had panned out over the past few years. Upon closer scrutiny, everything felt more like a dream.

I was but a bystander in this dream.

I reached Q City at dawn, and I got a night's rest at a hotel near the train station.

I fell into a deep sleep. It was already noon when I woke up. The first thing on my agenda was to change my phone number.

I went to Speed Mobile and got a local number.

I decided to come to Q City in the end because someone once told me that it was the best place to get away from the hustle and bustle of the big city.

This is a much better place for me to lay down my roots than R Province.

I'd never sold Macy's house in Q City. It was still registered under Summer's name.

I changed the locks and tidied up the house before moving in. A wave of nostalgia came over me. It seemed like just yesterday when Macy and I came to Q City together.

Marcus said he buried the baby at Q City Cemetery. I wondered if it was because I once said in my sleep that I'd like to raise him in Q City.

That had been a long time ago, and I could no longer remember the situation clearly.

Chapter 627

It was May and the temperature had begun to rise.

On our way to the cemetery, we saw many people offering flowers to the deceased.

Q City was relatively small, with a slow pace of life. Most citizens of the city were born and raised there.

Many still hold their local traditions close to heart.

Marcus named the child North and decided not to give the child a surname.

The photo of North had already faded, and his grave was covered with weed.

I kneeled to pluck the weeds and tidied the area around it.

After that, I leaned toward his grave and said with a weak smile, "I'm sorry to have only come now, my dear child."

I had been avoiding him for so long in hopes of letting go, but it was impossible.

Next to us was a lady in her thirties sobbing quietly.

I glanced over at the tombstone and saw that it was a middle-aged lady. My first thought was that the grave probably belonged to the lady's mother.

There was no point in consoling her, so I kept silent. I felt empty as I watched her crying her heart out in pain. I wonder why am I not tearing up like her?

Sometime later, the lady stopped crying. She was startled when she noticed me and spoke with her hoarse voice. "You..."

I gave a slight smile and replied, "I'm here to see my child."

She gave the blurry photo on the tombstone a side glance. Even though it was a blurred photo, anyone could tell it was a baby.

She stared blankly for a moment and asked, "How old is he?"

"A full gestation month old." Maybe slightly longer.

She looked at me with her eyes still red and swollen. "Life is so short."

I remained silent and slowly lowered my gaze onto the ground.

When I was about to leave the cemetery, the lady was still around, seemingly unwilling to leave.

She told me a story about an eight-year-old girl. That girl was born into a blissful family with her mother, father, and younger brother.

However, periods of joy tend to end with sorrow. A disaster occurred and took her father away. Her mother was unable to withstand the pain, so she brought along her brother and remarried, leaving the girl in the care of her grandmother.

Her grandmother was a fortune teller and depended on that job for a living. She did not earn much and the girl's presence was an added burden for her.

So, her grandmother channelled all the pain and suffering she had gone through into verbal and physical abuse. Eventually, the young girl chose to end her life in front of her father's grave.

I found it a little weird when she told me, a stranger, the story.

Regardless, I did not wish to dwell on it.

After all, I was not a resident of Q City, and my purpose there was to visit my child.

Back at the apartment, I took a long nap and dreamt of North waving to me to bid farewell.

I woke up in tears and could no longer fall asleep.

My heart ached as the painful memories unfolded.

The following morning on my way to buy breakfast, I overheard the conversation between the steamed buns' stall owner and her husband.

“I heard that a young lady killed herself at the cemetery last night. Such a pity,” the stall owner sighed.

“Don’t listen to those rumors blindly!” her husband exclaimed.

She raised her voice and retaliated, “I wasn’t listening blindly! I saw it on my social media feed earlier. I’m certain it’ll be on the news later. You’ll see.”

Her husband let out a deep sigh, probably assuming that she was overthinking.

They had great chemistry at work. While one packs the buns, another collects money from the customer, providing efficient service.

I saw the news of the young lady’s suicide when I returned to the apartment.

The location was eerily familiar. I gasped as they uncovered the face of the deceased.

It reminded me of the story that I heard. But... why did she choose to commit suicide?

And which role did she undertake in that story?

There was no way for me to find out. Regardless, I had no regrets. After all, I had achieved what I set out for.

There was a cemetery called Sedan on the outskirts of Q City. The people there were devoted Buddhists. I went there before, and the road there was steep. It was a sacred place, filled with countless souls that provided relief.

Some people travel into the mountains to find their peace of mind, and also to find a sense of relief.

That narrow path, with no vehicle traffic, had been flattened by countless believers. Regardless, people still went to get closer to their deities.

Donned in a red scarf, I followed the pilgrimage group and kneeled with them without chanting prayers.

Instead, I prayed for the misery and suffering to be gone through each step of the journey.

Just then, an elderly beside me who seemed to notice my awkward movements advised, "Young lady, do wear some knee guards or you'll injure your knees."

Chapter 628

I looked up at the elderly, who had a pair of bright eyes and a gentle smile.

I grinned slightly in response. "It's okay. The more pain I feel, the more burden I could lift from the deceased."

According to Buddhism, for every kneel a mortal being makes with the deceased in mind, the greater the sense of relief.

Like what the elderly warned, the long journey had caused my knees to feel weak.

As I kneeled in front of the deities, I looked up and clasped my hands together to pray. "I pray to god for the living to live in health and for the deceased to rest in peace."

With the sounds of the chants, I kneeled in the temple while staring at the statue of the deity. The deity had a kind face, with a pair of long and slightly upward-tilted eyes that seemed to see through all the joys and miseries of life.

Let it go!

Life is short and everything will pass. We can only gain a sense of relief by letting go.

There is nothing in this world that can't be resolved. All the pain and miseries are just a part of life.

Legend said that the road to reincarnation was similar to the rotation of a rosary, going through each misery with the heart of tenacity and warmth, following the path of light, and leaving behind a beautiful future.

That June in A City.

It was evening when a middle-aged man from Animus Corporation brought a bunch of documents to me. "These are the documents for the Marketing Department's use tomorrow. You might need to work overtime today."

I nodded, paused my work, and glanced at him. "Oh, then I'm not going to the gathering tonight."

"It's a company gathering for all colleagues. It's not a good idea for you to drop out of it," he nagged.

Slightly annoyed, I let out a sigh. "I'm currently swamped by work."

"Those documents are needed by tomorrow afternoon. You can arrange them tomorrow morning. Scarlett, you have to socialize more with people," he elaborated impatiently.

I chuckled. "Savini, I am not anti-social, nor am I trying to avoid the gathering. It's just that I don't like it."

He sighed and continued nagging, "You've been here for almost a month. Have you chatted with any of your colleagues yet? If you really want a fresh start, you should get out and mingle!"

I paused whatever I was doing and looked at him. "What is a fresh start?"

"To meet and interact with new people. To make new friends and experience new things."

"Alright," I responded and nodded.

He was surprised and assumed that I agreed with his advice. "The gathering is at Oasis Hotel. Don't be late!"

He proceeded to place an invitation card on my desk and said, "You'll need to bring along this card with you and retrieve your number card."

I nodded in understanding. "There's even an invitation card?" I was surprised.

"Yes," he replied and walked back to his desk. "The company has already paid in full, so y'all can directly head in for some fun! It's a hot spring hotel, where the services are all-inclusive. Just head into wherever you want!"

My first thought was that the place sounded luxurious.

After giving me the card, Savini was prepared to leave.

I suddenly recalled that I wanted to apply for leave for the next few days. I called out, "Savini, I need to take leave for the next few days. Please help to approve them."

He turned his head and furrowed his brows. "Are you heading to K City?"

I nodded. "I need to settle some things."

"Missing your kid?"

"Kind of." I realized he was too chatty, so I did not elaborate on my replies.

"Oh, we can go together, then. I'm heading there too in a few days."

Just when I was about to reject his offer, he interrupted, "Alright, hurry now, you need to pack your stuff and head to the hotel!"

I fell silent as he already turned to leave. I glanced at the clock and saw that it was time to get off work.

Then, I glanced at the invitation card. Since I promised Savini, I had to go even if I did not want to. So, I packed my stuff and grabbed a cab there.

I met two other female colleagues at the hotel entrance and chatted a little.

We retrieved our number cards, and the front desk staff informed us politely, "Kindly change into the clothes and shoes that are provided."

I was taken aback. Has the service in hotels always been so thoughtful?

Seeing my reaction, the ladies, who had been there before, explained, "This is a hot spring hotel, where the guests are here for leisure instead of accommodation."

I followed them into the changing room. After changing, I headed up to the game area. It was exactly like what the ladies had described.

The game area, entertainment plaza, and dining area were all at the third level.

I originally thought that it was a normal gathering, where everyone would sit together over food and drinks.

Chapter 629

I didn't expect the gathering to be held in such a unique way. The hotel had many guests. When we occasionally bump into some colleagues, we would greet each other and continue enjoying our separate activities.

Felling slightly lazy, I found a seat in the main hall and sat down.

"Is there anyone sitting here?"

I was startled by the voice. I turned to take a look and what greeted my sight was a familiar face, but I could not recall who exactly he was.

He was one meter eighty-five in height with a slender figure and a cool exterior.

Seeing that I was staring at him blankly, he raised his brows and asked, "So is it occupied?"

My senses returned, and I shook my head. "Nope!"

He took a seat beside me while holding a cup of coke.

I could not help myself but took a few glances. It felt weird yet normal at the same time.

He saw me looking and asked, "Do you want one?"

I shook my head in embarrassment and replied, "No, thank you."

Bright neon lights shone throughout the place. Logically speaking, people would usually drink either a glass of hard liquor or a cocktail in such an environment. As such, I found it weird that the man was drinking coke.

That being said, it was probably normal since the place caters to people of all ages, from kids to adults. Even without such beverages, the place had a lively atmosphere with its neon lighting and upbeat songs.

Live music sounded through the main hall. The main singer stood on stage and was ready to sing a folksong that conveys the yearning of one's hometown.

The sad music was filled with so much emotion that I found myself engrossed in it.

The man beside me stood up and left, only to return a few minutes later.

He placed a cup of juice beside me. I stared at him with a blank expression as I was slightly surprised by his thoughtful action.

He chuckled lightly and said, "You're welcome."

I started to recall his identity. He was the man that stood in front of Grandma's tombstone. Once again, I fell into a trance.

After a short pause, I asked, "Have we met before?"

He raised his brows and questioned, "Do you know me?"

"No." I shook my head.

"Well, then we don't know each other," he chuckled lightly.

I was taken aback by his casual response, so I thought for a moment and asked again, "No, I meant if we have actually met before this."

Meeting and knowing someone were two different things.

He chuckled lightly. "Since we don't know each other, it could only mean we have never met before."

I was speechless. Snapping back to my senses, I uttered, "Just because we don't know each other doesn't mean that we have not seen each other before."

The coldness exuding from him was impenetrable, even with my persistent questions.

He then said, "Since we've met before, let's get to know each other then!"

"I'm Scarlett Stovall!" I put my hand forward and introduced myself.

He smiled slightly and shook my hand. "I'm Armond Murphy!"

Armond Murphy?

I did not put much thought into it.

Seemingly gotten bored of the music, he asked, "There's a swimming pool and a hot spring on the first level. Shall we go together?"

I was a little taken aback and looked down at the hotel's set of clothes that I was wearing. "I don't think I can."

He laughed at my response. "Don't worry. They have swimsuits at that level."

"Since we're here, we should have as much fun as we can. Let's not waste the trip."

I let out a soft chuckle. I was filled with doubts but decided to play along. "Let's go then!"

As I stood up, two colleagues passed by, so I waved at them.

I was not familiar with the hotel, so he led the way. Once we stepped out of the lift, we headed straight for the hot spring.

It was an indoor hot spring. I scanned through the swimsuits at the entrance and subconsciously lifted my gaze at him.

He chuckled and said, "Wait for me!" He headed to the gents changing room after.

About five minutes later, he came out with a black paper bag. He looked at me and said, "Try it on."

I took over the bag and was shocked to see that it was a swimsuit. "This..."

"Try it on and see if it fits!"

I headed into the changing room to change into it.

It was a three-piece swimsuit. If I don't wear the smock, it would be a little too revealing.

On the other hand, if I wear it, I'll look demurer. That sounded good to me.

I walked out of the changing room. Armond was waiting at the resting area and froze when he saw me.

"It suits you very well."

"Thank you!" That was the first time I wore a blue swimsuit and I thought it looked pretty decent.

He smiled and inquired, “Do you know how to swim?”

I shook my head. Previously at K City, Ashton brought me to the pool at the villa to play a few times. However, I was basically holding onto the edge of the pool every time. It was still okay as the pool was around five feet deep.

I would need some time to adjust for me to swim independently without any aid.

“I don’t mind being your coach for the day!” he offered while holding out his hands toward me.

Chapter 630

Slightly stunned, I looked out at the pool for a moment. It was a shallow pool filled with kids, and the adults were sitting around the sides to watch out for their children.

“It’s all kids here. It doesn’t seem appropriate for us to be here.”

He chuckled and explained, “That’s precisely the reason you should practice here. So, you wouldn’t be pressured and stressed about it.”

He had a valid point. I could imagine feeling embarrassed learning in a pool full of others who could swim well.

Most of the kids in the pool did not know how to swim and had floats with them.

I thought for a moment and said, "I'll enter the pool myself."

Since I was there, I decided to have fun.

He laughed.

I grabbed a donut float and entered the pool. It was a relatively shallow pool, only four feet deep. But it was deep enough to swim in.

However, being the rookie swimmer that I was, I did not even know how to start in the shallow pool.

One of the kids raised his head above the water and mocked me. "Hey, you don't know how to swim?"

I shook my head with a slight smile. "I'm still learning!"

The kid looked at me and started advising me, "You won't be learning much if you do it that way."

He sighed and exclaimed, "Here, let me teach you!"

I noticed that the kid seemed to be around the age of ten.

It was easier said than done. No matter how much the kid asked me to be brave, I just couldn't let go of the sides of the pool.

After some time, the kid got impatient and exclaimed, "You can't be like this. It'll only make it harder for you to learn how to swim. I used to feel the same until my mother threw me into the pool. After a few experiences, I got it. You can't keep worrying about drowning."

I felt embarrassed that a kid was nagging at me to be brave, so I nodded and slowly let go of the edges.

However, floating in the pool made me feel insecure and anxious.

"Don't worry. Slowly use your arms and push the water toward the back and kick your feet." The kid was skilled in coaching.

With my progress, I felt less embarrassed. However, I still had some difficulty maintaining the motion.

Just then, I felt someone's arm holding my waist. It was an adult's arms. I was taken aback, so I turned before losing control and choked on the water.

I started coughing.

Luckily, someone supported me.

"How did you choke?" A deep and cold male voice spoke. "I saw you were getting pretty good at it."

I turned and saw that it was Armond. Dressed in his swimming trunks, his toned arms and abs were exposed for all to see.

He was obviously attracting the attention of many. I realized that he was still holding on to my waist, so I twisted away.

I looked at him before chuckling awkwardly and explained, "I lost my footing."

I felt even more awkward the moment the words left my mouth. I wasn't even standing in the first place. Why did I say that?

Luckily for me, he did not seem to notice, or perhaps he just doesn't care.

"I'll learn with you later on!" He chuckled.

"It's okay. I-I..."

"Don't be so quick to reject me now. Try it. You might be able to learn faster that way," he interrupted.

I spaced out while staring at him and nodded slightly. "Okay. Thank you in advance."

He raised his brows and smiled. "You can thank me later when you know how to swim."

Learning how to swim was not an easy task. Even if I could touch the ground with my feet in a pool that was five feet deep, I would not be able to swim while feeling insecure.

Luckily, I had Armond, who was a thoughtful guy, around. After a few more practices, I found that I could swim independently for some time.

"There's an indoor hot spring. We could head there to take a rest and soak in it," Armond suggested while he held me to the edge of the pool.

I nodded. "Thank you for today."

His lips curled into a smile. "I get thanked a lot every day."

Stepping into the hot spring, I looked at him and asked, "How long do you plan to stay in A City?"

"Not sure. Why?"

"I want to treat you to a meal, of course!" I exclaimed. I shifted and sat on a black stone. The warmth of the hot spring got my whole body to relax.

He found a spot to sit at, nodded, and smiled. "Sure, what about tomorrow?"

"For dinner?"

"Anytime!"

"For dinner then!" I had to work during the day and did not have much time at night either.

Just then, someone came to whisper into Armond's ear. Armond looked at me. "It's a date then! I'll take my leave first. I have something to attend to."