

Chapter 651

After a long silence, I spoke in resignation, "You don't have to hurt them. It was my fault, so I should be the one to bear the consequences."

Dante simply scoffed and looked at me indifferently. "It's not your time yet."

Then, he raised his hand and pointed at the girls. "They are going to die anyway. So why not let one of them help you to bear it first? Since you're not willing to choose any of them, let me help you to select the most obnoxious one, so we can end this discussion as soon as possible."

My eyes widened as I stared at him in disbelief. He is obviously sowing discord. No matter who it will be, I'll suffer from guilt for the rest of my life. He is doing this on purpose!

He fixed his eyes on Tessa and flashed an evil smile. "A woman who likes philosophy. Very interesting. I've heard that a woman like her normally practices abstinence. I wonder if that's true."

I shook my head. "No, you can't do this."

Tessa was dumbstruck, her eyes full of horror and helplessness.

I rushed forward to stop the men, but I was pushed to the ground.

Then, I heard her resisting and screaming for help.

Dante's voice came from the side. "I haven't seen this scene for many years. How spectacular!"

I could not look back. Her ear-splitting shrills echoed in my ears.

It is all because of me.

For a long time, I stood frozen amidst her screams of agony and wails of despair.

In the end, all I could hear was a sentence from Tessa: "Scarlett, I hate you."

People like Dante and Abe know better than anyone else that mental torture is more excruciating than physical pain.

By the time I was back to the villa, the huge dining table had been set.

I initially thought that Abe would have left, but he was still seated on the couch, reading a book leisurely.

Danny and Dante probably had left, so there were only Abe and me in this spacious room.

No one instructed me to go back to my room nor stay here. So, it meant that I should stand in the living room obediently.

Half an hour later, a chef came out from the kitchen and bowed to Abe. "Mr. Abe, dinner is ready."

Putting down the book in his hand, he replied, "Okay."

He was a man of few words.

Thud! It was so quiet that I could hear the sound of his book being placed down on the coffee table.

Then, he stood up and put his hand in his pocket. His towering 1.86m frame gave off a domineering vibe.

When he saw me standing at the side, he bent down slightly and glanced sideways at me. "Let's eat dinner."

Is he talking to me?

I pursed my lips and saw a housekeeper putting another set of cutlery and bowls on the dining table.

I understood now. He was indeed talking to me.

So, I followed him to the dining table and sat down. This sixteen-seater dining table was way too big for the two of us.

He seemed to have nothing to say to me as he focused on his food and ate gracefully.

Clang! A noise came from the kitchen.

Just then, Danny and Dante came inside.

One of them went to the kitchen to check on the noise while another one came to Abe's side and greeted him, "Mr. Abe."

People who worked in the kitchen came out and reported, "Someone accidentally knocked over something."

"Okay." Abe put down his cutlery even though he had not eaten much.

Danny frowned and glanced at the chef. The chef immediately looked down in fear.

“Mr. Abe, he...” Dante suddenly stopped mid-sentence when he saw Abe looking at me.

“Is the food not to your liking?” Abe asked. The question was directed to me.

I shook my head. “No.”

“Not in the mood to eat?”

I shook my head again. How could I eat after what happened to Tessa?

“Useless! Send them out to deliver the goods!” Abe shouted to his subordinates.

My heart sank. Does this man have a problem?

The housekeepers involved were then taken away, and the others remained expressionless as if they had become accustomed to it.

I was devastated. Although I wanted to say something for them, I realized that I could only protect myself.

“They...”

As soon as I mustered up the courage to speak, he had cut me off. "I heard that it's not only the Murphys who wanted you safe."

Taken aback, I raised my gaze and looked at him, but the coldness in his eyes was so overwhelming that I had to look away. "What do you mean, Mr. Abe?"

He smiled mirthlessly. "Never mind. I'll treat this as a favor for the Murphys."

After that, he glanced at Dante and said, "Let Ms. Stovall move around freely in the house and treat her well."

"Yes," Dante replied.

With that, he left.

I was momentarily stunned, baffled by his behavior.

Night fell.

The bright moonlight shone down on the front yard. The combination of the sound of waves and insects was exceptionally pleasant to hear at night.

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I sat up in a daze for a moment before I got out of bed.

With Abe's permission, I had complete freedom around the villa.

There was a landline in the villa, but I was not allowed to use it.

Nobody was able to guarantee if the landline even worked; it was not worth the trouble to try.

To speak to Nora and the rest, I had to find a way to enter the operating theatre. The only catch was that it required Danny's retina scan to unlock.

With nothing to be done, I wandered around the pitch-black villa and returned to my bedroom dejectedly.

Everything was normal over the next few days. I've probed Dante a couple of times hoping to learn something about Nora's situation, but all I've been told was that she was away doing what needs to be done.

The monsoon was in full force during lunchtime.

It left as quickly as it came; the air was dank with moisture when the rain cleared.

The compound of the villa was littered with rain moths. I glanced over at the boulder-like figure next to me. "Grilled moths are delicious," I said casually. "Have you had any before?"

Danny was taken aback. "Had before," he repeated, in broken English.

He looked like he understood. "Did you have them in a restaurant?" I asked with a grin. "I used to have them when I was little. Each time when it rained in my home, I would go out to the yard and pick them up. I'd give them a rinse and then throw them into a pan. When the wings are crispy, that's when I'd add some oil and spices. It was delicious."

Danny remained lost in thought as though he recalled something within his memories and did not answer me. "It had just rained outside," I pressed on. "If you're worried about me running, why don't you come along with me and we'll go pick some moths?"

Danny hesitated. "Stop overthinking," I said impatiently. "I'm just feeling nostalgic over the taste of fried moth. It was my childhood favorite, you know. I just want a taste, no ulterior motives."

He agreed in an instant. "Alright!"

I smiled at him. "Thank you, Danny!" I said as I got on my feet.

I procured a basket from the kitchen and proceeded to fill it up with moths from the yard outside the villa.

I became startled at the appearance of a dark hand over my basket only to realize that Danny had lent a hand too.

"Do you like fried moth too?" I laughed.

Danny grunted but did not elaborate.

I gathered an entire basketful and headed back into the kitchen.

To be honest, I was not familiar with the art of moth eating. But according to Tabitha, moths are a staple for people from Xenhall. Many of them had fond childhood memories of having moths as meals.

As I observed Danny's expression change, I think there was truth to Tabitha's words.

Due to geographical differences, one's experiences would differ from another's.

Tabitha had taught me to sauté them for a while before adding some oil and seasoning to taste. The moths would soon turn from sticky to crispy, bloated with oil and all the good stuff. A bite into it would be an explosion of flavor in one's mouth.

At the hint of a promising scent, Danny could not help himself but watch me in the kitchen.

"You know how to cook?" he asked, stunned.

I nodded. "Yes, I've learned how to when I was young. But it's been years since I've cooked this. I'm just figuring things out as I go along."

"Have a taste?" I offered Danny the plate when I was done.

His face broke into a very rare smile as he accepted.

Danny chewed the plump moth very slowly. "Not bad!" he said as he turned to look at me.

The people around Xenhall had to eat things that other cultures would consider repulsive like silkworms, maggots, and locusts due to their living conditions.

Back in the forest when Tabitha and I got to talking about this, I felt pretty disgusted too.

Her gastronomical memories sent chills down my spine.

But now that I have a chance to experience that, it didn't seem so bad.

Danny caught me in a daze. "Not eating?" he frowned at me.

I picked up a moth and ate it. It wasn't bad if I didn't keep reminding myself that it was a bug and just thought of it as a dish. Actually, it was pretty delicious, with that faint taste that protein-rich foods have. It was a unique experience, to say the least.

However, it got boring pretty quickly just binging on moths. "It would be perfect if we had some beer," I lamented.

Danny grinned and got up to fetch some. Beer was not enough to incapacitate a large man like him. It was a good thing that I still had the drugs from Nora I could use.

Danny was a rough and tumble sort of guy. After a meal of moths and beer, his wariness toward me had lowered.

The drugs soon took hold and before long he was sprawled on the table, ready to take a nap.

I got up and stood next to him. "Let me help you upstairs, you should get some rest."

"No..." he muttered and was unconscious before he managed to complete his sentence.

It was a monumental effort on my part to move this man, with a stature as frail as mine. It was a good thing that Dante wasn't here. The other servants busied themselves with water stains left behind by the downpour.

We lumbered over to the operating theatre. "Mr. Danny, open your eyes and have a look. Is this your room?"

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At the sound of my voice, he grunted but did not do much else.

Worried that the servants would walk in on us, I reiterated my request. "Mr. Danny, would you..."

Suddenly, he flung his head up violently and stared at me.

My heart skipped a beat. "Mr. Danny..." I stammered.

"Don't provoke Mr. Abe. He's more frightening than you could imagine." With that said, he turned and walked unsteadily away.

I stood rooted in surprise.

"I just wanted to visit them, are they alright?" I called to his departing back.

"They're still alive."

I sat down hopelessly on the floor. Is this how it will be?

What if I begged Abe to?

At this thought, I stood up and obtained a knife from the kitchen to slit my wrists.

I was very familiar with the process having done it countless times when I was mourning my dear child.

I passed out in the living room. My last memory was of the panicked servants rushing over to my limp body. With that in mind, I sighed in relief before losing consciousness.

I awoke in the hospital; being hardly surprised. As expected, Abe was by my bed.

“You’re up?” he asked without much emotion.

“Why did you want to kill yourself?” Dante asked with a frown.

I stole a glance at Danny in the corner; his expression was cold. I looked back at Abe and Dante, putting two and two together.

Danny did not inform Abe that I had set him up.

With a meaningful look at Abe, I said in a hoarse voice. “Mr. Abe, I am willing to exchange with my life!”

“Exchange for what?” Abe frowned.

“For their lives!”

“Ha!” Abe laughed coldly. “One life for four. You’re confident, aren’t you?”

“Aren’t you curious about my relationship with the Murphys?” I asked. My throat still hurt.

“Does this have anything to do with me?” he asked sharply.

I...

I was dumbstruck for several moments. Hastily composing myself, I continued. “The Murphys will be able to locate me, no matter where I am. Since you already have plans to send me back, why don’t you release my friends anyway? I’ll even owe you one.”

“Pah!” Dante spat. “Does this woman have rust in her brain or something? Talking about favors with Mr. Abe?”

I ignored him and looked straight at Abe.

He spoke again. “What is your relationship with the Murphys?”

“All you have to know is that my relationship with them goes deeper than you can imagine,” I said deliberately. I knew that they feared the Murphys. The closer they think I am to the Murphys, the more leverage I have on my side for negotiation.

He smiled. “The favor goes both ways,” he said after a moment’s pause.

“What do you want?” I asked sternly.

Before he could reply, the doctor entered to replenish my medication. Abe’s gaze followed the doctor and landed on my bandaged arm.

“How long more for her wound to heal?” he asked casually.

The doctor eyed him with suspicion. Dante conversed with him in their native Venrian.

The doctor spoke a few sentences and promptly left.

“See you in three days. Get well soon!” Abe said.

I wasn’t sure if he would hurt Nora and the rest within this timeframe. “What about my friends?” I asked.

“They will be unharmed.” With that said, Abe left.

Three days later.

The music was raucous and deafening in the Red-Light District. Spectators were screaming themselves mad at the strippers on stage.

I wasn't used to this kind of a place and was visibly uneasy. Next to me, Abe was drinking without much regard for my comfort.

“Mr. Abe, what do you need to do?” I asked. He gave me three days to comply with his terms. I thought about it a lot but did not expect to be brought here upon my discharge.

The large private room was only occupied by me and Abe. The girls all around us kept casting glances as they passed.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that they saw him as prey. After all, he looked wealthy and was handsome.

“Please remain silent!” Abe said, with a look at me.

I resumed my seat with some frustration.

It was difficult to remain silent in a place like this.

I noticed that Dante and Danny were gone.

Suddenly, Abe placed a device into his ear.

Turns out we're not just here for drinks.

Suddenly, he stiffened and was staring at something across the room. I followed his gaze.

My heart stopped beating momentarily as I froze with an inexpressible surge of emotions.

I haven't seen him for months and all of a sudden there he was in front of me before I knew how to react.

I watched as he entered the building and sat down amidst the noise and flashing lights. He was accompanied by Joseph who looked grave and stern, as though he was here on business and not for a good time.

Something stirred out of the corner of my eye. My heart skipped to my throat as I saw him reach out toward his waist.

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I am highly acquainted with this gesture from having witnessed it many times. Abe was reaching for his gun.

I glanced toward Ashton in desperation. He seemed to be looking for someone. His haughty expression kept people from approaching him.

“Mr. Abe, you...”

“Shut up!” He glared at me.

I was frightened into silence. Why is Ashton here? I thought. What is he doing here?

Was he looking for me?

No one would know about my disappearance from the country if Savini did not speak. Even if he did know and was out to look for me, how did he end up here?

Query after query raced through my mind, but the most pressing one was Abe's intentions towards Ashton.

Abe grabbed my wrist and brought my attention back to the present. I was here as bait.

"Don't startle him," Abe muttered into his earpiece. "Let's see how many men he has with him."

After giving the order, he was dragging me along toward Ashton's table.

"Mr. Fuller, what a coincidence!" he said with feigned surprise.

We locked eyes. I was at a loss for words with the sudden twist of events.

Joseph looked as stunned as I felt. For as long as I've known him, I have never seen him like this before. His eyes widened in shock at the sight of me.

"How are you?" I blurted, as I leaned forward to shake his hand.

Joseph shot a glance at Ashton and composed himself in an instant. "I'm well, how do you do." He took my hand.

“Long time no see, Mr. Abe!” Ashton said, with an inscrutably calm gaze at Abe.

The two men were of similar height. One had a calm and stable aura that hid an unpredictable nature, while the other looked calm and mild-mannered, but had ferocious rage just bubbling beneath the surface.

They sat down; I meekly next to Abe. I began to grasp faintly at Abe’s master plan for the night.

It’s obvious that he intended to leave no survivors.

I had thought that his purpose in bringing me along was to use me as a human shield if things got ugly. But it didn’t seem as simple as that.

What grudge does Abe have with Ashton?

“Mr. Fuller, did you bring it?” Abe asked briskly. He detested small talk.

Ashton frowned. His weariness was well hidden within his rugged brows. Traveling to this part of the world had taken its toll on him.

“Mr. Abe, why don’t you introduce the lady?” Ashton said with a casually unrecognized glance at me.

“My companion.” Abe leered at Ashton.

Ashton nodded but didn't seem interested in an elaboration regarding me.

I shot a glance at Joseph, who placed the black briefcase on the table.

“Mr. Abe, do you want to inspect the goods here?”

Abe grinned. “Mr. Fuller and I are old friends. I trust that the goods are in order.”

Abe turned to me and gave me a meaningful look. I understood immediately.

Before we came, Dante had told me to seize the briefcase at the first available opportunity.

I hesitated for a fraction of a second and reached out to grab it.

As soon as I touched it, a hand slammed down on top of mine. The familiar touch and warmth of it shook me.

“What's the rush? Mr. Abe should allow us to inspect the goods in return, shouldn't he?” Ashton said as he loosened his grasp on my hand but did not let go, as if he stole the opportunity to hold my hand.

I was on the verge of panicking and tried to withdraw my hand but Ashton kept the pressure down.

“Mr. Fuller, you’re always cautious.” Abe smiled.

As he spoke, he threw me back into my seat, pressed himself against me, and pressed his lips onto mine.

It was so sudden; I did not manage to react.

It must have been several seconds later when I felt a warm stiffness against my body, and he released his hold on me.

I had the necklace in my grasp. As I came to my senses, I glanced at Ashton instinctively.

His face was frozen in a look of cold fury. Hatred and rage emanated from his entire body.

“Mr. Fuller, why are you looking so grim?” Abe teased. “The necklace is lovely. I just wanted to see how it would look on my companion; I meant no harm. If it belongs to you, I will gladly oblige you.”

He handed the necklace over to Ashton.

I frowned in puzzlement. That necklace was originally given to me by Dante for safekeeping.

Was Ashton here just for the necklace?

Ashton said nothing but shot an indifferent glance at Joseph.

Joseph received the necklace, examined it closely, and nodded at Ashton.

“So, Mr. Fuller. This is an even trade, is it not?” Abe chuckled.

“Leave her here!” Ashton said coldly as he pointed a long finger at me.

“Why, Mr. Fuller, do you like the girl?” Abe raised his eyebrows. “Are you so lacking in the company of women?”

“No, I’m not,” Ashton said with a scowl.

Chapter 655

“This is love at first sight, you know,” Abe said with a mocking smile. “You’re putting me in a difficult position here. She is... occupied for the night. Would you like me to show you our selection of girls?”

Ashton looked mutinous.

Abe had touched a nerve.

Abe was openly taunting Ashton now with his laugh. I was desperately looking for something that I could use as a weapon.

Suddenly, I recalled the gun on Abe’s hip and gasped involuntarily.

Before I could lift a finger, I was pinned down on my waist by something solid.

“Take the briefcase and run,” breathed Abe’s voice in my ear. “Don’t try anything funny with me, or I would be more than happy to leave another corpse behind.”

The room fell silent, as though the occupants were aware of the tension brewing. The dancers and patrons had their guns aimed at Abe.

Abe narrowed his eyes as he let out a cold laugh. "Mr. Fuller, you've come prepared!"

Ashton kept his gaze on me. "Let her go, I will let you walk out of here alive."

"Her? Looks like my source was right."

"Darling, you're my ticket out of here. Thank you in advance," Abe crooned in my ear.

I squirmed and wriggled as he held my body close to his. My plan to steal his gun slipped away as he grabbed it and held it at my head.

I would be lying if I said that I wasn't afraid. I had no idea how I was going to get out of it.

With me as collateral, Abe was unfazed. "Mr. Fuller, do you have all of your men here? You didn't abandon your old headquarters, have you?"

"Let go of her," Ashton said quietly.

He too drew out his gun and pointed it at us.

I knew nothing regarding this whole affair, but things were beginning to make sense as they unraveled.

Abe must have known my identity in advance to bring me here for this particular purpose.

He held on to me and inched towards the door. Joseph was perspiring with anxiety.

Ashton had laid this trap for Abe, but he did not expect me to get caught up in it.

Abe suddenly squeezed my throat. Through my pain, I heard Dante through his earpiece.

“Mr. Abe, the explosives are in place. Awaiting your order.”

Abe did not respond but continued to drag me backward. “Ashton, you will lose to me again,” he jeered at Ashton’s helpless rage.

As I was hauled violently out the door, I threw caution to the wind and screamed. “Ashton, they’re going to blow up this place! Don’t worry about me and get out of there!”

Abe tossed me into the car. The next second, a flurry of gunshots filled the air. I did not know where they came from or who they were for. It was chaotic, to say the least.

Crash! Before we moved, we were hit by two cars, one from either side. We were locked in.

More gunshot sounds echoed into the night. Abe kept his vice grip on me and pushed me forward.

Ashton hesitated with his gun at the sight of me.

“Hoho!” Abe chuckled in disdain. “You’re worth more than you look, aren’t you?” he said to me.

I was disoriented and deafened by the gunfight all around us. “You overestimate me!” I screamed in despair.

He dragged me by the neck away from the window. “Stay where you are or she dies!” Abe shouted at Ashton who was in pursuit.

My arm felt as though a massive steel pipe was being forced through it. I cried out in agony.

“Everyone, hold your weapons!” Ashton shouted with pain in his voice.

Suddenly, the scene became deathly quiet.

The only sounds in the still night were the steady drip of my blood. My arm was numb, and pain threatened to swallow me whole.

I looked down, sweating in dread of what I may find. My arm was soaked crimson in my own blood.

The possibility of this was where I would meet my end was both terrifying and torturous.

I glanced up at Ashton. Looking back at me behind his fury and rage were tenderness and fear of losing me, both of which were beyond words to describe.

I saw for the first time what his helplessness really looked like.

“Ashton, let me leave here. Or she’ll die with me.” I felt the cold tip of Abe’s gun pressing lightly against my temple. He was no longer jeering at Ashton; his voice was cold and deadly serious.

Ashton hardened his gaze again. “Let go of her, and I may spare your life,” he said quietly.

“Hoho! Do you think I’m a fool?”

Ashton was shaking in an effort to suppress his temper. If he had the chance to kill Abe, he wouldn’t just do it. He would tear Abe up with his bare hands.

However, he fought that impulse and spoke to Abe in a level voice. “Let me take her place at being your hostage.”

“No!” My throat was dry.

Abe’s maniacal laughter rang in my ears. “Ashton, I’ve expected a lot more from you. So, this is the famous white knight rescuing the damsel in distress situation that your people talk so much about.”