

Chapter 666

Tessa had no good retort for that. Her face turned red with anger, and she frowned, ready to rebuke, but Laurel quickly stopped her, “Calm down, guys. Let’s talk this through. We don’t have to fight. It’s pointless. And we’re all safe and sound, and that’s a cause for celebration.”

Everyone fell silent, and Tessa stood up. “I’m full. You guys go ahead.” Then she went upstairs.

Tabitha and Nora said nothing, while Laurel looked at me and shifted the topic, “Are you going straight to A City after you go back, Scarlett?”

I nodded. “Yeah. I want to see my daughter.”

“You have a daughter?” She was surprised. “But you look so young. How old is your daughter now?”

“Five. Almost six, actually.”

They looked at one another, and Nora threw me a look of curiosity. “So you’re married? Does Armond know about it?”

That question was weird, but I nodded. “He does.”

“Huh?” The girls were stunned. “He knows you’re a married woman, but he’s still that nice to you? Is he sick in the head?”

“Didn’t know hotties like him love young MILFs.”

The conversation went in a weird direction, and I laughed. “Don’t think too much about it. He’s helping me out for something in return. I have something he needs, so this is nothing but a transaction.”

“Transaction?” Nora was surprised, and also flummoxed. “Is the thing he’s looking for worth the lives of five?”

“It’s a box my grandma gave me before she passed on. It’s a puzzle box. I have one, but the other one was auctioned off. He’s looking for this box, but I don’t know why.” I wasn’t sure who Armond was. His last name was Murphy, so I thought he was probably a part of the Murphys.

But if that was the case, why did he take the trouble to hold that auction in J City and sold off the box he had? If he wasn’t a part of the Murphys though, then why was he aiming for that box?

Nora rubbed her chin and nodded. “Rich guys like him like to waste their time on stuff we think are unnecessary.” She then looked at me. “Thank you, though. I’ll treat you to something good when we get back. You’re my friend now.”

I smiled, and Tabitha looked at me. “My wedding’s in October, but I don’t know if that’s going to change after what happened. You have to come if it’s proceeding as usual though.”

Laurel smiled. “Yeah, we’re besties now. Hey, I have an idea. Do you guys want to open a company?”

We were taken aback by that proposal, and Tabitha looked at her. “Don’t tell me you want us to be your partners.”

Laurel nodded incessantly. “I have been giving it some thought back in the glass room. I thought I’d open a company with you guys if I managed to get out alive, and I did get out in one piece. We’re going to work together for our whole life.”

Tabitha frowned. “You are so greedy! You just got saved from one hell, and now you want to bind all of us together?”

Laurel smiled. “I mean, we can do anything together after the hell we went through. We met by chance, and I want this friendship to go on. We come from different places, so we’re going to drift away if we have nothing to connect us. I don’t want that to happen.”

Nora found it amusing. “That so cheesy. That won’t happen. We can always chat online.”

“What kind of company do you have in mind?” I asked. “Any idea about where you’re going to establish it? What’s the company going to sell?”

Laurel gave it some thought. “I haven’t thought about that in detail. All I have is a rough idea, but I know where the company should be established— A City. Sure, it’s not the best city, but the infrastructure’s well established, and it’s developing well. It’s in a strategic location, and the weather’s perfect too.”

“I have an idea,” Nora said. “Why don’t you open up an inn or tea shop? We can gather round at any time for a little vacation.”

Tabitha nodded. "Good idea." The girls kept on talking, while I looked at the second floor, and I went upstairs after some contemplation.

I knocked on Tessa's door, but it took a while for her to open it. She was surprised to see me, then she asked, "Anything?"

"Let's talk."

She frowned and took a step back to let me in.

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She was obsessed with Buddhism. The moment she was saved, she erected a Buddha statue in her room and started worshipping it. Tessa sat cross legged before the statue and put her hands together as she muttered the mantras under her breath.

"What do you want to talk about?" she said.

I looked at her and answered, "Do you really believe he'll bless you?"

She looked at me from the corner of her eye and replied sternly, "I wouldn't be talking to you now if he doesn't."

Well, that was one woman far gone in religion. I paused for a moment. “They said you live in A City. Laurel’s going to open up a shop there once we get back. Want to join us?”

“No,” she refused firmly.

I nodded. “I didn’t mean it, you know. I didn’t want to hurt you guys. I really didn’t. I never expected Dante to hurt you like that. I—”

“Enough!” she interrupted me and threw me a dirty look. “Do you really think you’re that noble, Stovall? You keep looking down at us from a pedestal. Has anyone ever told you you’re one heck of a hypocrite?”

I looked at her, stunned.

She sneered. “I don’t think you even realized this yourself, but you’re a cold, selfish woman. And yet you keep trying to make yourself out to be some saint. You come from a privileged background, men fawn over you, and people would help you out no matter what. All you did was sit on your *ss and reaped the rewards. Ask yourself: have you ever gotten something through your own two hands? I knew it.”

I gaped at her, having no retort for that.

She was spurred on by my silence. “You’re just pretending to be a good guy, but you hate me more than they do, don’t you? That’s why you kept quiet when Dante chose me. Because you’d feel less guilty if I was the one who’s hurt. Because you never liked me. Am I right?”

I kept quiet, for I thought she had a point. Humans would tend to be sentimental, and even though I knew some part of her answer was fueled by her own rage, I couldn't help but feel that I had the same thought at some point too.

I wanted to save them, yes, but I didn't do my best either. I just went with the flow and didn't do everything I could. even though I knew Ashton might be looking for me in Venria, I was still staying in Western Europe without a care.

"What? Got nothing to say to that?" She sneered with disdain.

I got up and left without saying anything. Not many people could face their own darkness head on. Me included.

...

The morning sun shone through the glass and covered the bed with golden dust. It was already August before I knew it. Fall's around the corner.

Everyone gathered in the lobby early in the morning to prepare for the return. We managed to get to Western Europe from Venria without any passport or ID since the security was lax thanks to Armond, but it wouldn't be so easy the other way around. Fortunately, Nora and the girls called their families and asked them to send the necessary documents over.

Not mine though. I couldn't call anyone else, since the only number I memorized was Ashton's. That proved to be a headache for Armond, and he had to talk to a lot of people in power to get the authorization for me.

We came to the airport, and Armond sent his men to take our flight tickets. At the same time, he went to settle his matters, leaving us alone.

Nora and the girls were exhilarated. Nora held my hands. "You can't imagine how happy I am right now."

"We can go home! Yay!"

"Yay for me too!"

The girls held each other's hands, looking excited. Tabitha suggested, "Our flight's one hour away. Why don't we buy something to bring home?"

"Sure!"

And then everyone was silent. Laurel said carefully, "But we don't have money." Well, that killed the mood.

"Get Scarlett to lend you some then. She's friends with Mr. Murphy, and the Murphys are rich. I don't think she'd refuse, would she?" Tessa blurted.

Everyone looked at me. Well, this is awkward. Nora gave me the puppy-eye look and said nothing. Tabitha hesitated before speaking up, "Scarlett. I know it's a bit much to ask, but can you lend us some money? I really want to bring something home with me. It's been a while since I left, and my parents must be worried sick. I want to get something for them."

"Yeah," Laurel said carefully. "Same here. They must be worried sick. I know they must have searched high and low for us."

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I couldn't help but sigh. After looking at Armond, who was on the phone, I handed the bag to Nora and said, "Alright, I'll go get it. Wait here for me."

"Wow! Thank you, Scarlett." A joyful smile spread across her face.

Armond spoke into the phone with a low grunt. "I've taken the goods and handed them over. Recently you..."

When he glanced back, he saw me and was taken aback. Then he quickly said into the phone, "I'll talk to you later. I'm hanging up now."

After that, he turned to me and asked, "What's wrong?"

I was a little embarrassed. All this while I was staying at his place and being a burden to him. Right now, I was really pushing my luck by asking him to lend me some money.

But I've already made a promise. I couldn't return empty-handed now.

After some thought, I said, "Mr. Murphy, can I borrow some money from you, please? My friends would like to buy some stuff to bring home to their family members."

He was stunned for a moment, but he smiled and replied, "Sure."

From his pocket, he whipped out a black card and said, "Here you go. There's no credit limit."

I looked at the card in his hand and felt a little confused. "That's too much. All I need is just a few thousand. I..."

"Don't think too much of it. I only have this card on me," he said as he looked at me indifferently.

I was surprised, but I reached out and took the black card from him. Sighing inwardly, I said, "I can never understand the rich."

Some of the women lost themselves with the card. They bought a lot of products after going around a dozen of the branded stores in the airport.

Fortunately, they managed to control their shopping impulse. That was only because they were in a hurry to make it through security checks to board the plane.

At the security checkpoint, I rummaged through my bag for a long time and realized that my air ticket and entry letter were lost.

The paperwork that Armond had spent an effort to get for me was completely lost.

"Wasn't it in your bag just now? I watched you put it in the bag. It's impossible for you to lose it." Nora took the bag from me and searched the bag again. She couldn't find the air ticket and letter in the bag either.

Nora pondered for a moment and said, "I was holding the bag just now, and I didn't overturn it. Could it be that it was lost at one of the shops we visited just now?"

Tabitha grew anxious. Looking at the time, she said, "We only have half an hour left. This is a big airport, and it'll take us a while to get to the boarding gate. If we delay anymore, we might miss the plane."

Laurel nodded and began to panic.

Tessa looked at me and said, "Scarlett, why don't you continue to find the documents here by yourself, and we will wait for you at the boarding gate?"

"No way! What if she can't find it? Do you want to leave her here all by herself?" Nora said angrily.

I looked at the time. There was not enough time, and that's considering that we would need some time to get to the boarding gate after passing through the security check.

After thinking about it for a while, I looked at them and said, "You guys go ahead, go find the boarding gate first. I'll go back and look for the documents. It won't be a problem."

"But..." Nora looked worried. "But what if you can't find it? We won't be able to come out once we go in." After a pause, she said, "How about this? I'll go with you to find it. Anyhow, I'm not in a hurry to go back. I'll stay here to accompany you if we can't find it. There's nothing much to do back home anyway, so it'll be just like a few days of holiday over here."

Tessa laughed. "I didn't know you have bonded so well with Scarlett. Are you using her to climb the ladder because of her connections and family background?"

“You...” Nora fumed at Tessa’s ridiculous remark.

I stopped her and said, “It’s okay. Don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine by myself.”

“I’ll go with you,” Nora said stubbornly. She was a strong-willed person and would never allow anyone to tell her what to do. After saying that, she took my hand and pulled me out.

I was helpless and I said nothing more.

I felt someone was following us, so I turned around to take a look. To my surprise, it was Armond tailing after us. I said to him, “Go ahead to the boarding gate.”

He replied blandly, “No. The plane might be delayed. No worries.”

“How would you know that the plane will be delayed?” Nora asked. “You don’t own the airport.”

Armond smiled and said, “It’s going to pour soon. They will definitely delay the flight for safety reasons.”

Nora was stunned. She leaned closer to me and said softly in my ear, “I find Armond unfathomable. Are all young rich men like that?”

“Not necessarily,” I said with a laugh.

After searching through a few shops, we still couldn't find it. Nora started to panic and said, "I carried your bag properly just now. There's no way I could have dropped it."

She paused and was deep in thought. Then she said, "Let's search again."

I stopped her and said, "Forget it. I probably left it in the villa or dropped it somewhere. Why don't you join back the girls? I'll go and prepare for the paperwork again."

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"It's not that easy. You just applied for it, and now you want to go through it again. To start the process again, they will ask for your identification to verify. The entire process itself will take another half a month."

She had a point.

Nora grew anxious, then she looked at me and said, "Scarlett, listen to me. Let's go and search every store's trashcan. We might be able to find it."

"Why the trashcans?" I asked, in puzzlement.

She thought for a while and said, "I can't tell you now. Let's go and search first."

Having said that, she pulled me towards the store and began to look into the trashcans of every store. She even asked the storekeepers if they had changed the trash bag.

Although I did not understand what Nora meant, I went along with her.

“Found it!” After searching in a few stores, she finally found the documents in a trashcan. She exclaimed in delight, “I found it!”

I was stunned when I saw her retrieved the documents from the bottom of the trashcan.

Armond was just as surprised. Just like me, he never thought that the documents would be in the trashcan.

Nora handed the documents to me and said, “Look through it and see if there’s anything missing.”

Then she walked towards the storekeeper and raised her voice. “What’s wrong with you people? Why didn’t you keep the documents until the owner comes back for them? Why did you throw such important documents into the trashcan?”

The storekeeper was puzzled. She had seen us return to her store twice to look for it, and she was even more surprised that it was found in the trashcan.

She shook her head and said, “It wasn’t us who threw it in the trashcan. Besides, we’ve never seen these documents before. We have a surveillance camera, and if you’d like, you can view the footage yourself. We definitely won’t throw such important documents away.”

“I want to see the surveillance footage,” Nora said angrily. “Other than you guys, who else could have done such a thing?”

“Forget it, Nora. We have a plane to catch. Let’s go now.” All it mattered was that we found what we were looking for.

Stubborn as she always was, Nora insisted, “No. We must watch the surveillance footage.”

The poor, helpless storekeeper turned on the surveillance footage for us to watch. It was the only way for her to prove her innocence.

I glanced at Armond and said softly, “I’m sorry, but this may take a while.”

Armond smiled faintly and said, “That’s alright.”

Nora and a few of the storekeepers watched the surveillance footage together. After a brief moment, the storekeeper said, “See that? We didn’t throw the documents into the trashcan. You threw it yourselves.”

I froze and asked in confusion, “What?”

Nora looked at me and said, “Come and have a look.”

I was a little surprised, so I walked over to them to watch the surveillance footage. In the video, the five of us could be seen shopping around the store.

Because Nora wanted to try on some new handbags, so she handed my bag that was in her hand to Tessa.

The rest of us were so focused on shopping that we were not aware of what was happening around us.

Tessa took the bag, and with her back turned, she retrieved the documents from my bag and threw it into the trashcan.

And then she followed us out of the store as if nothing had happened.

“Damn it!” Nora blew her top. “What was she trying to do? Did she do that so that you won’t be able to return with the lack of those documents?”

I pursed my lips and was lost in thought. After snapping out of my thought, I turned to the storekeepers and apologized to them. After thanking them again, I slipped the documents into my bag and left the store.

Seeing that I was silent, the troubled Nora tugged at me and said, “You can’t keep quiet. You have to say something.”

I looked at her with a faint smile. “Even though the flight’s delayed, we should hurry. In a few minutes, it’ll be boarding time soon.”

She was speechless. “Not that. I mean about Tessa. She obviously has bad intentions. Are you going to keep quiet about this?”

After passing through the security check, we found the boarding gate soon enough. Fortunately, the passengers were still queuing at the passenger boarding bridge.

At the sight of us, Tabitha and Laurel ran over and asked, “Did you manage to find it?”

“How can she pass through the security checkpoint without the documents? She wouldn’t be standing here if we haven’t found it,” Nora snapped as she glared at Tessa.

I glanced at her and then turned to Tabitha and Laurel. “Yes, we found it. How long has the flight been delayed?”

“About half an hour. But there was an announcement not long ago saying that the plane will be ready for take-off soon. That’s why we’re boarding the plane now.”

I nodded with a smile, not saying a word.

Nora, who couldn’t keep anything to herself, walked up to Tessa and said sarcastically, “Are you disappointed to see us here?”

Tessa turned pale and stuttered, “What... What nonsense are you saying?”

Nora looked at her and sneered, “You are a wicked, selfish, and narrow-minded person.”

“Nora, just say whatever you have to say. Don’t look at me if you don’t want to. And don’t come looking for trouble.” Tessa raised her voice, causing other passengers to turn and look at us.

“Do you think I like to look at you? In fact, I feel disgusted when I look at you. I’m not looking for trouble at all. Why did you insist on Scarlett searching for the documents by herself? You’re the one who caused this trouble. You did that because you didn’t want her to return, am I right? You are an ungrateful woman. You make me sick.”

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Nora's sharp remark caused Tessa to flush red in embarrassment. Before Tessa could retort, Tabitha asked, "What are you guys talking about?"

"Nothing. Let's get on the plane," I interrupted them.

Everyone kept silent as we boarded the plane. Nora, who was still tensed, was supposed to sit at the same row as Tessa. But since she was still boiling in anger, she called for the flight attendant to change her seat. She even told the flight attendant that she'd rather die than sit next to Tessa.

The angry Tessa pointed her finger at Nora and cursed, "Don't push it, Nora. Have you no shame?"

"Shame?" Nora retorted. "You should be the one in shame. If I were you, I'd be embarrassed to sit here after what you've done. Aren't you shameless?"

"Please don't cause a scene. Both of you, please lower down your voices," the flight attendant asserted.

Both women finally became quiet, and Nora was granted her request to change to another seat. She was still fuming as she took her seat.

Tabitha asked curiously, "What's wrong with you? Why are you so angry?"

"Who wouldn't be angry at such a shameless person?" Nora barked.

“What happened? What did Tessa do?”

“Ask her yourself,” Nora snapped. Then she closed her eyes in anger and fumed quietly.

After a ten hours flight, the plane landed in A City. When we got off the plane, Nora, who couldn't bear to be parted from me, tugged at me and said, “When are you planning to go back to K City? Let's have a get-together in the next few days?”

Back to K City?

I was a little stunned for a while. I was still undecided on whether to return to K City. All I cared about was Ashton's safe return. To be honest, I never thought about going back to K City. Even if I were to be back in K City, it would be a short trip before coming back to A City.

I thought about it and said to Nora, “I'll be here in the next few days. I'm up for a gathering whenever we are free.”

Her mood improved significantly and she said, “About Tessa, are you going to just let it go?”

I was a little stunned before I smiled at her and said, “I owe it to her. I won't be in touch with her in the future anyway. So I'll just let it go.”

“What do you mean you owe it to her?” Nora asked, agitation on her face. “You brought her back from Venria and found someone to perform surgery on her. You even provided food for her and paid for her expensive air ticket. How could you owe her? She's alive because of you.”

I smiled and said, "You're exaggerating. It's all thanks to Armond."

After a moment of silence, she lifted her head and looked at me with a frown. "Are you shouldering the burden for her?"

I was startled. "This happened because of me, and it's my responsibility."

"Damn!" Nora said in despair. "This is not your fault at all."

"I'm finally back in my home country." Tabitha and Laurel came up to us and gave us both a hug. "My parents will be here soon to pick me up. I'll be going back home to have a good rest and sleep. Once I've bounced back from this holiday fatigue, I'll come and look for you guys, okay?"

Laurel took a glance at her and said with a smile, "Go on. I'm going back to recuperate."

We all said our goodbyes.

Everyone left, and I was alone with Tessa. She looked at me with squinted eyes. "What now? Are you planning for revenge?"

I raised my brow. "Revenge?"

"You know what I'm talking about."

I smiled faintly and asked, "Revenge for throwing away my documents? Or take my revenge because of your ingratitude?"

“You...”

Before she could finish her sentence, I interrupted her. “We’ve watched the surveillance footage in the store and saw what you did. I kept quiet about it to save you from embarrassment. So, drop the holier-than-thou act. Quit it with the dirty tricks. It’s despicable.”

That’s the difference between us.

After we exited the airport, we each parted way. Armond looked at me with a raised brow and asked, “Where are you planning to stay?”

I looked at him with a flush of embarrassment. Before we left for Venria, I lost all of my belongings, including my wallet, ID, and mobile phone. I had nothing left.

When I came to A City, I lost everything that I brought with me. So it was going to be tough for me to live in this city with nothing on me.

“Mr. Murphy, is your company hiring?” I’d better find a job, as it’s the only way for me to survive.

He looked at me with a smile and said, “Yes. I’m looking for an assistant. Meals and lodging will be provided. But you’ll have to be on call for twenty hours.”

That caught me off guard. “How much is the salary?”

“Five thousand.”

I thought about it for a while.

Meals and lodging provided. Five thousand a month. That's the standard range of salary in a city like A City.

After thinking for a while, I nodded. "Mr. Murphy, can I report to work starting from today?"

I had nowhere to go in this unfamiliar place.

He nodded and led me to a black Maybach. We sat in the car and headed straight to a seaside villa in A City.

Finally, a place to stay. After returning to this familiar land, it felt like my heart was home.