

## Chapter 671

As the old adage says, always return to your own root.

Although A City was not my homeland, it was much better compared to Western Europe and Venria.

That night, I slept better than ever. It was a dreamless sleep.

The next day.

I was awakened by the sound of knocking on my door. When I opened the door, I was struck dumb by the sight of a man in grey pyjamas standing outside my door. "Morning, Mr. Murphy."

He raised his brow and looked at the watch on his wrist. "You'll start work from today. From now on, you'll stay here. For the time being, there's no helper at home, so you'll need to prepare breakfast. We start work at nine, and it's seven now. In order not to be late for work, you'll have to go downstairs to make breakfast now."

Having said that, the man sauntered off. I was a little confused at first but recovered after a while. I quickly went back to my room and changed my clothes. After a quick wash-up, I went downstairs to the kitchen.

Fortunately, there was some food in the refrigerator. So I made a quick breakfast.

After breakfast, I was caught in a difficult situation. When I saw him holding the car keys in his hand as he was about to leave the house, I mustered up my courage and asked, "Mr. Murphy, can I trouble you to give me a ride?"

He nodded wordlessly.

After getting into the car, I put on a thick skin and asked, "Mr. Murphy, can I request one month's salary in advance?"

I had no choice because I lost all of my belongings. My bank card had to be reissued. Even my mobile phone was lost. The most important thing right now was to get myself a phone.

When I saw him looking at me, I quickly explained, "All of my belongings were taken by the policewoman. I've nothing left with me. That's why I want to get myself a phone first."

He nodded in silence. Then, he took out a white box from a bag and handed it to me. "Consider this as your salary for this month. It's new, take it. I don't like this design very much."

I took it and was a little surprised when I opened the box.

It was a new mobile phone, and it seemed to be worth more than five thousand.

After being without a phone for two months, I felt so out of touch. I unboxed the mobile phone excitedly and found that I just needed to get a SIM card.

The Murphys business in A City was still oil and jade. It was undoubtedly their business as the import and export centre in Southeast Asia.

Hence, the Murphys' company was situated in twin towers right in the heart of a busy city centre in A City.

In the twin towers, there were two other companies other than the Murphys' company. One was an IT company, and the other was an energy resources company.

The luxurious office building consisted of hundreds of floors, and it was owned exclusively by these three companies.

I spent the entire morning being briefed about my new job as Armond's secretary. And by noon, I took the advantage of break time to get myself a SIM card.

With a phone in hand, the first thing I did was to call the police.

Although I did not know if the so-called policewomen were real or fake, they convicted others in private and expelled others from the country, and the act itself was already an illegal act.

After obtaining the SIM card, I managed to log in to my google account. Fortunately, the account was linked to my google pay, thus it made things a lot easier for me.

Ever since I left K City, I had not responded to anyone's message from K City, nor had I posted anything on Instagram.

Countless messages kept popping up on my phone, and they were all messages from K City over the past two months.

Most of the messages were from Ashton. I clicked into it and quickly read the messages. There were mostly photos of him and Summer, and the rest were daily greetings and checking in on me.

I read the messages carefully, and by the time I read the last message, it seemed that the message was sent recently and he seemed to be doing fine.

I pondered for a moment before replying to his message.

“I’m fine, don’t worry about me.” Other than that, I didn’t know what else to say.

After that, I sent messages to both Emery and Hannah to tell them that I was safe and sound.

The police arrived not long after I made the call. They were here to take statements from me.

Savini at Animus was surprised to see that I was back. He was even more surprised that I had led the police to him.

The moment he saw me, he was so shocked that he dropped the papers that were in his hands. He looked at me with utter astonishment and stuttered, “Scarlett, you...you...”

I smiled faintly and said, “Thanks to you, I’m still alive.”

The police stepped forward and arrested him after they read him his rights. As for the group of policewomen, they were gone by the time the police arrived.

It appeared that they had left earlier.

Just as I was leaving the police station, Ashton called.

I memorized his phone number by heart and knew that it was him by just a glance at the numbers.

I was in a dilemma, to answer or not to answer the call.

After a moment, I answered the call.

Without many words, he asked in a low voice, and it sounded as familiar as ever.

“Where are you?”

I was distracted for a moment as I looked up at the August sky in A City. Suddenly I realized that time seemed to have passed for a long time.

“I’m back in the country.” When we met in Venria, there were no words spoken. He must have been worried.

There was a moment of silence on the other side of the phone before he asked, “Shall I come and find you?”

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I pursed my lips and replied, "No. I'm fine, don't worry about me."

"I want to see you." He sounded like he was trying to stifle his emotions.

I want to see you.

It's been a long time since I heard such sentimental words. I smiled as my heart filled with warmth.

"I'm fine, Ashton. Really." I had wanted to tell him to live our own lives separately, but I knew that it would inevitably anger him.

"I'm not fine." He sounded grouchy and emotional at the end of his tether. "Scarlett, everyone has their limits. I let you go when you wanted to leave. I was even willing to wait for you here. But you can't continue to be away like this. The night-time loneliness is killing me and I don't want to count on my memories to get past the nights. I want to see you, and I mean now."

I was dumbfounded for a moment. This was the first time for me to hear Ashton pouring out his feelings with no reservations, and his voice had an edge to it.

If he was in front of me at this moment, I would have pulled him into a tight embrace and tell him that I miss him too.

"Thank you for taking good care of Summer, Ashton." I changed the subject. I was afraid that I would not be able to control myself and tell him that I missed him. I was also afraid that if I were to appear in his life again, his world would be turned upside down.

He should be living a happy, married life, surrounded by children. But I was unable to give him a happy marriage, and I couldn't even bear him any children. Leaving him was the best choice.

I could hear him asking in a rough voice, "Are you punishing me, Scarlett? If so, then tell me what I need to do so that you'll come back to me?"

I was stunned and didn't know what else to say. After a moment of silence, I decided to end the call as I was afraid to continue having this conversation with him. "I have to go, Ashton. I'm hanging up now."

And with that, I hung up the phone and felt the sudden urge to cry. When did I become such a coward?

How pathetic!

Back at the company, Armond looked at me and asked irritably, "Scarlett, care to explain yourself?"

It was supposed to be a one-hour lunch break, but I ended up spending two hours making a police report. I was terribly late by the time I made it back to the office.

There was a deep frown on his face, he was clearly upset.

I told him everything, sparing no details, but he was still angry. "Whatever it is, it's irresponsible of you to leave your post during working hours."

I apologized profusely for my behavior. Knowing that he was angry, I chose to stay silent.

When he saw that I remained silent after being chastised, he stopped himself and said, "Go to Linda for handover. You're considered skipping work for today."

I was dumbfounded. I was away from work for an hour, and that's considered skipping work? These capitalists are vicious!

After all, he's the boss, and I made a mistake. No excuses there.

After handing over the work to Linda, Nora called.

"Do you have any plan tonight, Scarlett? Let's have dinner."

I thought for a while and said dejectedly, "Actually, I really want to go to dinner with you. But I might have something on tonight."

Armond had said that I would need to be on call twenty-four hours a day, and there's no telling when exactly he was going to call me.

"Oh!" She sounded disappointed. "What's occupying your time? I've made plans to meet up with Tabitha and Laurel, and we're going to Zero Degrees tonight. After our near-death experience, what can be more important than being alive and happy? You'd better not turn me down."

I chuckled and said, "I'm not turning you down, Nora. I'm serious. I'm working in Armond's company as his secretary. And I must be on call twenty-four hours a day. I can't just leave."

She sighed and asked, "You're a secretary? Being on call for twenty-four hours a day, does that mean you're involved in every aspect of his life?"



“Thinking about it, that sounds like it.” After all, I had to cook breakfast and dinner. That’s pretty much everything.

“Holy cr\*p!” She exclaimed excitedly. “Why does it sound like you’re in an idol drama? Could it be that Armond is attracted to you?”

I nearly choked on my own saliva after hearing that. I coughed and said, “You’re thinking too much. I’m working for him because I’m short of money.”

“Tsk!” She started to be nosy. “It’s not that I’m thinking too much. It’s just that I can’t help but think that your scenario is similar to those in idol dramas.”

She paused and then continued, “By the way, when are you going back to K City? You said you’re short of money, why don’t I give you some...”

Stopping mid-sentence, there was a slight pause before she continued, “That’s not right. Didn’t you say that you’re married? Shouldn’t you be going back to your husband instead? Why are you in Mr. Murphy’s company?”

Just then, I didn’t know what to say. So I avoided her questions by saying, “I have to go. I’m going to hang up now. Let’s meet up next time.”

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It was a complicated relationship, and I didn't think that I could explain it clearly within that half an hour.

In the end, I could only run from it.

There wasn't much to do when I first joined Murphy Corporation. Furthermore, Armond already had Linda as his efficient secretary. And that's why my job was relatively easy.

"Scarlett, you need to go through these documents and read the content of the contract. Then you'll need to arrange for Mr. Murphy's schedule for tomorrow." Linda gave me a brief instruction while looking at her mobile phone.

I couldn't help but ask, "Is something wrong, Linda?"

She nodded. "I'm going to pick up my daughter in a short while. I have to leave ten minutes in advance to beat the traffic."

I studied her appearance and felt that she didn't look a day over forty. "You have a daughter, but you still look so young. I wouldn't have thought that you have a daughter if you didn't tell me."

She looked at me and smiled. "I'm flattered, Scarlett. Thank you. I have to go now."

With her bag in hand, she left in a hurry.

Before I could pack my things, I saw a man in a black suit coming out of his office.

“Is there anything else, Mr. Murphy?” I instinctively looked at the time and noticed that it’s after work hours. This can’t be work-related.

He raised his brow and said, “Nora asked us for dinner. Let’s go together.”

I was stunned for a moment. “She invited you?” That’s really bold of Nora.

He nodded. “Let’s go.”

He was a man of little words.

After getting into the car, I started to wonder how Nora managed to get his number. I couldn’t help but ask, “When did Nora have your number?”

He raised his eyebrows and started the car. “We exchanged numbers at the airport.”

I was speechless.

She’s good. I’ll give her that.

When we stopped at the traffic light, I couldn’t help but think of Linda. So, I asked him, “Mr. Murphy, has Linda been your secretary for many years?”

He looked at me from the corner of his eye and answered indifferently, “She used to work with my grandfather. She’s a great employee, and that’s why my grandfather arranged for her to work with me.”

I nodded. That's obvious.

He raised an eyebrow. "Why did you ask?"

"Oh, nothing. I was just curious. Most secretaries are young and beautiful, but Linda is middle-aged and has a family of her own. That's why I asked."

He frowned before he sneered at me, "You've been reading too many romance novels. Being a secretary doesn't come with that kind of scandalous plot. To be a secretary is all about capability, not looks. Does that mean you see me as a pervert?"

I was stumped.

"Of course not." I shook my head.

He grunted and told me off. "Read more of non-fiction books."

Me? What the?

Was I being insulted?

At Zero Degrees' entrance.

Nora was dressed in a sexy short black dress and was wearing makeup. Because of her good figure, she was catching a lot of attention by standing at the door.

After getting out of the car, Armond threw his keys to the valet.

Nora greeted him with a smile. "Mr. Murphy, I'm surprised that you came. Thank you for showing up."

Then she turned to me with a charming smile on her face and said, "I thought Ms. Stovall said you couldn't come. So, why are you here? Unless this is part of being on-call?"

I rolled my eyes at her and ignored her teasing. Then I leaned closer to her and asked, "Why are you dressed to the nines? Are you planning to hook up with someone?"

"You read my mind." She smiled brightly, then she leaned closer to me and said, "I'm going for Mr. Murphy tonight. You can't have him, Babe. You're a married woman."

What more could I say? I looked at her and nodded. "Best of luck to you."

In fact, Armond was one of the most eligible bachelors around. Handsome and rich, he came from a prominent family. Ordinary girls would not have the chance to be up close and personal with him. This was definitely an opportunity not to be missed.

Nora booked a private room and proceeded to the second floor for entertainment. It seemed that tonight was going to be a full-blown party.

I was surprised to see Tessa in the private room. Instead of letting it get to me, I sat down and greeted her.

"It wasn't me who invited Tessa. It was Tabitha who did." Nora leaned closer to me and said into my ear. "I should have told Tabitha earlier not to invite her. This is so annoying."

I responded with a smile.

I thought a man like Armond wouldn't like to past his time in this manner.

But he didn't seem to be uncomfortable in such a scene. On the contrary, he was having a good time drinking and chatting with everyone. I, on the other hand, was a little confused.

Feeling a little hot from drinking, I got up and excused myself to the washroom.

At the sound of footsteps behind me, I turned around and saw Tessa following behind my back. I froze for a moment before asking, "Are you going to the washroom?"

She nodded and answered coldly, "Yes."

Saying no more, I went into the washroom to wash my face. She was already gone when I came out.

Stepping onto the soft carpeted floor in the corridor made me have a newfound appreciation for all the familiar things in my life.

“Ah!” a voice rang from a few yards away. It was Tessa.

I took a few steps forward and saw Tessa leaning against a black-suited man. She appeared to have sprained her ankle.

The man was someone all too familiar, someone I had been missing for such a long time. Bumping into him under such circumstances rendered me a little speechless as my steps hesitated.

“Sir, can you hold me, please? I think I have sprained my ankle,” Tessa said while wrapping her arms around Ashton’s.

The man raised his eyebrow and there was a perceptible distaste in his eyes. But the bearing of a gentleman in him would not allow him to push away a damsel in distress, hence he shot a side glance at Joseph, indicating him to take over.

Ashton then distanced himself from Tessa and was about to leave when his eyes met with mine. Not knowing what to say to him, I subconsciously wanted to avoid a direct encounter with him.

I turned around and started running away from his direction.

His steps, however, caught up with mine in no time and before I knew it, his familiar scent filled my nostrils as he held onto me from behind.

Before I had any time to respond, Ashton pulled me into an empty private room.

Inside the dark room, the man's lips landed on mine in a desperate and domineering kiss.

Our pounding heartbeats were audible in the still air inside the room.

My back was pressed against the wall by him and I was out of breath as his passionate and fervent kiss had almost sucked out all the oxygen from my lungs.

After a while, he finally moved his lips away from mine.

His strong arms had stopped my attempt to break away from his embrace as he spoke in his low and coarse voice, "How much further do you plan to push me away?"

My heart ached immensely upon hearing that, but instead of replying to his rhetorical question, I didn't stop him from planting more punishing kisses on my body.

"People used to tell me that poppies are very beautiful flowers. But I've never seen it in my life until I came across a field of fully bloomed poppies in Venria. I still remember vividly what they smelled like. It's true when people say that once you are addicted to it,



you are addicted for life. Ashton, you're like my poppy," I uttered in the dark, feeling a little self-conflicted.

Ashton's breaths were heavy. I couldn't make out his features clearly in the dark, but I could almost imagine his expression.

"What were you doing in Venria?" His hands were still holding tight onto my back as he asked, as though the moment he let go, I'll make a dash for the door.

After failing to come to a reasonable response to the question, I opted for an ambiguous one. "I just did."

He might have frowned and asked tentatively, "To get away from me?"

I pursed my lips and offered no explanation. It's not the worst idea for him to misunderstand. Haven't I already vowed to stay away from him since I won't be able to promise him a future? It's better to suffer now than to live a long life of regrets.

The hand holding onto my back loosened a little as he asked, "Who did you go with?"

I couldn't think of a better way to reply to him than to turn his question around, "The question you should be asking is, who did I come back with?"

The air became frosty in the room as he now seemed to be a little stirred up.

"Scarlett, this is not how things should be between us. You know in your heart that we belong together. There's nothing that can separate us."

Pursing my lips, I pried open his hand on my back and said coldly, "Ashton, I don't love you anymore. I cannot imagine spending the rest of my life with you because every time I look at you, I'll be reminded of my baby who had died horribly. There's no way I can forgive you for taking away my only chance to be a mother. You're a constant living reminder of a past that's like a dagger in my heart. So, I beg of you, Ashton, please let me go."

His lanky figure staggered in the dark. I couldn't see his expression clearly, but his choked-up voice was enough to indicate his despair and sorrow.

Maybe that will finally make him let go.

"Is there really no other way?" his voice catching in his throat.

I sniffled, trying to hold back the tear that's welling up in my eyes. "No. There isn't. Ashton, let this go. Let us both search for where we really belong and find peace for our minds."

For the first time, my body literally hurt with each breath I took. It was as though all the nerves in my body were pinched at the same time.

Ashton smiled wistfully as he spoke, "Scarlett, what do you mean we both search for where we really belong? You think just because you can walk away like that, so can everyone else?"

Biting my lips, I refused to let him talk me out of it. I was fighting a strong urge to leap into his arms and tell him that I didn't want to leave him, not even one bit.

I finally left the private room and met with Nora and the gang.

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A few of them looked at me in confusion. "Are you constipated?"

No one but Nora was capable of making such a crass comment.

Rolling my eyes, I resumed my seat and replied, "I bumped into a friend that's all."

My reply seemed to have piqued her interests even more. "What friend? Is it a he or she?" Is he handsome?"

Oh dear...

Tessa's gaze fell on me; her lips pursed with traces of disdain.

I lost my appetite after taking a few bites when Nora suggested a karaoke session on the second floor.

Everyone agreed to her suggestion. After all, they did promise themselves to play hard after returning home from Western Europe.

The second floor was full of private rooms for karaoke with a big pool hall in the middle. Customers who did not fancy singing karaoke could spend time playing pool out here. I regarded this to be a very thoughtful design.

I was terribly tone-deaf and could neither sing nor dance. Tessa seemed to view karaoke singing in the same light. But it could just be that she didn't like it at all. For all that I knew, we both disliked the rowdy environment.

After spending some time in our private room, I excused myself to get some air.

But mostly because Nora kept shooting me looks to get out of her way so she could spend some private time with Armond.

Armond was usually distant and reserved. I couldn't help but suspect something was wired wrongly for him tonight to subject himself to such discordant singings by a few girls.

Outside the karaoke rooms, the pool hall was now filled with a few men in groups and maybe two or three women in between. Pool was not a very popular sport in this area.

After searching for a while, I found a bench on the side and sat down with my chin rested on my hands, spacing out.

Before long, a figure took a seat next to me. It took me a few seconds to turn around and realized it was Tessa.

We had had very few exchanges throughout the night; thus I was a little taken by surprise when she sat down next to me.

"Did you know the man from just now?" she asked coldly.

I tilted my head in her direction and realized she wasn't even looking at me. Her gaze was falling right ahead at those playing pool in front of us.

The man?

When it finally dawned on me which man she was referring to, I pursed my lips and hesitated for a brief moment before I answered her question, "What about it?"

Tessa was fiddling with her hands as she spoke, "I believe in letting go of grievances among people. I can get over whatever had happened between us in Venria. But you have to remember that you owe me one."

I was a little bewildered by her statement but chose to remain silent.

"Now that we're all back to our home country and are going to remain friends, it's not in anyone's benefit if our relationship remains as strained as it is. Since we hang out with the same group of people and are bound to gather every so often, we might as well set aside our differences and spend time as real friends."

I looked at her with my eyebrow raised, still puzzled by her sudden change of mind.

She misinterpreted my silence as disagreement and retorted, "There's no need to be arrogant, it's fine by me if you wish to carry on like this."

I thought for another moment and sighed. "Tessa, I think sometimes you're trapped in your own pre-conceptions. I don't see you as an enemy and I never have."

"Great! That means we're friends!" she exclaimed while holding out her hand. "Give me your phone."

She took over my phone and did a few maneuvers before handing it back to me. "I've saved my phone number and added my WhatsApp to your phone. Let's stay in touch."

Honestly, I was still a little befuddled. But since she was the one to extend an olive branch, there was no reason to shoot her down.

I nodded and kept my phone.

At that moment, I felt a warm glare in my direction. I lifted my head and met with Ashton's clear, dark eyes.

Was that a coincidence? Probably not so much, given we were dining in the same building.

Ashton seemed like he was here for business purposes. He was standing mere meters away, talking to a few middle-aged men.

The men followed the direction of his gaze and turned to me all at once when Ashton stopped short in their conversation.

They all appeared to be people of prominent status. Their stares started to make me feel uncomfortable and so I shifted my gaze from Ashton and looked elsewhere, pretending that we didn't know each other.

Tessa, on the other hand, was visibly more excited than just moments earlier. "You guys really know each other?"

“Just barely,” I uttered, thinking we should probably head back.

“Regardless, we should just go say hi!” Tessa was almost pulling on me.

I wanted to gently push her away, but she was stockier and stronger than I was, making it difficult for me to pry open her firm grip around my arm.