

Chapter 686

I caught her looking at me out of the corner of her eye. “A car, a house, and some savings without a job, plus being able to go out whenever I want and do whatever I want?” She ticked these off her fingers as she continued, “Maybe it is a perfect lifestyle?”

I replied, “Correction, it absolutely is the perfect lifestyle.”

She let out a brittle laugh. “Scarlett, you know what I think? We’re always going to envy someone else’s life. Take me for instance. You have no idea how much I’d love to be in your shoes. You haven’t told us much about your old life, but I know it can’t be as simple as we imagined. After all, you personally know Armond, who’s a pretty big figure in K City. That alone already shows that you’re far from just a plain Jane. There’s also this perpetual air of elegance around you, with a dash of mystery that’s just absolutely alluring. Do you get what I’m saying?”

I chuckled at her words. She’s always lived a pretty straightforward life, so she’s naturally intrigued by mysterious things.

The car came to a stop before a cafe famous for its high teas. She turned to address me, “Let’s go!”

The cafe boasted an elegant ambiance, which was elevated by the soft, graceful music playing in the background.

After ordering some pastries, she asked, “Why did Armond give you a task meant for a project director?”

I shook my head and said, "I'm not too sure either!" I kept the bit about my relationship with Ashton to myself.

Frowning, she asked seriously, "Are you trying to find out more about the public enterprises because of this project?"

I nodded and explained, "I believe Armond wasn't planning to bid on this project in the first place since Murphy Corporation has never been involved in technology-related projects. So I was quite surprised when he suddenly mentioned his intent to take on this project and put me in charge. I can't say I agree with that decision. It's going to be pretty hard to snag a deal with Fuller Corporation."

She paused, and I could sense the gears turning in her brain. "When is the tender?"

"Tonight!"

"What? He wants you to come up with a bid proposal in one afternoon?"

I suddenly felt exhausted as I nodded. "I can't think of how to come up with a good proposal at such short notice. My brain's fried."

She stared at me and asked, "What can I help you with?"

I then proceeded to explain the details of the project to her. After some brief contemplation, she asked, "Where is the tender taking place?"

"Oasis Hotel!"

She nodded and said, "I know about that Derek you mentioned. I'll put out some feelers and see if we can find ourselves an advantage for the bid."

I agreed with her plan. Just as I turned my gaze away, I saw two familiar faces entering the cafe. I couldn't help the frown that took over my face. Why are they here together?

Nora followed my gaze when she saw my frown. Stunned, she exclaimed, "Why is Tessa here? And why is she with that hottie? That's the guy I was tailing this morning!"

I rubbed my temples. How does she make it sound so perverted?

I tried really hard to hold in my laughter. My eyes followed the two people as I said, "Maybe they have some things to discuss."

My gaze landed on Joseph, who was walking behind the two. If he wanted to meet her alone, Ashton would definitely send Joseph away on other errands.

Nora cried out in disbelief, "How does Tessa pick up these guys? She's so fat and flabby; how did she even get to know that hottie?"

We were sitting in a rather secluded section of the cafe, so Ashton and Tessa wouldn't be able to notice us unless they were deliberately looking.

Nora's penchant for gossip took over when she saw the two of them take their seats near a window.

She waved a waiter over. "Excuse me, we'd like to change tables. Is that fine?"

Naturally, he agreed.

Nora pointed to the table next to where Ashton and Tessa were sitting.

After the waiter agreed, I looked at Nora and said, "It's probably not a good idea to eavesdrop on their conversation. Both of us know Tessa, and if we take a table so close to them, she'll definitely notice us. And that hottie you mentioned? I know him. He's Ashton Fuller, the president of Fuller Corporation. We're bidding on his project tonight."

This stunned her into silence. There was a pause before she asked, "The president of Fuller Corporation?"

She glanced at them again before suddenly swiveling her gaze toward me as if remembering something. "When we were in Venria, you said you had some deep ties with the Fullers. What's your actual relationship with him?"

Pausing for effect, I said, "We're married."

Her jaw dropped to the floor. She asked with some incomprehension, "You're the wife of the president; why would you become a secretary at Murphy Corporation? I guess now I understand why Armond assigned this project to you; he's obviously trying to use your personal relationship to gain the upper hand! Why are you so worried about the tender then?"

She scoffed as she took another look at Ashton and Tessa. "So, was he the friend you mentioned last night? Did Tessa also meet him yesterday? But why are they meeting privately today?"

I shook my head, clueless about the meetup as well. I briefly explained my relationship with Ashton, "Nora, I'm not deliberately hiding things from you. It's just kind of a tangled

mess. Ashton and I have a complicated past, and our differences have only grown bigger because of it. That's why I came to A City. I want to live a life that belonged only to me."

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Nora frowned and questioned, "Did you guys have a fight? Oh! Could it be he cheated on you with some other woman and you left because of that?"

I couldn't help but laugh. "Why is your mind full of these weird ideas?"

She clicked her tongue and squinted her eyes at me. "This is logical thinking. Aren't all rich people like this? Plus, he's handsome and rich. Any woman would want to get close to him."

I nodded in acknowledgment and explained, "He's not that bad a person. We have our own reasons. I can't have babies, so I left him. I wish he can have his own kids, and lead a normal life."

"The hell?" The woman looked at me in bewilderment, all the while furrowing her brows. "What is this logic? Have you not heard of test-tube babies? You're telling me you're giving a wealthy bachelor to someone else because of this?"

I didn't know what to say, so I pointed in the direction Ashton was in. If you want gossips, you can go there.

Nora snorted, "Stop changing the topic. Besides, Tessa knows us, and do you think she won't see me if I stand up?"

"She's sitting with her back against us. If I stand up, Ashton will see me, but he doesn't know you, so you can go with no worries," I reminded.

She pursed her lips and thought for a while. "So you're saying that I should go alone to enjoy the show?"

I shrugged in response. I have too many concerns.

She leaned against the seat and wore a bored expression. "It's no fun if I am to go alone."

Seeing this, I thought she had given up on the dose of gossips in front of her. Later on, she looked at me with a serious expression and asked, "How is Ashton's temper?"

Feeling confused by her odd question, I froze for a while before replying, "Why are you asking this?"

"Just answer me. How is his temper?" She glanced at Ashton before turning to me.

I replied, "He always has a cold look, but he is a gentleman."

Suddenly, she stood up with a grin on her face and walked toward Ashton and Tessa.

I was stunned when she walked away, as I didn't know what she was going to do. Then she called out to a waitress and whispered something to her.

The waitress' expression toward Ashton took 360 degrees turn, from admiration and respect to anger and disgust.

When Nora was finished talking to the waitress, she gestured toward me with a wide grin while the latter walked away.

After two minutes, the waitress walked out with a glass of fruit juice in her hand. When she passed by Ashton's side, her hands slipped and the juice splashed onto the man's suit.

The calm and poised man was surprised, and the waitress gasped in shock. It was until Ashton went to the washroom that Nora waved her hand at me, motioning me to sit beside her.

I sat beside her with a curious look. "Did you ask the waitress to do this? What did you tell her?"

The woman smiled cunningly and announced, "I told her Ashton is your husband, and he's cheating on you with a rich lady."

I...

The president of the Fuller Corporation actually became a man who lives off women just because of Nora's words.

No wonder the waitress' expression was written with disgust all over when she looked at Ashton.

"And she believed you?" I was surprised because Ashton's classy demeanor was on a significantly higher level than Tessa, and it was obvious that the man was richer than the latter.

She shrugged. "The waitress had just stepped foot into the society, so she doesn't have much experience. Although Tessa's bag is outdated, it is still one of the old collections of Burberry, which costs tens of thousands. To the waitress, it's a sizeable amount. Plus, Ashton's suit is tailor-made, and she doesn't know that."

I was totally speechless at how cunning Nora was. Soon, Tessa's voice sounded from behind. "Mr. Fuller, are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Ashton spoke in an indifferent tone.

"Holy sh*t!" Suddenly, Nora cursed out loud. I froze and lowered my voice. "What's wrong?"

"I need to go to the toilet for a bit." With that, she jogged to the washroom.

When I was still lost in a daze, I heard Tessa's voice from behind. "Mr. Fuller, is Scarlett really your wife?"

"Yes." The man's voice sounded cold and impatient.

After taking a sip of her wine, the woman said, "I couldn't believe my eyes when I bumped into you guys at Zero Degrees yesterday. If I am to tell others that you guys are married, they wouldn't believe it either."

Ashton immediately asked, "Others?"

"Yeah!" Tessa immediately started blabbering, "We went to Venria recently and almost lost our lives there. We were trapped in the operating room and suffered, especially Scarlett. She was the most beautiful out of us."

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Tessa paused for a moment and cried softly to add to the dismal topic. Her crying noises were low, but it was enough to make the atmosphere gloomy.

Although I couldn't see Ashton's expression, he was silent all the time, so I bet he could be paying attention.

Seeing how Tessa was just sobbing and didn't continue, he took the initiative and asked, "Operating room?"

"Yes." Tessa sobbed softly, "I didn't know how to tell you. Everything in the operating room was terrifying, and it's a total nightmare. They held us captive to make use of our bodies as transporting tools. It was agonizing when we were forced to queue up outside the operating room, waiting for our turn."

She wiped her tears before continuing, "Scarlett stood up and begged them for mercy, so she got into trouble."

I listened for a moment before doubting her thought process. Wait... So I got into trouble to save them?

Ashton commanded frostily, "Continue!"

The woman sniffled and said, "Scarlett could leave unscathed initially since she knew the Murphys. When the bad guys found us, they had decided to send her to the Murphys in Marsingfill. However, she didn't leave, and when she knew they were going to carry out operations on us, she went to beg Abe..."

I furrowed my brows because her version of the incident was quite different from what I knew.

However, I did nothing and continued listening to their conversation. The woman added, "Abe doesn't like women and forced Scarlett to accompany three men. If she agrees, he will think of letting us go."

What she said was so outrageous that I broke out in a cold sweat. When did those events even take place?

The woman continued, "I noticed Scarlett was unwilling to go with you yesterday. She might feel guilty for not being pure for you, so she left. I understand how she feels. It really isn't her fault."

The man didn't say anything in reply, while the woman had more to say. "Plus, the days in Venria were nightmarish to us, while Armond's presence gave warmth and hope to Scarlett. He even got heavily injured when he saved her. Later on, he took us to Western Europe and recuperated there. From their interactions, they seemed to get along with each other and looked good together."

She added while nodding, "If I didn't run into you guys yesterday, I would have thought Scarlett and Armond are a couple and they will be happy forever."

I was at a loss for words and felt amused.

Nora returned to the table and saw me smiling coldly. She lowered her voice and asked, "What did you hear? Why are you smiling like that?"

Wearing a faint smile, I said, "Nothing. I just heard a dramatic story, and it was quite interesting."

The woman in front of me narrowed her eyes slightly and whispered, "Don't tell me she's trying to appease herself in front of Ashton."

I smiled and stayed silent. Getting up in my seat directly, I wasn't going to hide any longer.

Tessa's repressed sobbing immediately halted when she saw me walking past their table. Widening her eyes in surprise, she opened her mouth, but words never found their way out of her mouth.

When Ashton saw me, his eyes were full of worry.

It seemed he more or less believed Tessa's words. From what I knew, Tessa added a lot of dramatic sauce into her version of the incident to make it seem like I had lost my purity. She was doing this to induce disgust in Ashton toward me.

As to why she deliberately brought up Armond, I figured she wanted to tell Ashton that I was a flirtatious woman and could make anyone fall for me.

However, I would've to thank her for giving me this chance to push Ashton away.

I looked at Tessa and smirked. "Tessa, to be honest, no man would fall for a woman like you. For real. You have nothing attractive at all, be it your figure or capabilities. If the woman sitting here is Nora or Tabitha, I'm willing to give my man to them, but you? You're unworthy."

"You..." She was so enraged that she couldn't utter a word.

I turned to look at Ashton while wearing a faint smile. "Ashton, she was trying to tell you I'm unworthy of you now that I have lost my purity. I bet you know the underlying message of this. An ugly woman with a disgusting heart is trying to get close to you, can't you see that?"

He reached out to me and pulled me into his arms without sparing a glance at Tessa. Gazing at me with concern and affection, he declared, "She's unworthy of me."

With that, he dragged me out of the restaurant. Joseph, who was behind him, didn't follow us.

When we exited the restaurant, I flung Ashton's hand away and looked at him indifferently. "That's enough. Let go!"

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Ashton frowned and stared at me. “Are you pushing me away because of what happened in Venria?”

I nodded and said, “I was lucky. I didn’t suffer from the surgery, but I went through everything else. Ashton, I have my choices.”

“What did you choose?” He wore a grim expression. “Scarlett, you never told me anything and pushed me away. Do I seem so unworthy of your trust? You went to ask for help from a man you’ve just met for a few times, and not me. What exactly am I to you?”

I pursed my lips as I didn’t know what to say. It’s just as he said. I was indeed looking for reasons to push him away.

“No?” Nora came out of the restaurant and was completely baffled. “What are you guys quarreling about? You’re Ashton, right?”

She was only 1.6m in height, while the man who was 1.88m was rather tall for her, so she could only raise her head to look at him. “Mr. Fuller, you can manage your billions of assets, but you can’t even be rational in relationships? You actually believed everything that busybody told you and started questioning Scarlett even before asking if it’s true. Hey man, think about it. Does this make sense?”

Her showing up got both of us stunned. Ashton frowned slightly at her and asked, “What do you mean?”

“I meant what I said!” Nora was rather furious and dragged me away. “Let’s go. Don’t waste your time on a no-brainer like him.”

I was dragged away by Nora while Ashton quickly caught up to us. He held onto my arm and asked, “Scarlett, can we make things clear before you leave? Is that okay?”

In the bustling city, his tall figure and good looks made us stand out among the crowd.

Nora was a hot-tempered woman, so she couldn’t back down. “What is there to talk about? You yelled at her before knowing everything. That alone is enough to prove that there’s nothing to talk about.”

After pausing for a while, she continued, “Besides, Mr. Fuller, don’t think that you can do whatever you want because you’re good-looking.”

I...

I’ve got a feeling that Nora hasn’t figured out the situation yet.

I couldn’t help but utter, “Nora, can you wait for me in the car. I have something to discuss with him.”

The woman nodded and turned to Ashton. “Mr. Fuller, no matter what Tessa told you, you mustn’t believe a word she said. She’s always feigning kindness, but she is ugly inside.”

“Nora, what nonsense are you spouting?” Tessa exited the restaurant and charged at Nora with no hesitation.

The two women didn't care about their image and started throwing punches at each other.

Nora was wearing heels, and she took it as a weapon. Hurling the tip of her high heels at Tessa, she roared, “Tessa! If you dare to badmouth Scarlett, I won't let you go. I've seen many pretentious b*tch, but this is my first time seeing an ugly one. Let me remind you. Be thankful that Scarlett saved you. Or else god knows what will happen to you.”

The fight between the two women went on and attracted a crowd.

Tessa was no pushover either. She pulled Nora's hair and snarled, “She saved you guys too! Nora, do you think she will treat you well if you become her dog? What wishful thinking! She's just using you.”

The two of them kept on hurling insults and punches at each other. As no one interfered and asked them to stop, the crowd grew and everyone was watching the show.

I turned to look at Ashton. He was staring at me indifferently, totally ignoring the ruckus.

“Can you ask Joseph to stop them?” I asked as I was concerned about Nora. Although she was bold, her stamina couldn't catch up. If this goes on, she'll be at a disadvantage.

Ashton glanced at Joseph and dragged me into the car.

His movements were too fast, and before I could struggle, I was pinned to the seat.

“Ashton, you...” I gritted my teeth.

“Shut up!” He spoke with a low voice while focusing on driving.

He drove the car toward the city and kept on speeding. I was scared to death, so I held onto the seat for dear life.

It was quite a while before he stopped the car by the roadside. He parked and exited the vehicle before dragging me out.

“Ashton, why are you bringing me here?” Unwilling to be dragged away, I tried to break free from his clutches.

He was walking rather quickly. I wasn't able to catch up with him, so I stumbled along the road and almost fell down a few times.

I was unfamiliar with my surroundings, so I panicked.

Thankfully, after dragging me for some time, he brought me to a rest area by the roadside. There was a river beside the area.

When we headed toward the riverside, he pinned me to the handrail while his dark eyes gleamed. “Tell me everything. Give me an explanation.”

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I was stunned by Ashton's command. Anger was written all over his good-looking face. Failed to phrase any sentences in my mind, I stared blankly at him and started to zone out.

It was as if he realized he was being too angry at me, so he took a deep breath and suppressed his fury. Gazing at me with his dark eyes, he asked, "When and why did you go to Venria? What happened there? How did you return? Tell me."

With him standing in front of me, his tall and sleek figure blocked most of the light.

I froze a while before saying, "It's all in the past. There's nothing to tell."

He argued, "What do you mean by that? Scarlett, do you think I'm a fool? Even I'm not good enough for you, I'm still your husband. I have the right to know where my wife went, don't I?"

I had never seen him so agitated before. He was completely helpless and at wit's end.

"You have." Staring at the glistening surface of the river, I took a deep breath and started telling him everything. "After leaving K City, I went to Q City to visit the child. Later on, I met Savini in A City. Perhaps he couldn't let go of the past and asked someone to..."

When I recalled everything about the past, those painful memories I suffered, I felt lucky to be able to overcome them all.

The man stayed silent and listened to me. I told him everything, including meeting Armond in Venria and causing Tessa to be injured.

Digesting my words, Ashton turned to look at me. "I'm not against you doing the things you like. However, Scarlett, you have a husband, so you shouldn't stay with Armond. The consequences will be dire if people catch wind of this."

I understand it well, but I don't have any other choice.

However, this wasn't the topic I wanted to talk about. Looking at him, I wore a serious expression. "Ashton, I wanted to leave without a word, but it seems impossible. In order to correct what Tessa said, I told you everything. Since things have gotten this far, let's talk about us."

Our eyes met. His gaze was deep with a tinge of warmth and determination. "Alright."

I sat on the bench as the breeze blew by, leaving ripples on the river while the willow trees swayed along.

Sighing faintly, I said, "Ashton, I've decided not to return to you after leaving K City. To me, we were divorced five years ago. After all, we had marital separation for three years, so under the laws, we were already divorced."

The man grimaced and stared at me with his dark eyes. "Are saying those cruel words an effortless task for you? It seems you've never thought of my feelings. Or could it be that you've never loved me?"

Pursing my lips, I felt suffocated. My heart started aching, but I didn't want to show it. "Just take it as I've never loved you."

He was obviously mad as he tightened his grip on my wrist. Although it started hurting, I didn't struggle to break free.

I continued, "Ashton, everything has a shelf life. I admit, I'm rather odd. When I couldn't get my hands on something, I tried my best to pursue it. However, after attaining it, I lose interest. Setting aside how you humiliated me those years, you set my mother up and killed my child. Do you think I will forgive you after all those things you did? I hate you! So there's no way I can bring myself to live with you. Let alone loving you."

I wouldn't know how hurt he would be by my words, but all I wanted was to make him leave my side.

Looking at his grim and cold expression, I remained expressionless. "I thought I could let go of the past and live with you just because of your wealth and good looks. Even if I don't love you, I can act like I do. Acting's just a piece of cake for women, isn't it?"

Lowering my gaze, I was determined in drawing a line between us. "However, I felt tormented when I face you every day, so I left. I wish you'll never show up in front of me again. Ashton, I feel happy to be by Armond's side. So, please let me go. Give me the freedom to pursue my happiness."

Suddenly, the man chuckled. His voice was low, while he wore a bitter expression. His usual good-looking face looked terrifying as he gave one of his coldest smiles.

"Your happiness?" He scoffed, "You're so impatient, be it living with him or working at the Murphy Corporation. Are you so eager to find a lover?"