

## Chapter 691

I nodded and spoke with no hesitation. "Everyone lives for themselves. Not only is Armond rich and good-looking, but he also willingly accepts my past. He's a really nice guy."

Ashton stared at me for a long while with some hope left in him. However, I kept my face devoid of emotions, forcing him to believe that I felt nothing toward him. Soon after, he gave up and scoffed, "Good! Very good!"

The three words were spoken with his teeth gritted.

With that, he turned around and headed toward his car. After taking a few steps, he halted and glanced back. "Scarlett, I'll ask you once again. Do you mean everything you said?"

"Yes. From the bottom of my heart." Reluctant to be entangled, I cut off every tie I had with him. It was best to end it this way.

"Haha!" He laughed, but it sounded rather forced. "Good, very good! If that's how it is, it seems everything was all my wishful thinking."

With that, he walked away. Hearing his footsteps getting further and further away from me and finally the sound of the engine blaring, I stayed rooted on my spot. I couldn't bring myself to look at him and my heart felt hollow.

Grandma was correct. I was hesitant about everything. If I couldn't let it go and make a clean cut, I would suffer in the end.

I had repeated the same question in my mind for several nights. Why do I have to leave Ashton?

I really couldn't think of an answer. Maybe it was just like what Nora said. I was a psycho, so I chased away the people that loved me.

To be honest, I wasn't confident if I could let the past go. Even if Ashton and I lived together for the rest of our lives, I was afraid that I would bring up the past and use them as reasons to hurt him when we fight.

When I returned to the Murphy Corporation, it was almost time to get off work. Armond wore a white dress shirt while his black coat was hanging on his right arm.

Looking at me coldly, he asked, "Is the bid proposal done?"

I nodded and handed the documents to him. "Others used half a month to prepare a proposal, while I used only one day, so I bet Ashton wouldn't pick ours."

Flipping through the proposal, disdain was written all over his face. "This is the worst bid proposal I've ever seen. Congratulations on breaking the record."

I pursed my lips. No matter how reluctant I was to admit it, he said the truth. Other than the suggestions Linda and Nora gave, nothing else could pass as authentic.

It was done in a few hours, so there was no way it would be good. After pausing for a while, I said, "The Murphy Corporation wasn't an expert in this field, so Ashton will not choose us."

Knitting his brows, he threw the bid proposal aside and turned to look at me. "Let's go for dinner."

Frankly, I felt that he had no intention to win the bidding. Otherwise, he wouldn't ask me to prepare the proposal at the eleventh hour.

I checked the time. Seeing that it was already 6 p.m., I suggested, "The bidding begins at 8 p.m. I'll head to the Oasis Hotel first. Can you have your dinner outside later?"

To my surprise, the man took his car keys and said indifferently, "Take your things. We'll head straight to the Oasis Hotel for dinner."

I was stunned and asked subconsciously, "Are you going too?"

He raised a brow. "If I don't go, do you think you can win the bid with your scrappy proposal? Or are you relying on your beautiful face?"

I...

He's so harsh and vicious with his words.

Stealing a glance at him, I chose to keep quiet and packed my stuff before following him out of the company.

In the car, he drove the car and asked casually, "Do you know which companies are taking part in the bidding?"

I froze instantly and shook my head. “No. I asked my friend and only know that several state-owned enterprises are taking part.”

Armond took a side glance at me with disdain and anger. “Ms. Stovall, how do you even become the director at Fuller Corporation?”

I frowned, and the man glanced at me coldly. Then he was merciless with his insults. “Poor bid proposal and knowledge about opponents. Do you really think we, the Murphy Corporation’s joining for fun?”

I tried to reason with him. “Mr. Murphy, you only gave me six hours to do all of this. In six hours, I’ll have to understand the company’s structure and advantages. Then I’ll have to prepare a bid proposal and understand our opponents while taking the demands of the bidding company into consideration. I accept whatever reprimands you gave. However, I wish you could understand that I’ve tried my best and my intelligence is much lower than yours.”

Although I was rather angry, I calmed myself down. To rush a proposal in six hours that took others half a month, it was impossible to make it good, as I wasn’t a genius and my capabilities had a limit.

He glanced at me sideways and narrowed his eyes. “Are you saying that you felt wronged?”

“Nope,” I shook and focused on the scenery outside the car window to distract myself from the unpleasant feelings. Well, who hasn’t met psychopathic bosses in life?

The man set his eyes on the road before saying, “I can’t deny that six hours is truly too little. You could prepare a three thousand words proposal in a few hours with the analysis of our budget as well as pros and cons. Not bad, I’ll give you that. However, Scarlett, that doesn’t mean you can’t do it better.”

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I stayed silent, as I felt there was no need to argue with a psychopath.

Suddenly, I received a phone call from Nora. "Where did you go, woman? Are you not worried about me? I even fought for you!"

"How are you?" I asked, but I wasn't worried because Ashton had signaled Joseph to take care of it, so she wouldn't be mistreated.

The woman clicked her tongue. "I'm at the hospital, but it's no biggie. That b\*tch scratched my face, and I'm not done with her."

I sighed. "Nora, thank you. I'll visit you tomorrow and treat you to something delicious."

Nora sighed and asked, "That's not it! Why are you treating Ashton like a stranger? He's your husband! Did he do anything you can't accept? Or is it you guys never loved each other? Other married couples wouldn't be like you guys even though they aren't affectionate towards each other."

I pursed my lips. "Nothing. There's nothing left between us. We were divorced."

"Scarlett, why are you pushing him away?" She was getting a little agitated while my patience was running thin. "I don't love him anymore."

Before she could say anything, I quickly end the conversation. “Nora, I have some matters to attend to now. Rest well, and I’ll visit you tomorrow.”

With that, I hung up. Sensing a gaze on me, I raised my head and saw that Armond was staring at me.

I knitted my brows in response. “Mr. Murphy, you’re still driving.” Eyes on the road, Mister.

He withdrew his gaze and said indifferently, “I’m curious too. Why are you hiding from Ashton?”

I pursed my lips. “When did Mr. Murphy become someone who enjoys digging into other people’s private business?”

He shrugged and smiled faintly. “I’m just curious. Right! We have to go to K City after this project. Don’t you forget about our promise in Venria.”

Listening to him mentioning the promise, I was stunned for a moment. “Got it!” He wanted the sandalwood box that Grandma has.

When we arrived at the Oasis Hotel, Armond parked the car at the entrance and took me to a restaurant nearby for dinner.

Then we went to the bidding hall. The wide hall was crowded with people, and some business partners came to greet Armond.

Armond asked me to find a quiet place and make some changes to the proposal, at least to the point of not bringing shame to the Murphy Corporation.

There was a lounge in the hotel. Sitting on the couch, I went through the proposal and my head started hurting. Apart from not understanding the overall situation, the proposal was way too rushed.

“You’re... Ms. Stovall?” A voice called out to me and I was stunned.

Raising my head, I saw a chubby middle-aged man standing in front of me with a file.

I was slow to react and blurted out, “Hello. You are?”

The man burst into laughter. “Ms. Stovall, you’re so forgetful. We just met last night.”

Last night? Hmm...

After pondering for a moment, I looked at him and finally realized who he was. “You’re Mr. Watson?”

He wore a wide grin and said, “Ms. Stovall, please remember me this time. It’s rather embarrassing.”

Feeling awkward, I forced a smile and immediately stood up to shake hands with him as an apology, but he stopped me midway.

Sitting at the side, he looked at my proposal and smiled. “Ms. Stovall, are you taking part in the bidding?”

I nodded and smiled. "Are you too?"

Seeing how he had a stack of documents in his hand, I guessed he wasn't here just to watch the show. Plus, he didn't get to a conclusion with Ashton last night.

So he must be here for the bidding.

"Ms. Stovall, may I know where you are working at?" Wearing a smile, he saw me shutting my laptop.

I replied, "Murphy Corporation. Mr. Watson, I've heard that you and other members are not allowed to take part in third-party business cooperation. So, are you here for..."

He was stunned for a moment, but his smile never left. "That's right. We can't take part. I gave my wife a job in the company as she was bored at home. And today, I'm just here to look around and accompany her."

It seemed he was a husband who loved his wife truly.

I smiled. Noticing that it was almost time, I got up and excused myself. "Mr. Watson, the bidding's about to begin, so I have to go make some preparations. I shall not disturb you any longer."

He smiled and got up to block my path. "Ms. Stovall, how about we talk for a bit? It won't take long. Just a few minutes."

I froze, as I knew what he was getting at. So that's what he had in mind after beating around the bush for so long.



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“That’s too kind of you, Mr. Watson. I’m just a common staff member here. What would you like to know?”

He sat back on the chair and smiled at me, indicating for me to do the same.

Then, I sat down in front of him and made sure to keep my manners in check.

“How much will you profit from this project?” He asked without beating around the bush.

I smiled and placed my drink down. “Are you perhaps concerned about my wellbeing, Mr. Watson?”

He chuckled casually and replied, “You’re quite the jokester, Ms. Stovall.”

I maintained my smile, staying silent.

After a while, he stopped chuckling and said, “If things go well, what do you think about becoming business partners for life?”

“Why don’t you let me know why you’re concerned about my share of the earnings first, Mr. Watson? That would make our discussion go much more smoothly.”

He pressed his lips together tightly. His smile was starting to become so deep it was almost fake. "I like your style, Ms. Stovall."

As he spoke, he pushed a bank card toward me with a smile glinting in his eyes. "There's two hundred thousand in here. Of course, this must seem like a small sum to you. This two hundred thousand is just to treat you to tea, but if you're willing to sweet talk Mr. Fuller into working together with me, I'll top up another five hundred thousand. Of course, you're welcome to name your own price."

I was taken aback as my gaze fell upon the card on the table. With narrowed eyes, I leaned my elbow on the tabletop and cupped my chin in one hand. "So, Mr. Watson, you want me to give up on this bid and also put in a good word for you with Mr. Fuller?" Was I hearing things correctly?

"That's right. How I enjoy working with smart people such as yourself. Mr. Fuller has good taste." Derek's grin widened in pride.

His chubby face stretched wide with his sleazy smile as he continued pushing the card toward me, clearly wanting me to keep it.

But of course, I wasn't blinded by the money. On the contrary, I simply glanced at the card and said lightly, "Two hundred thousand. That's quite a sum. I could put a down payment on a place in A City if I include the other five hundred thousand."

For some reason, it felt like I had to return his smile, so I did. "That's not exactly how things work around here, though. You probably don't understand how the Murphy Corporation settles profits. I'd say they're especially generous as the project manager will always receive twenty percent of all earnings made. Ashton invested about ten million into this project, and twenty percent of that will already be far more than just a down payment. Dare I say – it would be enough for me to buy a whole house."

His sleazy grin froze on his face, and he narrowed his eyes. "Asking for two million right off the bat? Do you know what happens to greedy women, Mr. Stovall?" he asked in a cold voice.

I chuckled lightly. "How could you say that Mr. Watson? I wouldn't call myself greedy at all. Based on my relationship with Ashton, I would say that I'll do well with any projects given. Not only will I do well at the Murphy Corporation, but I will also get to earn more money. If I do take your two hundred thousand, I would be giving myself the short end of the stick. If word gets out that I betrayed my own company for a couple hundred thousand, how am I going to continue working in this field?"

With that, I pushed the card back with the same smile on my face. "Next time you try and bribe someone, please do your research. This is rather embarrassing on your part."

It was getting late, so I stood up and walked into the bidding room without another glance at Derek.

Armond's lean figure stood out among the other people in the room. I walked toward him and asked mildly, "How confident are you in this project?"

He raised an eyebrow and looked at me. "Shouldn't I be asking you that?"

I pressed my lips together before replying, "You've probably been preparing this project for about two weeks or so. Before this, Linda was put in charge. You're just trying to use me, aren't you? Why else would you only tell me today?"

He glanced at me and indicated for me to sit down next to him. After a short silence, he said, "That's going to be difficult to say."

“I agree.” After all, I had just chased Ashton away with venomous words that afternoon. I couldn’t start chasing after him again after that.

The room started filling up. Five minutes before the auction began, the room was already completely full, and everyone settled into silence as they waited for the announcer to show up.

I looked around but failed to see Linda. Curiously, I approached Armond and asked quietly, “Are you really planning on using my proposal?”

He raised an eyebrow. “Can’t I?”

I nodded and kept quiet.

Five minutes later, Joseph got on stage and started briefly explaining the Fuller Corporation’s public tender. After going through their goals and the general plan, he started calling each bidder up to present their proposals.

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There were nineteen companies in total. There were even some companies that had gotten eliminated near the beginning. All the remaining companies were quite prevalent in A City.

Upon closer inspection, I realized that most of the proposals were rather similar to one another.

I was nodding off when Armond suddenly said, "Take a look at this. When you go on later, do what you usually do."

I looked down to see another proposal in my hands. Taken aback, I noticed that it was a bidding document. I glanced sideways at Armond and asked in surprise, "Did you do this beforehand?"

He nodded. "Take a closer look. Don't embarrass me."

I felt a little lost for words. "That was dangerous, Mr. Murphy. If you already had a proposal ready, then why did you ask me to make my own? I'm about to go on stage, but now I have to memorize a different proposal. You must have more confidence in my skills than I do because I don't think I can memorize everything in just a few minutes."

"If you never try, you'll never know," he said lightly.

What the hell?

I glared at him and decided that I didn't want to speak to him anymore. After that, I continued reading the proposal and was rather surprised.

Looking at him in shock, I asked, "Did you make this, or did Linda write it?"

He glanced at me and evaded my question. "You're next."

I pressed my lips together in a tight line before continuing to read the proposal closely. Ultimately, I had to grab the chance to memorize as much as I could.

“Next, we have the Murphy Corporation. Please get ready,” the announcer called out.

I started to panic. Despite the shiny new proposal, I was still nervous since I was preparing everything so last-minute.

Cold sweat started running down my back, and my hands started to shake.

Suddenly, a large hand wrapped around my own, and I looked up only to see Armond’s dark gaze staring at me.

His brow was relaxed, and his tone was light and breezy as he assured me, “Don’t worry. Even if this bidding doesn’t work out, you can still stay in Murphy Corporation.”

I glared at him and removed my hand from his. “Don’t act all kind and smiley with me. Next time, can you please at least let me know in advance?”

“Of course I will.” His smile became more of a slight smirk.

If it wasn’t for our situation, I would have loved to punch that smug look off his face.

All of a sudden, I felt a cold gaze on me, so I turned my head in that direction.

A man dressed in all black, who I had failed to notice, was standing not too far away. His cold gaze was practically piercing through Armond and me.

He had clearly mistaken Armond’s previous action as a sign of our flirting.

“Looks like he’s seen everything,” Armond said in a particularly smug voice. “Do you think he would kick the Murphy Corporation out just for that?”

I sighed and tried to control my anger. “Don’t worry. Ashton isn’t as petty as you.”

It seemed like Armond had purposely held my hand just now so that Ashton would see us.

After the person onstage finished presenting, a round of applause sounded up as usual.

It’s my turn now.

I got up and walked onstage. Meanwhile, Ashton was standing right next to the table set up beside the stage, staring at me with his coal-black eyes.

He must be incredibly furious right now. I sighed and passed the presentation that Armond made to the workers.

Next, I started presenting. “Greetings. I’m the project manager for Murphy Corporation, Scarlett Stovall. I would like to thank Mr. Fuller for giving us this opportunity to present the Murphy Corporation’s ideals as well as our proposal.”

I didn’t want to drag on my introduction for too long. After a brief introduction, I went through the proposal that Armond had given me. Thankfully, I managed to remember most of it.

After the proposal, I let out a sigh of relief. I was prepared to end it when Ashton suddenly cut me off. “Ms. Stovall, was it? That was quite the interesting proposal you

just presented. It's quite unique, so I would like to ask you about some details if that's alright."

Just looking at his handsome face wasn't enough for me to guess what he was about to say next. I just nodded and smiled lightly. "Please, be my guest."

He narrowed his eyes slightly and asked, "As everyone knows, the Murphy Corporation has been leading in the petrol and jade business. This public tender is based on AI technology. Your proposal is very well-planned, but that doesn't mean it's useable. Do you think we could work together well despite your company's lack of experience in the AI field?"

Thankfully, I had already thought about that question beforehand. After a pause, I answered, "We've already thought about that question just like you have, Mr. Fuller. We already have a proposal ready to answer that question. Please take a look."

He didn't reach out to take it. Instead, he glanced at Joseph, who reached out for it instead. After that, he looked at me as if he wanted to say something.

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I thought he would have been done after that question, but he piped up again soon after. "Ms. Stovall, if I remember correctly, you used to be the project director for the Fuller Corporation. Do you remember why you left?"

I was surprised as I hadn't guessed that he would suddenly ask about that. Without waiting for my answer, he looked at Armond and smiled. "Mr. Murphy, do you know about Ms. Stovall's past?"



How could he?

Back then, I left Fuller Corporation because I had gotten framed. Despite that, Ashton had destroyed all the evidence and did not let even the slightest bit of news get leaked about it. There were barely any people who actually knew about the incident.

He was clearly asking Armond so he could use this chance to humiliate me.

Armond looked at me and said calmly, “Everyone has their own past. I don’t know what she used to be like, but now I know that she’s a very talented person. After all, don’t you have your own history too, Mr. Fuller?”

Armond was clearly avoiding the question.

Ashton smiled. “How open-minded of you, Mr. Murphy. Still, we can’t deny the fact that someone’s past will certainly affect their future. While the Fuller Corporation does in fact consider our partner’s capabilities, we also take into account their values.”

His words clearly had a double meaning to them. The audience had probably already started doubting the reason behind Fuller Corporation’s decision to fire me all those years ago.

I heard some members of the audience start to mumble amongst themselves. Some of them had even started whispering about Ashton’s attitude. I could hear them speculating that Ashton, Armond, and I had a relationship beyond just former and current colleagues.

No one enjoyed the feeling of being gossiped about by their audience, much less in a situation like this.

I glanced at Ashton and said, "If you so heavily doubt my loyalty and values, then I'm more than happy to pass on my role as director to another staff member from the Murphy Corporation for this project."

He frowned, clearly ruffled. His cold gaze landed on me once again. "That's alright. I think you'd be a good fit for this project after all."

After that, he simply glanced at Joseph before leaving.

I returned to my seat and Armond spoke, "Lover's spat?"

I pressed my lips together and threw the documents back to him. "You should really think before you speak."

He raised an eyebrow. "Why are you so angry? You're the one who keeps running away, and you're the one who keeps pushing him away too. He's already given up his dignity as a man for you. What do you have to be angry about?"

I stood up, reluctant to speak to him for any longer. "Since the proposal is done, I'll get going. I'm still busy."

I knew it was my fault, but it wasn't like that would stop me from continuing. After all, Ashton was much better off without me.

However, I still felt suffocated despite having left the hall and decided to find a place to sit down and take a breather.

“Ms. Stovall!” Someone called out; it was Joseph.

I looked at him and nodded with a smile. “Mr. Campbell.”

“Ms. Stovall, Summer is back at the villa with Mr. Fuller. She’s fine, but she keeps asking where you are,” he told me. His tone was light as if we were simply conversing about the weather.

I thought he would bring Ashton up, but he started talking about Summer instead.

I was taken aback for a while before sighing. With that, I couldn’t help but ask, “Is she doing alright?”

He nodded and basically repeated himself. “She just keeps asking Mr. Fuller where you went.”

I pressed my lips together, feeling a little bitter. After a pause, I said, “Thank you, Mr. Campbell.”

He then shook his head and said, “I don’t understand. You and Mr. Fuller clearly still love each other. If that’s the case, why do you keep pushing him away?”

“He deserves someone better,” I retorted.

“Who would that be? When it comes to love, feelings are the most important. Since when this became some matching game?” The man frowned at me.

I looked at Joseph and sighed. “Mr. Campbell, plenty of people think that a couple should end up together as long as they love each other. No one ever thinks about how they should deal with their own individual problems.

“After I heard that he was the one who pitted my parents against each other and caused my mother and me to become enemies, I brought Summer away. I knew that if I stayed by his side, I’d be swallowed up by both love and hate. Hence, I used four years of my time to try and get over it, but that turned out to be useless.

“I thought I could get over it once I came to K City so I could have a good life with Ashton from then onward. I wanted to have a normal mother-daughter relationship with Cameron, but she was always so careful around me, and Ashton always seemed to be letting me do whatever I wanted. It hurt even more because I’d already seen how much they loved Rebecca. With her, it was unconditional, but when it came to me, all they did was tiptoe around me. I don’t blame them. I blame life.”

I looked at Joseph and smiled bitterly. “If I stayed with Ashton, that just means I’ll be stuck in a hellhole of my own stubborn making. I’m a coward after all. I’d rather be afraid than breaking the peace.”