

## Chapter 701

“Scarlett, are you aware that other people can get hurt too? You’re not the only person who bleeds or cries, you know.”

I stayed silent in shock as I processed what she said. It was the first time anyone had ever said anything like that to me.

“I-” I tried to explain but scoffed at myself. I nodded and said, “You’re right. I’m sorry. I didn’t realize how much I hurt other people.”

Since I couldn’t explain myself, I just hailed a taxi and went back to Murphy Corporation.

I felt like screaming. All this while, I had always been more of a cold person, and I didn’t know what to do now that someone had brought it up.

My bad mood continued even after I was back at the office. I looked through some of the documents that Armond wanted to be signed and felt even worse.

Linda saw that I was still in the office and knocked to come in. She frowned as she asked, “Are you okay?”

I noticed that everyone had left and replied mildly, “I’m fine. Might be PMS or something.”

She said a bit pitifully, “Oh, that’s too bad. The Magpie Festival is in two days. What a downer!”

The Magpie Festival?

I had almost forgotten about the Magpie Festival and sighed. "I'm too old to even celebrate the Magpie Festival anymore. There's no meaning to it now."

She rolled her eyes at me. "What do you mean you're 'too old'? Do you think people just start to wither and dry up after a certain age? That's so boring of you."

I chuckled and suddenly remembered Nora's request to ask Linda out for dinner that night.

I was about to ask when I suddenly remembered what happened. After today's incident, I didn't know if Nora would still want to have dinner.

"Linda, do you have any good friends? Maybe someone you really love?"

Linda nodded. Her heels seemed to be hurting her, so she sat down next to me. "Of course I do. I have a close friend who I've known for about fifteen years. As for someone I really love, I have my kid and my parents."

I hesitated before asking, "What about your husband?"

She paused in slight surprise before replying, "We got a divorce."

I was taken aback for a second and apologized hastily. "I'm sorry, I didn't know-"

"It's okay. It's normal after all. At my age, everyone's bound to come across an obstacle or two. Scarlett, you don't have to follow any particular recipe for life. Just do what you

like,” she said mildly as if she was simply asking about the weather. I nodded with a smile.

She smiled back. “What’s wrong? Did something happen?”

Since we had already started talking about this, I didn’t feel the need to hide anything. With a nod, I said, “I don’t really know how to treat those people who care about me. It seems like I’m always unknowingly pushing them away.”

She looked at me with her hands folded under her chin. “Your friends and loved one, perhaps?”

I nodded again. “Yeah. It’s not like we learn how to love other people in school. I think I might have missed a lesson or two.”

She looked at me in surprise. “You have a child, don’t you? Don’t you love her? I don’t know how other people would explain it, but to me, love simply means wishing the best for the other person from the very bottom of your heart. Just think about how you treat your daughter. You know what’s best for her, so you always try to provide her with the best.”

“What about friends?”

“It’s the same idea but in moderation. After all, if you go overboard, you might achieve the opposite result.”

I felt like giving up. “That’s so complicated. I still don’t think I understand how to solve my problems.”

She raised an eyebrow. "What happened? Just tell me. I'm older than you after all, so hopefully, I can be of some help."

"What should I do if I argued with a friend?"

She looked surprised. "Have you never argued with a friend before?"

I shook my head. "Not exactly." Before this, when Macy and I argued, I usually stayed silent and didn't retaliate. She always came back to find me after she got over it anyway.

This time, my attitude toward both Nora and Ashton seemed to make this a much harder situation than before.

After some thought, I decided to just come out and ask, "Are you busy tonight? Let's have dinner."

She smiled in surprise. "What a coincidence. My parents offered to watch my kid for me today, and I was planning on having a nice night off. I'm glad to have a partner now."

After tidying up our things, we headed out of the office.

Linda and I walked around the mall for a while and had a light meal. Since she rarely got the chance to have a night out, we decided to go to a bar.

"You know, I haven't stepped foot in a bar since giving birth. I was starting to feel much older than I actually am! Looks like everyone really does need a night out once in a while to keep spry and energized," Linda quipped. She was in a pretty good mood and ordered another round of drinks, sipping from her glass as she chatted with me.

She drank rather quickly and suddenly approached me with slightly narrowed eyes. "Being young sure is nice. Just sitting down here already got you some stares."

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I glanced around us and realized we were getting stares from other people. I did my best to ignore them as I turned to Linda, who was drinking like a fish. "You shouldn't drink so much. It's bad for your health."

"Don't worry. I can hold my liquor well!" she said with a faint smile.

I sipped from my glass of juice and found myself gradually zoning out. Even in my daze, I was still checking my phone periodically.

My actions bothered Linda so much that she decided to set me straight. "Scarlett, do you know what's the scariest thing in the world?"

I shook my head. Linda clinked glasses with me before replying, "It's indecisiveness. The longer you procrastinate, the easier it is to lose the most important things in your life."

The next thing I knew, she had taken my phone to make the call I had been so reluctant to make.

I was about to grab my phone back when a voice rang out from behind us. “Ms. Stovall?”

I was taken aback by the sudden intrusion and couldn't help but frown when I turned to look. A familiar face came into sight, and only then did my frown turn into a smile. “Hi, Mr. Watson!”

“Ms. Stovall, this is the third time we've run into each other this month. I guess this is what they call fate, wouldn't you agree?”

I smiled back politely as I got up from my seat. “I'm sure you have work to attend to, Mr. Watson. I shall leave you to it.”

Just as I was leaving with Linda in tow, Derek and his subordinates circled us and stopped us dead in our tracks.

I furrowed my brows as I turned to Derek. “Mr. Watson, what's the meaning of this?”

Derek was still smiling, though he now had a lecherous look to him. “How are you still so full of yourself, Ms. Stovall? Do you not know the situation you're in?”

“What do you mean by that, Mr. Watson? I'm sure I haven't offended you in any way, so there's no reason for you to threaten us like this,” I replied as calmly I could.

He chuckled before shifting his gaze to Linda. “You look like you've been doing well. You're still as beautiful as ever.”

I was stunned, but before I could react, Linda had jumped in. “If you're here for me, leave Scarlett out of it.”

“Then you’d be glad to hear that I’m here for the both of you!” Derek exclaimed.

He then looked back at me, lips curled in a sinister smile. “Scarlett, even after everything you’ve done for Ashton, he still dumped you? I can see why, though. I saw the lady he was with today, and she was stunning! If I had to choose between you and her, I’d pick her too. That said, I’m still rather fond of you, so what do you think about getting together with me?”

“Derek, you disgusting pig!” Linda yelled, shielding me from him. “You know why you had to escape to A City, or do you want to be back in Dellmoor?”

Linda must have pushed all the right buttons because that immediately riled Derek up. “Is that a f\*cking threat?”

Linda remained composed as she continued, “You know very well if it’s a threat. Don’t forget how you ended up in A City. If I can destroy you once, I can do it again.”

A slap came down fast and hard on Linda. It was so sudden that no one saw it coming.

Linda held her face in shock as blood trickled down the side. “I have been f\*cking nice to you, haven’t I?” Derek growled. “You have done me dirty once, but I won’t let it happen again. Don’t assume I can’t do anything to you just because you have the Murphys to protect you.”

Derek looked around him and gestured to his subordinates. “Take these two women to the room upstairs.”

“Go to h\*ll!”

Linda had only just gotten her words out when she got another tight slap.

“Shut the f\*ck up! If the Murphys are really that capable, I invite them to bring it on!”

A group of onlookers had gathered round to see what the commotion was all about. However, Derek remained unfazed by the attention he was attracting and merely got his subordinates to send them away.

We were just two women up against a group of burly men. Unable to fight against them, we were soon brought upstairs and thrown into a hotel room with Derek.

He leered at us as he paraded around with a devilish grin, his beer belly now even more protruding. “It’s been a while since I’ve had so much fun. I’m going to enjoy myself to the fullest today.”

Linda got flustered and started flinging items at him, all of which he successfully ducked.

Not wanting to take the risk of either of us acting up again, Derek called for his subordinates to tie us to our chairs.

“Ms. Stovall, look what you’ve done to yourself. If you had cooperated with me right from the start, I’d have gladly taken you in after Ashton dumped you. You could have avoided all this.”

The smug look on Derek’s face as he spoke to me made me feel sick to my core, so much so that I didn’t even feel like replying.



He dragged a chair in front of me and sat on it, locking eyes with me. "It's still not too late now. If you get together with me, I can provide you with a comfortable life. What do you think?"

"Will you stop being so gross?" I shouted. If my hands weren't tied up, I'd have slapped this pathetic excuse of a man.

Instead of being offended, Derek howled with laughter. "What a character! No wonder Ashton fell for you."

## **Chapter 703**

"Hey Derek, have you looked into a mirror recently?" Linda mocked. "You may not see it yourself, but trust us when we say you're disgusting. You better let us go soon, or you'll regret it."

Derek fixed a steely gaze on Linda as he chuckled. "Do you think I'm still the same person from five years ago? The one you so easily manipulated? And do you really think the Murphys have any power over me here in A City?"

"The Murphys may not be able to do anything to you, but I can!" We were all taken by surprise when Nora's voice rang out of the blue, only to see her emerge from the bathroom.

She leaned casually against the door frame, her lips in a pout. "Mr. Watson, what do you think will happen if I pressed this?" she asked as she slowly held her phone up.

When Derek didn't reply, the doe-eyed Nora continued, "Why don't we try it? I'm so curious to know what might happen!"

"Nora," Derek grunted. Even though he was still smiling, one couldn't miss the hint of annoyance in his voice. "How did you get in here?"

Nora pinched her cheeks as she muttered, "Having to fake a smile is so tiring. My face has gotten all stiff from it."

She ignored Derek's question and looked around the room for a spot to get comfortable in, her phone still tightly clutched in her hand.

"Mr. Watson must have been so busy with work that you forgot this bar was given to me by my grandfather. I was bored and came here today for a drink. But I got a little tipsy and entered this room for a shower and nap. Unfortunately, I got more than what I had bargained for when I ran into this scene."

Nora's devil-may-care attitude was starting to get on Derek's nerves. She continued her innocent act as she propped her chin up with her hand. "I've seen and heard everything, and I can't possibly pretend otherwise. My grandfather had always taught me to stand up bravely for what's right. If I were to do the right thing and call the police now, what do you think will happen to you, Mr. Watson?"

That last sentence wiped the smile away from Derek's face. "Tell me, what do you want?" he asked with a glare.

Nora sighed as she thought about it. "To be honest, I have everything but a man. But that's not something you can give me. You're too old and fat, and you have bad teeth and body odor." She shuddered. "Ugh... I wouldn't want you even if you offered."

Derek shook with anger, but Nora ignored him as she continued to be deep in thought. "How about this? I saw you slap them earlier, so why don't you let them return the favor?"

Derek's expression darkened as he clenched his fists tightly. There was no doubt he was fuming, and I thought he was about to blow his top. To my surprise, he acceded to Nora's request and even personally untied Linda and me from the chairs.

We stared in bewilderment, neither of us knowing how to react to this sudden turn of events.

Nora said nothing as she started playing with her phone. Derek stole a glance at her before turning to face Linda. "Hit me!" he said through gritted teeth.

Everything was happening so fast that Linda hadn't gotten a chance to recover from her shock. She turned around instinctively to look at Nora, only to find her still playing with her phone nonchalantly.

"Just leave," Linda finally said.

Her response stunned both Derek and Nora, though neither said anything.

Nora shrugged innocently when she caught Derek staring helplessly at her. "Don't look at me. You're the one who hit her. You should be thanking her for being so kind, not me."

At that, Derek immediately thanked Linda before looking back at Nora. "Please send my regards to your grandfather."

Nora hummed in response and went back to playing on her phone. Not wanting to stay and be snubbed any further, Derek angrily left with his subordinates.

Now that the worst was finally over, Linda and I could finally calm our racing hearts.

After exchanging glances with each other, we looked at Nora, half expecting her to say something. Instead, Nora remained silent as she stood up and prepared to leave.

"Ms. Oberick, thank you for your help," Linda called out.

"It's ok. I just happened to be here," she replied coolly as she continued to head toward the door.

After everything that had happened, the awkwardness I felt with Nora earlier had long been dispelled. "Didn't you want to drink with Linda? It'd be insincere for you to leave now, wouldn't it?"

Nora stopped in her tracks and turned to look at me with a raised eyebrow. "Did I say I was leaving? I just wanted to use the bathroom."

As soon as she said it, she walked into the bathroom and closed the door.

Linda was left even more confused by this interaction and gaped at me. "You two know each other?"

I nodded.

After a while, Nora walked out of the bathroom and looked at us. "I've ordered some drinks. Shall we have them together?"

"Of course!" Linda replied excitedly. "If we're having drinks, should we get some food too?"

"Done! Delivery shouldn't take long," Nora said with a grin as she scrutinized Linda. "I heard you're Armond's personal assistant?"

Linda cleared her throat nervously. "Well, there's nothing personal about it. It's just a job."

## **Chapter 704**

After a moment's hesitation, Linda beckoned me to sit with her.

I sat next to Linda but realized Nora refused to look in my direction. Judging by that reaction, I figured she was still mad at me from earlier.

A sharp-eyed Linda also noticed the tension between us and tried to change the subject. "We're so thankful for your help today. Otherwise, who knows what that scumbag Derek would have done to us."

"Don't mention it," Nora casually replied.

Piqued by curiosity, Linda couldn't help but continue, "Ms. Oberick, the grandfather you mentioned earlier, is he the Mr. Oberick that I'm thinking of?"

Nora pursed her lips as she pondered about the question. "Don't think so much. Meeting you was fate, so let's drink to that!"

It was at that moment when I realized how little I knew about Nora. We had initially met in Venria, and even though everyone shared their stories, we all kept them brief. Even I didn't divulge much about myself, so it wouldn't be a surprise if she had held back information about herself too.

Linda noticed Nora's reluctance to elaborate and thus didn't ask any further. It was also then when the food and drinks got delivered.

Linda poured us our wine and raised a toast to us. "Once again, I have to thank the two of you for today. Here's to our friendship!"

Nora raised her glass of wine in return and drank it in one gulp.

"I'm still curious though, how did you get in here? We didn't even see you around before this. It seems too much of a coincidence, doesn't it?" Linda quizzed.

Nora raised her head and glanced at me. "I had long noticed the commotion when you were still in the lobby. Then I heard the staff mention the old lecher wanting to get a room, so I told them to let me in first."

Linda nodded, her eyes filled with gratitude. "Thank goodness for you. I still shudder to think what Derek might have done to us otherwise."

Just then, I mustered up my courage and turned to Nora. "I was rash earlier today, and I apologize for that. Thank you for still helping us get rid of Derek."

Nora seemed to be in self-reflection as she held my gaze. "It's not entirely your fault. I'm sure you have your reasons, so I shouldn't have forced you for an answer. Besides, when it comes to affairs of the heart, everyone handles them differently. I shouldn't have meddled in yours. I am to blame for being so pushy," she said apologetically.

"No, you aren't!" I exclaimed. "I don't know how to handle these problems, and I always seem to overcomplicate them. As an outsider, you have a clearer view of things. And as my friend, it's only natural that you want to help. At the end of the day, it's my fault for pushing you away."

Linda looked at us and burst out laughing. "You guys are adorable! Come on, let's drink. Real friends don't keep grudges. After today, we'll still be friends!"

With the tension between Nora and I all gone, the three of us continued drinking to our hearts' content.

Nora was terrible when she got under the influence of alcohol. All it took was a few glasses of wine before she latched on to Linda and bombarded her with every question about Armond, from details about his lifestyle to his past relationships.

Linda could still hold back initially, but the more she said, the more enthusiastic she got. Before long, she had managed to spill just about everything she knew about Armond.

I had stopped drinking for fear of getting too drunk and having no one to take care of me. As I continued to be entertained by my friends' incessant need for gossip, Armond called.

"Where are you?" he asked, slightly fuming.

It suddenly dawned on me that because I had gone out with Linda right after work, I hadn't been home to make Armond dinner. Is that why he's angry?

My anxiety drowned out my surroundings as I tried to pull myself together. "Mr. Murphy, I'm so sorry. I'm out with friends tonight, so I- "

"Where are you?" he interrupted.

I was speechless, but Nora replied on my behalf, "Baroness Bar."

"Who are you with?" Armond snapped. He wasn't hiding his anger anymore.

"Linda and Nora," I answered honestly.

After a slight pause, I added, "Mr. Murphy, have you eaten?"

However, all I got was a dial tone in response as Armond had already hung up on me.

Nora, who was now very drunk, tried to snatch my phone away. "Who was that on the phone? Was it Ashton?"



As she fiddled around with my phone, she continued, “You should call him and snatch him back from Ms. Zimmer, or whatever she’s called. He’s your man! How can you let him take care of another woman?”

I slapped my forehead in exasperation. Nora was a little dizzy from all the wine she had had, so I led her over to the sofa to rest.

Linda, on the other hand, was already lying quietly on the sofa. If she had been anything like Nora, I wouldn’t have been able to handle them both.

I got up to get Nora some water, only to realize I felt a little light-headed myself. So much for saying I’d drink less.

“Ashton, your woman is drunk. Are you coming to take care of her?” Nora suddenly piped up.

When I turned to look at her, I found her pressing away on my phone haphazardly. I couldn’t help but frown. “Nora! Stop playing!”

She ignored me as she brought the phone to her ear and shouted, “Baroness Bar!”

## **Chapter 705**

After that, she continued, “No, I’m drunk now. I shouldn’t be calling Ashton. I should call Armond, and let him come...”

Before she could finish her sentence, Nora dozed off.

I couldn't help but chuckle at how ridiculous she was. Since she had fallen asleep, I brought her to the bed and tucked her in.

After covering Linda with a blanket, I decided to lie on the sofa to get some shut eye.

Ding dong! I was so close to dozing off when the doorbell to our room suddenly rang. I was stunned and sat up straight from the sofa.

Alcohol had clouded my mind, and I began to fear the worst. What if that there was an intruder at our door?

A short while later, the door opened, and Armond stepped into the room. One of the staff from Nora's bar followed behind, still holding on to the room key.

When he realized the room reeked of booze and was in complete disarray, Armond's face blazed with anger. "How much did you drink?"

Seeing how angry and fierce he already was, I decided not to lie. "A lot. But Nora and Linda drank the most."

"Do you expect me to praise you for having control?" he said coldly, even though the anger in his voice was obvious.

I was still feeling light-headed, but I forced myself to stay sober. "Armond, I... "

“Armond?” Nora suddenly sat up from the bed when he heard his name. In her drunken stupor, she scanned the room until she met his gaze and broke into an enormous grin.

“Armond, you’re here? Are you going to take me home?”

She then got up from bed and staggered over, throwing herself into Armond’s arms. “I knew it. I knew you’d appear in my dreams. Linda told me you hadn’t been a virgin since you were seventeen. I’m sure you must be amazing...”

Nora’s words left me dumbstruck.

I didn’t pay a lot of attention to what Nora and Linda were discussing earlier. But judging by what we just heard, Linda had been very generous with the details.

The entire situation was so embarrassing that even the staff who had accompanied Armond had left quietly.

Armond was already angry when he first stepped into the room. But, now with Nora all over him, the fury in his eyes intensified even more.

He stared daggers at me like he was about to shred me to pieces. In an instant, I tried to pull Nora away from him but to no avail.

I trembled as I spoke, “Mr. Murphy, Nora’s completely drunk now and thinks she’s dreaming.”

“How dare you, Scarlett!” He gritted his teeth in anger.

I forced a smile, despite feeling like I might keel over anytime from embarrassment.

The commotion had caused Linda to stir from her sleep as she groggily sat up from the sofa. She had a moment of clarity and shock when she saw Armond. "Hello, Mr. Murphy. Please excuse me. I've still got work to do."

Linda then stood up and strode toward the door like she was going back to work. Damn, she is blackout drunk.

I was getting worried about Linda when she didn't show any signs of stopping. She can't possibly believe she's at work, can she? If she walks out in this state, she's going to get into trouble.

Without further ado, I hurriedly apologized to Armond, "Mr. Murphy, I'm so sorry! Linda has had too much to drink. I'll go after her!"

In my hurry to keep up with Linda, I accidentally bumped into someone on my way out. Before I could make out who the person was, I was already once again apologizing profusely.

I had barely stepped out of the room when that same person grabbed me by my arm and pulled me back.

It was only then that I got a good look at him. My eyes widened in surprise when I met the gaze of Ashton. Why is he here? Oh no, that means Nora must have made a real call earlier.

"Where are you going?" Ashton asked before I could say anything.

My mind was a complete mess from the alcohol and all the surprises that had been thrown at me. "Linda's drunk, and I can't leave her on her own," I sputtered.

Ashton hesitated as he looked around the room. He appeared somewhat relieved when he saw Armond getting pestered by Nora, then proceeded to pull me out of the room and toward the bar.

Even in her drunken state, Linda had managed to make her way to the entrance of the bar. That was as far as she went because she made herself comfortable and fell asleep against one of the flowerpots.

Despite many attempts to wake her up, Linda still didn't stir. Ashton had no choice but to call for Joseph, who got to the bar in just ten minutes.

Joseph pinched his brows and sighed in resignation when he saw Linda sprawled on the floor. It was clear what Ashton had called him over for, and he felt a headache coming on.

"Get Linda checked into a hotel room, or try to send her back home," Ashton instructed. With that, he forcefully pulled me up to leave with him.

I was still perplexed as I followed behind him. "Ashton, what are you doing?"

He didn't say a word, not even when he pushed me into the car and sped off.

As the car windows were down, I was constantly blasted by gusts of cold air, making me feel increasingly sick and nauseous.

Eventually, I couldn't take it any longer and tugged at Ashton's sleeves to let him stop the car. When he finally pulled up at the side of the road, I stumbled out and started retching.

I took the bottle of water he handed over and rinsed my mouth with it. "Do you still feel sick?" he asked sympathetically.

I shook my head slowly, even though I still felt dizzy and awful. When I tried to stand up, Ashton immediately came forward and caught me in his arms.

At that moment, my subconscious wanted to push him away. But after a long, arduous day, coupled with the effects of wine, I had no strength left to fight him. I was so tired I just closed my eyes and stayed in his arms.