

## Chapter 726

My heart skipped a beat in shock, but I immediately shook off his hand and returned to the dining room.

Channing was done with his meal and was having a chat with Leedon when he saw me enter. He smiled and said, "Where did you go? You didn't really eat, so Ashton ordered you some clam chowder."

I was stunned for a while, then saw that there really was a bowl of clam chowder on the table.

I gave him a faint smile and replied, "Thank you!"

Then, I sat down to drink the soup. Around ten minutes later, Ashton arrived with Rachel by his side.

"Wow, you have only left for a while, but the two of you are already holding hands and have even changed your clothes. Where did you go?" said Channing as he laughed. Since he always loved to joke around, the rest of the table was unbothered by his comments.

I was drinking my soup with my head down but subconsciously looked to the two as Channing spoke. Indeed, just like he said, they were holding hands and had both changed their clothes.

They looked a lot more intimate now.

Although I knew that they had changed because they fell into the water, the others did not.

Thus, I had expected Ashton to explain himself to the others. However, he simply smiled and kept quiet.

Rachel stood beside him shyly, without a word as well.

At first, the others had misunderstood them. However, looking at them now, everyone felt that they were indeed a couple.

I lowered my head and continued eating without paying too much attention to them. After all, when I was done eating, I still had work to do in the afternoon.

Leedon had previously given me a heads up, saying that I would be busier in the afternoon as many jobs in the base required manpower, but we were short-handed. Thus, it would be especially tough to do those jobs.

To me, that was quite a good thing since physical exertion could help take my mind off of my troubles.

At the base that afternoon, I squatted as I helped to select the equipment and organize the materials. Just then, Leedon carried a large box into the base. When he walked past me, he jokingly said, "Ms. Stovall, it's the first time a woman has ever entered the base. Everyone intended not to let you do any work, but you've been helping us for most of today. Thanks for your hard work!"

I smiled slightly then looked up at him. My legs were numb from squatting and my shoulders hurt. "This is my job. Didn't I say that there's no distinction between men and women in the workplace?"

Everyone laughed. That afternoon, Ashton would take Channing to see the construction of the base. Basically, it seemed as though he wanted the Oberick family to participate in the project as well.

Rachel tagged along, explaining some professional concepts from time to time. The two of them indeed looked quite compatible working together.

When they headed toward my direction, I lowered my head and focused on my work.

I had initially thought that they would leave as soon as they were done looking at the area. However, Rachel suddenly spoke. "Mr. Oberick, you must be tired after walking for so long. There's somewhere nearby where you can take a rest. Why don't we go there first, and you can have a taste of the pears here later!"

The old man seemed to like fruits, especially those that were freshly picked from the trees.

Thus, as soon as Rachel had spoken, Channing gladly agreed to stay on and rest.

As she helped him into the lounge, Ashton then turned to look at me.

I had thought that he would only take a glance at me before leaving. However, he suddenly said, "Ms. Stovall, please help to pick some fruits from behind the base."

I froze, then instinctively said, "I'm not familiar with the roads here!"

He raised his eyebrow as if to say that that was not his problem. "I think Mr. Murphy had said that you needed to cooperate with our work to the best you could."

On the surface, his words seemed irrelevant. However, they basically implied that if I did not go, I would be seen as uncooperative.

Thus, I nodded and put aside whatever I was doing then. "Okay, please wait for a while!"

After searching for a few plastic bags, I left the base. As most of Lavelian Village's lands were orchards, it was not difficult to find fruits to pick.

However, heavy rain from the night before had caused the orchards to become muddy. They were also fenced up to keep out livestock and to delineate each family's land.

The fences were lined with thorny rattan, so people could easily get injured if they tried to climb over without using the proper entrance.

I was walking around the orchard in search of its entrance when Leedon followed after me and smiled. "The entrance is on the other side, so you'll have to go around the fence. It rained last night and there are many construction sites here, so it won't be an easy walk. Be careful!"

I nodded and headed in the direction he pointed out. After a while, I finally found the entrance.

Since it was August, most pears in the orchard were ripe and suitable for eating. However, some ripened a little slower and therefore tasted a little sourer. Hence, since I was picking pears for the elderly, I had to find those that were riper and sweeter.

Luckily, it was already afternoon, so there were no longer any water droplets left from the rain last night. Thus, when I heard others chatting nearby, I stopped in my tracks and eavesdropped on their conversation.

## Chapter 727

It seemed to be Ashton and Rachel.

Rachel spoke in a delicate voice. “Mr. Fuller, you didn’t have to come with me. This orchard is not that far away, so I’m fine being alone. It’s better if you stay with Mr. Oberick and keep him company.”

Ashton replied softly, “It’s fine. The paths are slippery so it’s not that safe for you to come alone.”

Rachel then broke out into a light smile as her eyes shone brightly, probably because Ashton’s words had been very warming to hear.

Feeling as though I was a third wheel, I prepared to leave.

However, Ashton suddenly called on me. “Ms. Stovall, have you finished picking the fruits?”

Stunned, I looked into my empty plastic bag and laughed. “Not yet. Aren’t you picking some with Ms. Zimmer? I don’t think Mr. Oberick needs that many, so I’ll just leave first!”

“Since you’re already here and the weather is so hot, why don’t you pick a few more back and share them with the rest?” said Rachel, as she deliberately moved closer to Ashton, as if she were afraid that I would not be able to see how close they were.

I nodded and replied indifferently, “Sure, I’ll pick some then!”

As I walked around the orchard, I managed to find a pear tree that looked rather healthy and was at the right height for me to reach.

Rachel had been following me around as if she were a ghost haunting me. When I plucked a pear and placed it in my bag, she picked one too. She then wiped it clean for a long time before taking a bite. She scrunched up her face as she said, “It’s really sour. Who’s going to eat them if you bring it back? What a waste of these fruits!”

I just stood there as I was lost for words. Then, I looked at her and said, “Someone else will eat them. If it’s too sour for you, go pick your own!”

Ignoring her, I then found another tree. However, Rachel continued to shout, “These fruits seem good, Ms. Stovall. Why don’t you climb up to pick them!”

I looked to where she pointed and pressed my lips together, speechless. The tree was a few meters tall, so naturally, it got a lot of sunlight. However, it was not that simple to pluck fruits from a tree that tall.

“I can’t climb trees!” I replied, not planning to carry on the conversation any further.

“Seriously?” She looked at me with a shocked expression and continued, “Mr. Fuller told me that you grew up in the countryside. Don’t tell me you can’t even climb such a small tree?”

However, the man in question was nowhere in sight. Frowning, I looked at her and said, "Did Ashton tell you that?"

Rachel nodded as if it was something to be expected. "Yeah, he told me so much about his past!"

I then gave her a nod and hummed in reply before ignoring her.

Seeing that I was about to leave, Rachel moved to block my way. "The fruits on this tree are definitely sweet. Why can't you just climb up to pluck a few? You're so selfish. Who's going to eat all those sour fruits that you picked?"

I huffed, feeling slightly irritated, then looked at her and said, "You have hands and feet too. Why don't you climb up and pick them? Since you think it's so easy, go ahead! I'm not stopping you!"

What a crazy woman!

"Scarlett, you're... really selfish!" Rachel was so furious that she could not find words to refute me and could only curse at me in anger.

However, I was not in the mood to continue talking to her. I just wanted to pick some fruits and go back.

Just then, Ashton came back with a bag of fruits. He looked at us and asked, "What's wrong?"

"You're back, Mr. Fuller!" said Rachel, as she strutted to Ashton and continued, "Look at the pears on this tree! They look so big and juicy even from afar. I bet they're delicious."

He nodded. "It's a little tall though, so it won't be easy to climb."

Rachel nodded and acted pitiful as she replied, "I'd previously heard that Ms. Stovall liked to climb trees, so I wanted her to give it a try."

I was lost for words as I always got the feeling that the two of them seemed a little crazy.

Paying no attention to them, I was preparing to leave before Ashton looked at me and raised his eyebrow, then said, "The pear tree in the yard at R Province is taller than this. Summer always said that you climbed it to pick the pears every year. Why don't you try it!"

Damn it!

I frowned and replied, "Climb it yourself. It's getting late so I should go back. I still have a lot of work to finish."

He replied with an air of leisure, "Looks like you don't really care much about Mr. Murphy's instructions to cooperate with us."

Holding my breath, I glared at both of them, unable to get a word out.

I then placed the bag down then looked up at the tree, which was about three or four meters tall. I could not help but exhale in annoyance.



It was not actually that difficult. In the past in R Province, John had said that since I was so small and thin, I would not crush the tree when I climbed it to pick its fruits.

From then on, he liked to trick me into picking the fruits that he could not reach, while he just stood on the ground and waited with a basket in his hands. According to him, even if I did not pick the fruit and had fallen, he would still be there to catch me.

Since I was lucky, I had never actually fallen from a tree since I was a kid. Then, as I grew up, it became rarer for me to climb trees.

During the period when I had brought Summer back to R Province, I planted a pear tree in the yard. It grew very tall and whenever she wanted to eat one, I would climb up and pick one for her.

## **Chapter 721**

“A sum of money?” I let out a faint smile as I asked with curiosity, “How much exactly?”

She showed me contempt before querying, “How much do you want?”

“The thing is, I don’t know how much you are willing to give!” I stated the truth. Based on her current income, she should be able to offer quite the sum.

“Five hundred thousand! That’s enough for you to afford a house with two bedrooms here, in A City,” she replied in an ostentatious manner.

I smiled and uttered, "Five hundred thousand is a large sum. I might need to work extremely hard for a long period of time."

"It's good that you know!" With her arms folded, she gazed at me haughtily like a boastful sparrow.

I lowered my head to look at my outfit. No wonder she's so arrogant. I guess she has the right to be.

After all, my outfit is only worth about five hundred. It definitely pales in comparison to her luxurious and extravagant get-up.

"So? What do you say?" She inched closer. "Since you don't love Ashton anymore, why don't you just quit? I'll even pay you for it. That way, you'll have enough money to live however you like."

I chuckled. "That does sound like a good idea." Glancing at her, I frowned and added on, "However, how can you be sure that he would choose to be with you after separating with me?"

She answered confidently, "I'm the best candidate available; there is no one better. Once we have our own children, he will shift his focus to our family. For a man, romance doesn't matter anymore after a certain age. Am I right, Scarlett?"

"Yes, I see that you have a plan in mind already." I pursed my lips and smiled. "You must feel like you're in control of the situation now. But Ms. Zimmer, there is a plethora of beautiful and graceful ladies in K City. Considering Ashton's outstanding qualities, I believe they would not mind it's Ashton's second marriage. Do you think your talent and beauty are unrivaled? Just wait till you see the beauty of the prestigious bachelorettes around here."

Glaring at the despondent expression on her face, I continued, “In addition to your talent that you are so proud of, the ladies here in K City are also well-versed in arts. Their talent far surpasses yours. Not to mention, a man as wealthy as Ashton would want to marry a lady based on her ability to educate children, not her ability to work. He would also want his wife’s family to be influential and strong. With that said, it looks like you have neither of the qualifications. Am I right?”

“Y-You...” Her expression changed drastically. Livid, she stared at me and extorted, “Who cares if that’s the case. If he was willing to marry an orphan like you, then why can’t he marry me?”

I let out a smile. “You forgot about the most important thing—love. As you said, love becomes irrelevant after years of marriage. Honestly, that is only the case for the average family. Privation and endless hard work to sustain a family are what strip marriage of love. Do you think Ashton fits into that profile? No. What a man like him craves after a certain age is mental nourishment. That’s why for him, love is crucial.”

She darkened her face and sneered, “Scarlett, since you no longer want to be with him, why do you bother arguing with me? You could’ve just quit. Aren’t you just playing hard to get?”

I smiled nonchalantly. “You’re overthinking this. If you like him, I honestly won’t mind you chasing after him. I’m only mad because you’re blaming me for your failure to do so. By the way, regarding the five hundred thousand that you mentioned just now, I’ll consider it. I’m kind of short on money recently.”

Having said that, I turned around and was getting ready to leave the base. To my surprise, I stumbled upon Ashton at the entrance.

He glanced at me with his gloomy face and asked in a deep tone, “I’m only worth five hundred thousand?”

Stupefied, my heart skipped a beat. Did he overhear our conversation just now?

I feigned a smile. "The thing is that was the highest she could go."

"Scarlett, what the f\*ck are you going on about?" asked Rachel, who was catching up to us. She put on a pitiful look and uttered, "You said so yourself that you didn't love Mr. Fuller. You even told me that you despise him for being a nudnik to you."

She paused for a while before gazing at Ashton. "Mr. Fuller, can you even trust her words? If she intended to get money, she would've just asked you for it. The pittance that I offered wouldn't have mattered."

Her statement was actually quite reasonable. Ashton stared at me with a sombre expression on his face.

I was speechless as part of me knew what she said was true. I shrugged and uttered, "That's enough, I still have work to do. You two can continue acting in your depressing love story by yourselves!"

Ashton scowled and grabbed my hand before gazing at Rachel. "Leave now!"

"Mr. Fuller..." Rachel wanted to say something but was scared off by Ashton's minatory expression. Chapter 721

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## **Chapter 729**

The two bags of fruit were heavy but still manageable. I was lagging behind the rest of the group as I was walking slowly with the heavy load.

It had rained, so the road was muddy and wet. My shoes were caked with mud, making the walk a slippery affair, full of near misses. I planned to take a rest after crossing this muddy stretch, as my arms were almost breaking under the weight of these heavy bags of fruit.

Unfortunately, all of a sudden, I slipped and sat right into a pool of mud.

Slosh! The mud splashed onto the fruit I was carrying as well.

Oh my god! Where am I going to find clothes to change into?

I was tired and frustrated, so I just sat in the mud pool, stoned.

"Throwing in the towel?" I heard a voice mocking me.



I looked up to see Ashton. He was standing a distance away, looking amused. I instinctively wanted to get up from the ground.

On second thought, I gave up and just sat there. "It's none of your business," I retorted. He had already seen my embarrassing fall, so who cares?

"It is not about you. I am worried about the fruit. It was hard work harvesting them. You are not going to waste them like that, are you?" he mocked as he walked towards me.

I held out the muddied fruit to him and pouted, "There you go. Are you happy now?"

He looked at me with a tickled expression, seemingly trying to suppress a good laugh.

He did not take the muddied fruit from me. "Get up. Mr. Oberick is still waiting for the fruit."

With that, he turned to walk away, not showing any intention to help me up. Apparently, he came by to ridicule me. How maddening!

I was a complete mess when I reach the base. Leedon was resting on the steps when I approached. When he saw me, he gaped. "Ms. Stovall, did you fall into a trench?"

"Sort of." I could not bother to go into details.

He suppressed his laugh and took the muddied fruit from me to wash. "There are shower facilities at the base. You don't have any extra items of clothing with you, do you? If you don't mind, you can use mine." It was kind of him.

“Sorry to trouble you. Thank you very much.” I did not have other options and was thankful for his offer.

“No trouble at all. Hurry on,” he urged.

Everywhere I went, people turned to gawk at me. I don't blame them. I looked like I rolled in the mud.

Finally, I made my way to the bathroom. Joseph was there waiting for me, with a set of clothing in hand. “Mr. Fuller gave instructions to bring this to you, Ms. Stovall.”

I saw him trying to hide his amusement.

“You tell Ashton Fuller that I would not thank him for sending me clothing. It was his fault that I got into this state.” I vented my frustration on him.

“Yes, Ms. Stovall. You go clean up. I will guard the entrance for you,” he said. Joseph was trying his best to hold in his laughter.

I was thankful for Joseph's offer to stand guard. This base had no bathroom for ladies as all the staff was men. Luckily they had standalone shower rooms that I could use.

Leedon came by with some clean clothes for me. “Thank you Leedon, but I already have a set here with me.”

“That is great! I will get back to my work then.” He left and I went in for a shower.

After washing up, I rinsed my dirty clothes and packed them into the bag. When I came out of the shower, Joseph had composed himself. I thanked him for his help.

“Ms. Stovall, I’ll get going then.” Seeing I was done with cleaning up, he excused himself and left.

It had been a long day. I was on my way home when I met Leedon. “Mr. Campbell came by and invite us for lunch, so please stay a little longer, Ms. Stovall.”

“We just had breakfast together this morning, isn’t it?” I was puzzled.

Leedon laughed, “Mr. Oberick is an old man who lives alone. Only his granddaughter would visit him occasionally. I guess Mr. Fuller wanted to invite more people to keep him company. It is livelier with everyone gathered.”

I could not disagree with that. “Sure! Lunch is at the visitor centre?” I asked.

Leedon nodded, “I will be transporting some goods there, so my vehicle will be full. Mr. Fuller will be driving there. You can join them.”

“Okay.”

“Oh, Mr. Oberick heard you are the one who harvested the fruits. He asked for you to join them. You’d better move along,” Leedon urged.

“I harvested much fruit. Did you keep some for the staff?” I asked.

## Chapter 730

Leedon nodded and shared, "We ate them. Mr. Campbell gave us a big bag. Don't worry about us. We work in the orchard and get to eat the fruits regularly."

I headed straight to Channing's office. I was at the door and could hear laughter drifting out from the room.

"Rachel, you have a glib tongue. I have not laughed so much in a long time." It was Channing's voice.

"Mr. Oberick, you have flattered me. It is an honor for me to get to chat with you. I am thankful you enjoyed my company." Her words brought more laughter. Without a doubt, Rachel was much better than me when it came to socializing.

I was about to knock on the door when I heard Channing said, "Ashton, I was too sick to travel to your wedding when you and Rachel got married."

He fished out a pretty box from his pocket and handed it to Rachel. "Rachel, this is a small gift from me. Before I went to fight in the war in Venria, my wife gave this to me and I had kept them since. It is a bracelet. I gift it to you now. Please take it."

Rachel was surprised and delighted. She looked to Ashton, seeking his consent to accept the gift.

Ashton was also caught off-guard by this gesture of Channing. He came around and held the box. "Mr. Oberick, we appreciate your generosity. This bracelet was from your late wife. It is too precious. I cannot accept this gift."

Mr. Oberick was a little displeased he rejected the gift. "Who said it is for you? I am giving this to George's granddaughter-in-law. Take your hands off. Let Rachel take it."

He took the bracelet from the box and put it on Rachel's wrist. "Rachel, from now on, have a blessed life with this rascal."

Rachel was not expecting this gift. She looked to Ashton, confused.

Ashton was frowning slightly. However, when he saw Channing was happy, he kept quiet, so as not to dampen the joyful moment.

I did not want to interrupt the conversation, so I turned around to leave.

"Mrs. Fuller, you are here." Joseph was standing behind me, a tray of fruit in hand.

I was taken by surprise. I took a moment to recover from the shock before mumbling, "Oh, you went to cut the fruit?" He nodded.

We attracted the attention of those in the room, and they turned to look at us.

"Hello, Scarlett! I heard you went to harvest the fruit and had a fall. Are you alright?" Since Channing already saw me, I could not turn around to leave anymore.

I put on a smile and entered the room. "Don't worry, Mr. Oberick. I just slipped. It was no big deal," I assured him.

He laughed and recalled, "When George and I were fighting the war in Venria, there were days when the combat zone would become slippery and muddy because of a storm the night before. Sometimes, we would slip and roll down the mountain. Those were the difficult days. You kids have an easy life now."

We were nodding to Channing's story when I turned in Rachel's direction and caught sight of the bracelet. It was unintentional. The bracelet was very exquisite, so I took a second look at it.

Rachel must have thought I was after the bracelet, so she put her other hand over it to hide it from my sight.

I was amused and looked away.

We had a good time chatting and enjoying the fruit Joseph served.

After a while, we could see Mr. Oberick was getting tired and nodding off.

We ended our conversation and Ashton helped Mr. Oberick into the car to head for lunch at the visitor centre. The plan was to send him home after lunch so he could rest. Mr. Oberick must be tired after a long morning, given his age.

Joseph got into the driver's seat while Ashton helped Mr. Oberick settle into the backseat. Rachel joined them in the backseat.

Joseph was stunned. He looked at me, then turned toward Ashton with a questioning look in his eye, but Ashton kept quiet.

Joseph observed I did not get into the car, so he asked, "Are you not joining us?"

I shook my head. "I will head there with Leedon and his team."

"Leedon is transporting a load of stuff in his vehicle. It will be packed." Joseph was concerned.

"Not a problem," I assured him.

"Joseph, get going," Ashton commanded coldly. He was obviously not happy.

Joseph was bewildered but drove off compliantly. I let out a small sigh and consoled myself. It's okay.

Back at the base, Leedon was surprised to see me. "Ms. Stovall, did you not meet Mr. Fuller?"

"There were a few people with him. It would not be convenient for me to join them in their car. The visitor centre is not far from here. I can cycle there," I replied.