

Chapter 761

Rachel wept as if her heart was going to break. “I will always get what I want. Scarlett does not want him and pushes him away, so isn’t he up for grabs? Who do you think you are to judge me? All because I am beautiful and talented?”

Their argument amused me. Before I could stop myself, I joined in. “Liking somebody is something you couldn’t control. It is not wrong of you to like Ashton. You can continue to pursue him, but I will also keep being in the way. Let’s call it a fair game between two rivals.

“Scarlett, are you crazy?” Linda gawked at me. “Another woman is after your man, and you’re still this generous?”

“I trust Ashton completely.” I shrugged. “If he does fall in love with Rachel, it’s his choice. If he does not and turns her down without even giving her an opportunity, doesn’t that show that it was worth all of the trouble I had gone through to make him my husband?”

“That’s true...” Linda nodded.

Rachel continued to glare at me fiercely. “Scarlett, you’re too confident with yourself. After the honeymoon phase, we’ll see if you still feel the same.”

She did have a point. “Like I said, fair game amongst rivals.”

Rachel's screams and sobs had attracted a large group from the base.

When Armond and Ashton arrived, they saw Linda and I standing tall and proud over the wretched figure of Rachel on the floor.

The outcome of the confrontation was obvious at a glance.

Rachel cleverly used this opportunity to weep harder and blubber about how Linda and I were the ones to assault her.

Ashton looked at me sternly. My heart thumped nervously at his impending accusation.

It felt like I had done something grievously wrong just from the way he was looking at me.

"Linda!" Armond called with a frown. "Ms. Zimmer is a director of Fuller Corporation. You two have crossed a line!"

Linda readily admitted her mistake. "Mr. Murphy," she said as she hung her head. "I am sorry. I acted rashly."

She sank into a magnificent bow to Rachel, who was still weeping on the floor. "Ms. Zimmer," she said sincerely. "I would like to beg for

your forgiveness for the incidents that had transpired today. I was too irrational. I hope that you could forgive me!”

I was stunned. Linda’s ability to adapt astounded me.

Armond appeared satisfied with her apology. “Ms. Zimmer,” he said to Rachel. “No matter whose fault it was today, Murphy Corporation will bear the responsibility accordingly. We will send you to the hospital to check if you had sustained any injuries. Meanwhile, we will carry out punishment to Linda and Scarlett here. Again, we sincerely apologize for your ordeal.”

I was about to ask why but was promptly silenced by Ashton’s furious glare.

After that, Armond turned to address me. “Ms. Stovall, no matter whose fault it was, this place belongs to Murphy Corporation, and everybody is a guest here. The altercation that you have had with Ms. Zimmer is unacceptable behavior.”

I turned to Linda, and she gave me a wink. Then, I regained my senses and apologized to Rachel as well with the same deep bow.

Now it was Rachel’s turn to be embarrassed. She had assumed the role of the victim to gain sympathy, but now it was backfiring on her.

After we had apologized, Linda rolled up her sleeves to reveal the scratches Rachel had caused.

“Ms. Zimmer,” she said to Rachel. “You were not the only one hurt from this ordeal. Scarlett and I are hurt too. Your nails are awfully long, you know. Scarlett’s neck and face had been ravaged by you. Besides, you are aware of how hard you’ve pinched and choked us. You’re not the victim just by sitting on the floor and crying about it.”

“As a partner of Fuller Corporation, you are a guest here at Murphy Corporation, which is why Scarlett and I had apologized to you. As for whose fault it was, we are all clear about it in our hearts.”

Linda looked at Armond, all traces of her apologetic demeanor vanishing as she said, **“Mr. Murphy, we’re leaving!”**

She tugged me by the arm, and we left.

But before I could get far, Ashton grabbed hold of my wrist. He was silent the entire time, but now he had a dark and dangerous look in his eyes.

I did not know what he intended to do with me. **“Linda, why don’t you go ahead and treat your scratches. I’ll be right behind you.”**

Linda was startled but complied with my request.

Armond shifted his gaze from Ashton to Rachel on the floor but said nothing.

“Did you hit her?” Ashton asked in a low voice.

“Yes, I did.” I nodded with no intention of lying.

He deliberated for a moment and said, “As the wife of Fuller Corporation’s chairperson, you were wrong to be intolerant and to raise a hand against an employee of mine. For that, you owe Ms. Zimmer an apology.”

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I felt as nonplussed as Armond looked. We both thought that Ashton was prepared to give me the scolding of a lifetime.

Rachel’s look of shock on her tear-streaked face told me that she did not expect Ashton to be this lenient with me as well.

I hesitated for a fraction of a second but repeated my sincere apology toward Rachel.

Ashton looked down at her. “Ms. Zimmer, I, too, am sorry for whatever transpired today. I will be sure to make the arrangements to see that you are compensated for.”

He was indifferent but cunning about how he had crafted that sentence.

Rachel was deathly pale as she stood up. She gazed at Ashton with disappointment but was unable to say anything more.

All of a sudden, Joseph appeared and took her away to the hospital.

Armond had nothing more to say as well. He exchanged several words of courtesy with Ashton and promptly departed.

After they left, Ashton and I remained where we were. I hung my head and prepared myself for the telling-off I was about to receive.

“I shouldn’t have hit her,” I blurted out. “I won’t do it again.”

“If you didn’t hit back, she’d walk all over you,” he said with an unflinching gaze at me.

I was shocked, to say the least. I looked up at him quizzically.

Ashton gently lifted up my sleeves and frowned at my scratch scars. “Did you return the favor?”

I nodded. “I did, but I trimmed my nails a few days ago, so I think they didn’t hurt her. I did pull out some of her hair, though.”

Ashton gazed at me with a crestfallen expression written across his handsome features. “You could have used your fists or, at least, kicked her.”

I fought down a smile. “I’m not like men who fight with fists and feet. Actually, it was a good thing that Linda had drenched her before the fight got too out of hand.”

Ashton eyed me with some playful disdain. “Two of you ganging up on a woman, and you still managed to get yourself hurt. You weren’t even the one who threw the water! If Linda weren’t here, would Rachel have kicked your ass?”

I was speechless and hung my head like a guilty child. “If Linda weren’t here, I wouldn’t have dared to start a fight,” I said in a small voice. “I wouldn’t have been able to beat her anyway. She’s too vicious!”

Ashton grunted and turned to leave at that.

I followed closely behind him but squatted down after a couple of steps. My heart filled with joy at every step he took that led him further from me.

Ashton turned to look behind him when he did not hear me anymore. "What is it?" he asked.

"I'm hurt. I can't walk." I remained squatted and pretended to be injured.

He was near tears with exasperation. "Just tell me. What should I do with you?"

I racked my brain for a moment. "Could you carry me out of here?"

Ashton laughed helplessly. "Is your leg injured?"

"No!" I said, with a shake of my head.

"Then why would I carry you?"

"You would if you love me!" I said in a huff and got up to walk.

I knew that he wanted me to say it out loud, but if it had to be forced, it'd lose its meaning.

Ashton looked at me with a twinkle in his eye. As I walked past him, he swept me up roughly in his arms.

I was startled by the sudden movement. "Ashton, you jerk!" I squealed.

He grunted without saying much else.

As we exited the corridor, the employees of the base caught sight of us and stared.

They had an odd expression on their face. I wouldn't blame them. After all, they were under the impression that Ashton and Rachel were something of a couple given their closeness.

Especially since that day when we had dinner with Channing, Ashton did not bother to correct Channing's assumption that he and Rachel were an item, thus accidentally condoning the rumors.

As time passed, that notion became the default in everybody's minds.

Now that Ashton and I were this intimate under the public eye, it might attract some very unwelcome gossip and speculation about us.

Ashton acted as if he hadn't noticed anything. He carried me straight to the office and plopped me down onto an empty chair.

"Where're you going?" I blurted, seeing as he was about to leave.

“I’m getting a first aid kit,” he answered, turning around to look at me. “Do you intend for those to turn into scars?”

“Of course not!” I shook my head.

As his tall and thin frame departed, I pored over the documents that Joseph had neatly arranged in a pile.

They were mostly the minutes of recent meetings that they’ve had, nothing important. I got bored of them quickly.

Ashton returned soon after with a first aid kit in hand.

“Where else are you injured besides your arm?” he asked as he rolled my sleeve up.

I shook my head. It was common for girl-fights to just bear some scratches on non-vital areas. They would heal up soon enough.

It wasn’t even anything serious; Ashton was just overzealous.

I couldn’t help but feel a surge of emotions as I watched him tend to my wounds with such tenderness.

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Ashton looked up unexpectedly and caught me staring. Panicking, I averted my gaze immediately. “What’s wrong?” I asked when he stared at me intently.

“Pick up the phone!”

“What?” I asked, feeling even more confused.

“Your phone!” Ashton reiterated as he closed the first aid kit with a slam.

I wrenched myself out of my reverie only to notice dully that my phone had been ringing for the past few minutes. It was Nora on the line, and she did not sound happy at all.

“Babe, what’s up with you? Why weren’t you picking up?”

I felt slightly embarrassed. “Oh, I had something on. What’s the matter? Are you here?”

I recalled earlier in the day that she had called to state her desire of coming over to the base and then going over to her grandfathers for dinner.

“I’ve reached a long time ago. I’m at the hotel now, but I don’t know the exact location of your base. Why don’t you send someone over to pick me up?”

I shot a glance at Ashton. Joseph had been dispatched to send Rachel to the hospital, and Linda was probably off with her own tasks. Armond, too, was busy with the incident of the theft.

It looks like I’m the least occupied one for the moment.

“What is it?” Ashton asked when he saw me staring at him.

“Nora wants a lift from the hotel, is that alright with you?” I did not know if he had anything going on currently, so I thought it’d be better to ask first.

Ashton grunted. “She’s at the hotel?”

I nodded.

Other than his grunt, he did not indicate that he had heard what I said after that. I was doubtful that he understood the situation but trusted him to handle it and allowed the matter to drop.

It wasn’t a big deal. We emerged from the office and headed for the museum.

Joseph was already waiting there. At the sight of us, he hurried over. "Mr. Fuller, there are some documents from Mr. Quinn for your kind attention."

Ashton nodded and took the stack of documents that Joseph was offering him. "How are things being handled?" he asked with a glance toward the museum.

"There was a breakthrough," Joseph answered. "The perpetrator had contacted his partners on the outside. It doesn't appear to be a simple break-in now, but we're still not certain."

Ashton frowned but nodded. He took the documents and headed over to the visitors' room.

I found Linda, who was back to her old self again. She stared in surprise at me. "Did you not have a fight about what happened earlier?"

She was, of course, referring to Ashton and me. At that, I nodded and told her, "He told me to defend myself and not let myself get hurt the next time."

She gaped at me and burst into laughter. "Hats off to Mr. Fuller for giving his wife an unlimited berth."

We suddenly caught sight of Rachel who had had a change of clothes. She glared at us with hatred when she passed by. It was as though she would love nothing more than to rip us from limb to limb.

However, Linda was not intimidated. She stared provocatively across and said in a loud voice, "She thinks that she is so popular just because she's good-looking. But it all amounts to nothing if her manners and character are rotten."

I tugged at Linda's shirt. "Alright, that's enough," I said softly. "Nora's coming here; Ashton sent for someone to pick her up. Do you still have much to do? When we're done here, we're going over to Mr. Oberick's house for dinner."

Linda was taken aback. "You're going to her grandfather's for dinner?"

I nodded. "She's been bored all day and is in desperate need of companionship."

Linda shrugged but ceased her attempts in taunting Rachel.

After some time, Nora made her grand entrance by emerging from Armond's car. Linda cast a look of surprise at me.

I was surprised as well. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that Ashton was still absorbed in his documents and paid no attention to Nora's appearance.

Nora had on a demure skirt with plain and natural-looking makeup. It made her appear unusually mature.

Linda teased her. “You’re not planning on meeting the boyfriend’s parents today, are you?”

Nora giggled. “Linda, I’m still relying on you to make that happen for me.”

“What do you mean, relying on me?” Linda answered. “It all depends on your own efforts. Meeting the parents is the easy part – just promise an heir for them! Old Mr. Murphy has always wanted a great-grandson. There’s your ticket in.”

“That’s a bad idea,” Nora pouted.

“Though the Murphys are rich and proud, they take etiquette very seriously,” I chimed in. “If Nora gets to be part of the family with your scheme, she’d be frowned upon.”

“Hey, you wanted my advice. Here it is.” Linda shrugged.

Armond appeared. “Tonight, you girls should take Rachel out for dinner as a truce,” he said to Linda and me. “You’d be seeing a lot more of each other, and you might even need each other’s help.”

Linda and I nodded solemnly. Armond could see that we weren’t taking this seriously and sighed, “Linda, you are a veteran in this organization. You shouldn’t show your displeasure like that. Think of the bigger picture!

What's more, the issue with Fuller Corporation is still not resolved. If things went sideways, the procurement of the equipment would depend on her."

Linda nodded. "Yes, Mr. Murphy," she replied with the utmost sincerity. "I will be more mindful with what I say."

Armond nodded and hurried off to attend to his matters.

As soon as he left, Nora stared at us both uncomprehendingly and asked, "What happened?"

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"Before you came, we had a fight with Rachel. We're all bruised and battered," I explained, with an automatic glance toward Ashton.

Nora's eyes widened. "God! Why didn't you include me for this?"

"Don't talk nonsense!" Linda chastised. "It's already happened, and Rachel must be holding a grudge. It's hard to tell how she would make things difficult for us in the future."

I pursed my lips, deep in thought. Armond had a point.

Though I did not like Rachel, it was indisputable that she was a capable employee of the Corporation. If it weren't so, Ashton wouldn't have gone through the trouble himself of hiring her all the way from Ustrana.

Aside from the fact that Ashton had no romantic interest in her whatsoever, her skillset and professionalism were second to none, and Ashton valued her for it.

If Rachel left in a rage, the only one at a loss would be Fuller Corporation.

"Alright then. Do you still have work to do?" Nora asked. "If you don't, we'll head over to Grandpa's for dinner. It's harvest season for the fruits he had grown in his yard."

"What a glutton!" Linda teased. "We still have a meeting to attend. There still isn't a concrete plan to deal with the situation at the base, and we can't afford to delay this any longer."

I nodded in agreement. "There are some pear trees outside the base," I informed Nora. "They're ripe enough to be eaten. Go and amuse yourself. We'll call you once the meeting ends."

She nodded glumly. "What an awful life it is to have to amuse oneself."

Linda and I laughed for the lack of anything else to say and headed to the meeting room.

Leedon saw us and, for some reason, smiled awkwardly to himself and went on his way.

Seeing that, Linda and I were startled. What was that about?

In the office, Linda heated up some water. While she searched for a paper cup, Leedon pushed some freshly harvested fruit to her. “Ms. Linda, could you help me peel these?”

She was busy, but I got up and volunteered on her behalf. “I’ll do it!”

Leedon was startled at my enthusiasm. “Oh, there’s no need. I’ll do it myself!”

I frowned as I tried to recollect our interactions over the past couple of days. I don’t think I had offended him. Why was he behaving like this?

Nonetheless, I did not spare much thought for the matter after he brought his fruits out of the conference room. Soon after, Ashton and Armond entered.

Then, Rachel entered after them. When everybody was seated, Joseph began. “I’m sure everybody has their own suspicions regarding the

situation of the base and are keeping a close eye on it. We're here today to discuss our progress."

"This project was launched half a month ago. Right now, all of our tasks are bottlenecked, due to the mistakes of some people. We have been unable to get started even until today. How are we supposed to discuss progress?" Rachel cut across with an ugly look on the face.

Her words had truth to them, even if they were scathing. Linda did not retort, but she did not object either.

Ashton and Armond remained silent as well. As leaders, they were just here to listen.

After that, Joseph briefs a little regarding the status of the project and opened the floor for each of us to express our opinions.

"It's my fault that the project is currently stagnated," Linda voiced out. "I accept the blame fully. But the most important thing right now is to think of a way to catch back up."

"What a load of rubbish!" Rachel scoffed coldly.

Linda frowned but did not say anything.

Everybody present was well aware of the source of Rachel's discontent.

After a brief pause, I said, "The items stolen from the base are impossible to be recovered right now. I wonder if Fuller Corporation has any comparable technology that can substitute the stolen goods for the time being? For the project to continue, we need the equipment."

Joseph nodded. "It has already been arranged. Don't worry, Mrs. F-, I mean, Ms. Stovall!"

"Nice save, Mr. Campbell." Linda laughed.

Joseph grinned apologetically.

Rubbing my nose thoughtfully, I said, "Besides, I've been curious about what's been going on here at the base. It's very unlikely for Linda to forget the operational steps. How was it so coincidental that the thief would have been able to pick that up?"

"Coincidence? Sounds to me like we have a traitor in our midst. How easy it must have been to have something worth billions at one's disposal. They get the goods, and they get the man as well. Hah! What a breeze!" Rachel said bitterly, her tone dripping with sarcasm.

"Rachel, you should clarify who it is that your filthy mouth was accusing."
Linda was losing her temper by the second.

“Well, well... Who else could I be referring to? I mean, if the shoe fits.” Rachel laughed coldly.

“You...” Linda spluttered, her anger rising steadily.

I pulled her back into her seat. “We’ll deal with what we have to deal with,” I said hastily. “Ms. Zimmer, there’s no need to bring your personal issues to a professional setting, and there’s even less need for you to use that tone with all of us. We will bear the price of our mistakes, but we are here to discuss what we can do better moving forward, and we will do exactly that!”

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“Let’s talk about how we are going resolve this,” Ashton said sharply. He then threw his documents on the table.

The table fell silent at once, and all eyes were on me.

I was unnerved but spoke slowly and confidently, “The project still has to continue no matter what. As for the theft, we will conduct an internal investigation. It is too big of a coincidence for both the surveillance and equipment to malfunction at the same time.”

Joseph frowned. "We've investigated everybody at the base. They're all clean."

"Isn't that the biggest suspicion?" I protested. "How is it possible for everybody to claim an alibi at the same time?"

"I will communicate your concerns to the police," Joseph said after a pause.

"So we're back to where we started. There's no way to proceed with our investigation." Rachel laughed derisively. "We are always-"

A knock on the door of the conference room interrupted Rachel.

Joseph got up and opened the door. Leedon was on the other side.

"Ms. Stovall," he said in a panic. "The lady with you earlier is a friend of yours, is she not? Something's happened to her. Could you come and have a look?"

Nora?

I rose hurriedly. "Mr. Fuller, Mr. Murphy, please excuse me."

Armond got to his feet as well. After a mumbled explanation to the rest of them, he came out of the room with me.

“What happened?” I asked Leedon, who looked like he was in despair.

“The land adjacent is undergoing some renovation, and the lady fell into one of the holes dug into the ground when she was on her way to pick some fruits,” Leedon explained as we hastily made our way out.

“The foundations that they’d dug aren’t that deep,” I asked with confusion. “Why couldn’t you just bring her up?”

Leedon shook his head. “It’s a little more serious than that. There is no parking lot over here; it would have been a waste to use a plot of land as parking spots. We’ve decided to have an underground parking compound instead.”

I shivered. In that case, the foundation dug must be quite deep to accommodate the dimensions of a parking compound.

“Have you brought her up?” I couldn’t help feeling anxious.

“I’m not sure. When I first came, Ms. Oberick appeared unconscious. She might have been rescued, but she could be injured.”

The route around the outside of the base was difficult to traverse on foot. I jogged along with Leedon leading the way to the site where Nora fell.

A crowd gathered around the spot. With some trepidation in my heart, I joined them.

The paramedics were already there and were preparing their equipment to treat Nora, who was being lifted out at that moment.

She was indeed unconscious. “What happened to her? Where is she hurt?” I demanded.

“It might be her brain, but we can’t be sure without tests from the hospital,” one of the paramedics replied.

A stretcher was brought over, and Nora was placed on it. They carried her swiftly to the ambulance.

Leedon dispersed the crowd as I glanced down to where Nora fell. It wasn’t very deep.

At the bottom were several pears that were squashed. Those would be the pears that Nora had plucked.

But the question is – what was she doing all the way over here by herself? An ordinary woman would cringe at the amount of mud around the site and would rather die than soil their footwear. Why did she come all the way over here for?

Armond followed the party carrying Nora away. Soon after that, Ashton and the rest came toward me.

“What’re you looking at?” Ashton asked me as I stood next to the base.

“Why do you think she ran all the way over here for?”

“You need to be asking her that,” Ashton answered, just as confused as I was.

I shrugged without any further questions. We got into the car and followed the ambulance to the hospital.

With the chain of accidents that had occurred, coupled with Nora’s identity, the project was called to a halt.

Back at A City, the doctors who had examined Nora had revealed that she had hit her head pretty hard during the fall and would be remaining comatose for the foreseeable future.

Armond visited her, while the project in Lavelian Village was halted. The only thing left for me to do was to return to the villa for some rest.

Back at the villa, I attempted to key in the same passcode as I always have but was denied access.

Nonplussed, I gave Armond a call. “Did you change the passcode to the villa?”

He paused for a moment before answering. “Yes, Ashton does not wish for you to continue living with me. Your things have been relocated to the other villa.”

I hung up and sighed deeply.

It was futile to hide from it. I trudged next door, entered the passcode, which was my birthday, and the door swung open.

There was a car already in the yard; it seemed as though Ashton had arrived before me. The door to the living room was wide open.

Joseph was occupied with watering the plants in the yard. “Mrs. Fuller, you’re back!” he greeted.

I nodded, feeling somewhat uncomfortable.

“Is Ashton not back yet?” I asked after a pause. I cast a gaze around the perimeter of the living room just to be sure.

“Mr. Fuller is in the study upstairs,” Joseph replied. “He is probably going over some documents. Why don’t you go upstairs and have a look?”

Upstairs in the study, Ashton was hard at work. His black-rimmed spectacles rested on the bridge of his aquiline nose as he peered at the documents intently.