

Chapter 771

Glancing up at the clock, she asked me, "Don't you plan on heading back soon?"

It was indeed getting quite late, but I didn't want to leave her alone in the hospital ward. "I'll stay with you tonight. What do you want for dinner?"

"What if Ashton gets mad at you for not going home?" She fretted instead, making me laugh.

"It's fine. He knows where I am."

I stood up and was getting ready to go downstairs to the hospital's convenience store when the door suddenly opened.

It was Armond, clearly tired and carrying a large plastic bag of food and various snacks in his arms.

"You haven't eaten yet, have you?" he said to me. "I've brought a lot to spare, so have some before you leave."

I was stunned at the sight of him. Did he rush all the way back here just so he could make sure that Nora is well-fed?

Nora's face immediately broke out into a bright smile when she saw him, tugging on my arm. "Don't go just yet, Scarlett! At least eat with us first!"

Armond nodded in agreement, taking out the items from the bag one by one. "Linda recommended me Northern City District's seafood, so I specially made a detour to buy some. I also got some soup for you."

He directed the last part of his sentence at Nora, placing the bowl on her bedside table before turning to me. "The seafood I bought is all fresh. Try some, Scarlett!"

I giggled, giving into their persistency and sitting down to have dinner with them.

The seafood lived up to my expectations. Nora stared at Armond's sallow face, inquiring worriedly, "Were you so busy today that you didn't get any sleep at all?"

He nodded. "The incident at Lavelian Village is getting out of hand, and the Fuller Corporation plans on holding a press conference for promotional purposes next month."

Clearly pitying him, Nora turned to me with puppy-dog eyes. "I think it's best if you stay with me tonight, Scarlett. That way, Armond can go home and rest."

That had been my plan in the first place, so I agreed easily. "Sure."

"There's no need for that," Armond quickly cut in. "I'll ask someone to set up an extra bed in here for me to sleep on tonight. I'd be so worried that I wouldn't be able to sleep if I went home, anyway."

After saying that, he glanced at me. "Besides, if you don't go back home tonight, Mr. Fuller might become even more stressed regarding the Lavelian Village project. If that happens, he'll make me work my fingers to the bone, and that just won't do!"

I wasn't sure how to respond.

"He's right." Nora nodded in agreement. "If you try to make Ashton happy, the situation might improve."

Then, turning to Armond, she clung onto his arm and fluttered her eyelashes up at him pitifully. "Though, I feel bad for making you accompany me... I shouldn't be putting you through such torture!"

I massaged one of my temples. Are these two being lovey-dovey on purpose?

Slowly munching on my food, I spoke up, "That works too, I guess. I'm almost done eating, so I'll leave you two to catch up with each other, okay?"

"I'll send you downstairs." Armond got to his feet.

Slightly taken aback, I glanced at Nora, who told me, "Go on, Scarlett! You don't have your car with you, right? He can help hail a taxi for you!"

I shrugged in response.

At the hospital entrance, I gave Armond a sidelong glance. "Do you have something to ask me, Mr. Murphy?"

He slipped his hands into his trouser pockets, his expression turning solemn. "I take it you've made up with Ashton?"

Why is he asking the exact same question as Nora did?

“I guess so.” I smiled awkwardly. “Did you offer to walk me downstairs because you wanted to talk about that?”

“Of course not,” he huffed. “Has Ashton discussed with you about his stance on the project?”

I blinked owlshly at him. After working together for so long, I knew what he was implying.

The Lavelian Village project was one that the Murphy Corporation had fought against countless other equally well-qualified rivals for. We could not afford to make a mistake, but there had already been several accidents since the project first started.

The project hadn't fully kicked into gear yet, either. Thus, Fuller Corporation had every reason to start from scratch and look for a new collaborator to cut their losses.

Armond was trying to find out Ashton's current attitude towards the whole issue through me.

“I'll find a way to pry some information out of Ashton,” I promised him.

“Thanks.”

After that, I hailed a taxi and headed straight home.

The sky was already dark when I reached the villa.

I thought Ashton would have returned home by now, but the entire place was dark, and none of the lights were on. It seemed that he hadn't come back yet.

Figuring that he must be busy at work, I went upstairs and entered the bathroom to wash myself up.

Left alone in the silence with only my thoughts accompanying me, my mind wandered to the project once more. I couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't right, but I just couldn't place a finger on what it was exactly.

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I couldn't figure out a solution to my problems, even after wracking my brain.

After my shower, I sat at my dressing table to do my skincare routine. I was so lost in thought that I didn't even hear Ashton's footsteps when he entered the bedroom.

It was only when he suddenly picked me up in his arms that I was jerked back to reality, letting out a squeal of surprise. "What are you doing here?" I gasped. "When did you get back? You didn't make a sound at all!"

“I’ve been here for a while already. Didn’t you see me in the reflection of the mirror you were staring at?” He sat down in my seat, placing me across his thighs as he tucked a stray lock of hair behind my ear. “What’s on your mind?”

I sighed, resting my head against his shoulder. “The Lavelian Village project keeps running into problems. I’m in charge of everything, so can you blame me for overthinking it?”

He chuckled. “Everything that happened was out of your control. It won’t do you any good to keep stressing out over it. Besides, you now have your hubby’s money to use whenever you like. Who cares if you quit your job or end up having to pay damages?”

The stubble on his chin pricked my hand when I reached up to touch his face. “That’s easy for you to say. One compensation claim is worth ten million. How many times will I be able to fork that amount of money out, hm?”

“As many times as you like.” He grinned at me.

“You should really shave soon.” Running my fingers along his stubble made the skin on my finger pads feel raw

He hummed, one large hand sliding down to pinch my hips. “Will you do it for me?”

I nodded and got up, tugging him into the bathroom. “Armond wants to know what you think about the Lavelian Village project,” I told him as I picked up his razor from the sink.

“That man is more meticulous than I give him credit for,” he lamented, wrapping his arms around me as he pressed my back up against the sink. “He employed my very own wife in his own company so that he could send you to sniff our information for him.”

I lathered some shaving cream on his jawline. My feet were getting tired of standing on their tiptoes to reach his tall height, so I made him sit down on a chair. Without thinking too much about it, I climbed up and sat in his lap, focusing intently on shaving his stubble.

“It’s not like that. No one expected that Fuller Corporation would award its’ project to Murphy Corporation. Besides, he’s just asking about your opinion, not sniffing out information.”

He made a brief sound of affirmation, unable to open his mouth and reply because of the razor near his skin. I could tell from his fond gaze that he was in a good mood today.

It was my first time ever shaving someone else, so my movements were somewhat clumsy. Thankfully, I hadn’t cut his skin, and I quickly handed him a warm towel to wipe off the cream after I was done.

He looked much younger and clean with a shaved jaw. I held his chin in one hand and turned his head from side to side, admiring my handiwork. “It looks good to me. I think I did well!”

The corners of his lips quirked up. I felt his large hand squeeze my hips as he spoke in a low, gravelly voice, “Are you trying to seduce me right now?”

My mind blanked. Upon realizing that I had put on nothing but a sleeveless negligee after my shower, my cheeks flushed red.

I’d been so concentrated on shaving his stubble that I’d failed to notice the compromising position I’d put us in when I climbed into his lap. His hand on my waist only served to make the situation appear even more suggestive than it really was.

“Get your head out of the gutter. I just genuinely wanted to help you shave.” I tried to get off of his legs, but he held me in place.

“Yes, and I just genuinely want to hold you in my arms,” he declared unabashedly.

Setting the razor aside, I circled my arms around his neck and looked him in the eye. “I think you should go take a shower and get ready for bed. I’m a little tired, and I haven’t slept well for the past two nights.”

He smiled humorously, caressing my cheek with one hand. Leaning in, he left feather-light hints of kisses on the corner of my mouth that felt ticklish.

“Ashton!”

Ashton let out a laugh and pressed his forehead against mine as he massaged one of my ears. “Fuller Corporation is planning to pull out of the project to minimize our losses as much as possible, and then let another company take over it. When that’s all settled, go back to K City with me, Scarlett. Okay?”

“But I want to see this until the very end.” I preened in his embrace, my eyes fluttering close at the relaxing motion. “I don’t want to go back to K City and become a spoilt wife who just waits for you to return home every day.”

“I never said that” he sighed. “You’re free to do whatever you want in K City. Didn’t you mention that you wanted to pursue a postgraduate education? You can try that, and if all else fails, you can come back to Fuller Corporation and take up your previous job. How does that sound?”

I pursed my lips. “But I can’t just give up on the project halfway through.”

“Sometimes, I really wonder if you’re a spy that Armond sent to bewitch me on purpose.” He shook his head, a little exasperated.

I raised an eyebrow, quickly taking the chance to climb off of his lap. “Go take a shower and sleep early tonight,” I huffed before exiting the bathroom.

There were too many suspicious things about the Lavelian Village project as if someone was causing trouble on purpose. Thus, I didn’t want to return to K City without getting to the bottom of things.

I heard the sound of running water from the bathroom as I sat back down in front of the dressing table, resuming my skincare routine.

Soon after, Ashton came out, a towel wrapped around his waist. He furrowed his eyebrows slightly at the sight of me. “What’s the use of all these bottles and creams?”

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I shrugged, my gaze sweeping over the many skincare products lined up on the dressing table. “I’m getting old. If it weren’t for these, I’d have turned into a hag a long time ago. You wouldn’t want to bang a wrinkly lady, right?”

He squinted at the products, raising a curious eyebrow. A charming smirk grew on his face as he slowly approached me.

Sensing his strange actions, I stared at him suspiciously out of the corner of my eye. "What are you doing?"

He picked up one of the bottles of lotion, skimmed over the instructions, and then glanced at me. "I'll help you put this on."

I...

That was the lotion that Nora had gifted me. Her old folks claimed that our relationship would improve with this. Despite the expensive price tag, she thought we had to catch up with the trend and try it.

He squeezed some lotion out onto his palm, pulling me into his arms once more. "You can leave these sorts of things up to me in the future, Mrs. Fuller."

Panicking, I grabbed onto his wrist. "What are you doing, Ashton?"

"I'm helping you put lotion on." His smile was disarmingly handsome, and one of his hands was already starting to slip under my negligee.

"Don't rush your decision to withdraw from the Lavelian Village project, alright?" I frantically changed the topic. "Hopefully, this will all pass and everything will get better soon. Besides, hasn't Fuller Corporation lost some of its AI technology recently? Even if you try to withdraw now and find another company to collaborate with, you'll still face the same problems. The employees from both corporations are finally starting to get along and cooperate with each other well, too."

My little rant didn't distract him at all. I bit on my lower lip, suppressing the heat building within me as I asked, "Did something happen today?"

Ashton seemed stubborn in not talking about the subject anymore, but he finally replied, "Just the project."

I knew it. The project's condition was still unstable, after all. Pushing him away, I crawled back into bed and hid under the covers. "I'm sleeping!"

"You little vixen," he laughed wryly. "It's as if Mr. Murphy is your husband instead of me. You're just trying to twist my arm at this point."

"I get a large portion of the profits if I stay with Murphy Corporation," I argued from under the covers. "I wouldn't get anything if I worked at Fuller Corporation."

He sighed, getting under the covers and wrapping me in his arms. "Can't I just give you however much money you want?"

"It's different! I want to earn my own income." I squirmed in his embrace.

"I see that someone needs to be taught a lesson tonight," he joked. After saying that, his hands started wandering all over my body.

More than an hour later, my body had reached its limit after several rounds of lovemaking, and I begged him, "Ashton, I can't... Ah! If you keep this up... I won't go back to K City with you..."

Ashton's hips finally halted their movements as he buried his face into the crook of my neck, chuckling in satisfaction. The grass is always greener on the other side. People often fail to realize the bliss and happiness they own when faced with challenges.

Just like how someone might be admiring the scenery, but someone else might be admiring the sight of them from afar.

I grew sleepy as the night dragged on, my eyes closing on their own will. I distantly registered the sensation of something being put onto my finger, whimpering quietly as I pulled my hand back. "What..."

"It's your wedding ring," I heard Ashton say before he placed a gentle kiss on my lips.

A little astonished, the fog cleared from my brain as my eyes flew open. Burrowing into his arms, I reached up and kissed him again, saying drowsily, "We're already an old, married couple, though."

When I ran away from K City, I'd left my wedding ring and all my credit cards at the villa. I'd never thought that he would be wearing it all this time.

The dim lighting of the bedside lamp cast a warm glow onto Ashton's gentle smile. His voice was husky as he replied, "Thirty isn't old at all. In fact, I think it's the best time of our lives."

He pushed himself up to hover over me, swiftly stealing my breath away with countless deep kisses.

The following days were inevitably boring due to the project Lavelian Village being put on hold.

As a result, I grew antsy and antsy with each passing day.

Nora eventually recovered and was discharged from the hospital. She wasted no time in going to the Murphy Corporation and inviting Linda and me for lunch.

“There’s no use in drowning in work to distract yourself. Even if the project gets back on track, we still need to take the higher-ups’ opinions into account. You might as well enjoy some delicious food and take your minds off of the whole situation for a while,” she chided us while in the car.

Linda’s fatigue and worry were clearly written all over her face. Even her makeup looked cakey in contrast to the perfect image that she usually upheld.

I was faring slightly better than her. Although Ashton was still busy at the office, he made sure to come home every night and keep me company, preventing me from burning the midnight oil and ensuring that I would actually get a good night’s sleep.

“It’s not like I want to be this stressed either,” Linda groaned. “But the longer this project stays on hold, the more our company will suffer losses that just keep piling on top of each other!”

She had a point. There were more than a hundred employees currently on-site at Lavelian Village whose salaries were at least five thousand per month. If the project was delayed for one month longer, we would be wasting a month’s worth of salaries. Murphy Corporation was a large company, but that didn’t mean that we could afford to burn through our financial assets recklessly.

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“Mr. Murphy’s the one who should be worrying about this, not you. Let’s just forget this nonsense and go grab some food,” Nora said.

Upon our arrival at Gastronomica, Linda exclaimed when she got off the car, “Ms. Oberick, is there really a need for us to eat here? One meal cost at least a month’s worth of my salary. We know you’re rich, but the both of us treasure our money.”

Nora handed her keys over to the valet. “Stop exaggerating. I know you’ve eaten at fancier restaurants back in the past. C’mon, it’s not like you’re treating. Let’s just enjoy our meal.”

Linda coughed awkwardly. “Can’t help it. I’m tight on cash recently.”

Although A City was only a second-tier city in the Xenhall region, it did not lose out to the other first-tier cities in terms of lavishness.

True to its name, Gastronomica was a fine-dining restaurant that served exquisite food. Instead of the private dining room, we opted to eat at the main hall. Nora headed over to the bar to greet a few familiar faces.

One of them led us to our seats. Right after, she took the liberty to order for us. “They sell mainly seafood here. So don’t worry about getting fat and eat your fill.”

Linda was in disbelief. “Is this really our main concern now?”

Despite the complaints from earlier, the relaxing ambiance and mouth-watering dishes had evidently improved all our moods. At the moment, Nora ordered some red wine. She managed to persuade Linda to drink with her.

After a few drinks, both of them started talking about Armond. Nora seemed a bit down. “Dating is such a dread. Which reminds me, Linda, have I ever mentioned how much I envy you? You have a family of your own. Being a single parent is tough, but it saves you from all those relationship issues.”

“Ms. Oberick, this is where you’re wrong. You’re the lucky one! Since you’re single, you can do whatever you want and not have to be accountable to anyone. How great is that!”

“How’s that great? Linda, let me ask you. Why do we date guys? Isn’t it so that they can protect us and fulfill our bodily desires?”

Linda nodded, completely oblivious to her hidden intention.

Nora continued, “See, you agree with me too! As a couple, we have to satisfy each other’s needs. But, what the hell. How did I find someone like Mr. Murphy? He doesn’t even come close to touching me.”

Feeling helpless, she pulled on Linda’s sleeves. “Do you think he has lost interest in me? Or, does he hate me so much that he doesn’t want to touch me?”

Regardless of whether this was an act, I got to hand it to Nora for her ways.

Linda replied honestly, “It’s not that Mr. Murphy doesn’t want to touch you. He probably hasn’t let go of his past. He hasn’t allowed any women to get close to him in all these years. I thought things were fine between the both of you. Maybe you should give him some time.”

Nora felt herself getting close to the truth. “What past?”

At that perfect moment, Linda blacked out. The conversation came to an abrupt halt. Nora turned towards me, looking unsatisfied.

I took this as our cue to leave. “All right, it’s getting late now! I’ll send the both of you home.” I went over to help Linda up.

My plans were interrupted when Armond came to pick Nora up. He turned towards me. “I’ll give both of you a lift.”

Since our houses were on their way back, I accepted his offer. I settled Linda in the backseat. Before I could make my way around to the opposite door, a black Bentley parked right in front of me.

There was no way I would not recognize this car. To confirm my suspicions, I peered through the tinted windows. The person inside winded down the side window.

Marcus!

Why’s he here? Isn’t he supposed to be in K City? Not knowing his purpose here, I nodded at him before attempting to flee. Marcus was one step ahead. He got off the car and approached me.

Seeing his face, nostalgia hit me. It felt like an eternity since I last saw him.

I stood rooted, recalibrating his features again. Perhaps due to a period of not seeing each other, he stood further than usual.

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His handsome features seemed even more pronounced under the streetlights. But underneath it, I could see traces of fatigue.

“Mr. White, what a coincidence!” I greeted him.

With both his hands in his pocket, he looked right at me. “Not a coincidence. I was looking for you.”

I felt neither surprised nor threatened. Instead, there was something amusing about this situation. “What an honor.”

“Seems like you don’t miss me as much?”

I kept silent, hoping he would get the hint.

After a long, awkward pause, he continued, “I don’t have any motives. I just came here to check if you’re doing ok.”

“Thanks for your concern. I’m doing fine.”

My curt response seemed to have affected Marcus. He wore a forlorn smile. “I’ll wait for you, even if it means waiting for the rest of my life. If not this life, then the next. But next time around, let me be the one to meet you first.”

Right then, a black Maybach parked beside his car. The rear window came down, revealing a person who was looking placidly in our direction.

I forced my attention back to the conversation. “Mr. White, the same old words. Don’t waste your life waiting for me. I have a great career and family; I’m happy with what I have. Your advances would only trouble me, including those things you do for me without my knowledge. Besides Ashton, I really don’t want any other man to be thinking of me in this manner.”

Marcus let out a bitter laugh. “You didn’t even hesitate the slightest bit, huh? If you’re so loyal to him, why did you leave K City to come here? Scarlett, what exactly are you thinking?”

How do I explain this?

“Leaving K City was simply because that chapter of our lives was over. It wasn’t that I stopped loving him, or that I found someone else. In fact, it’s the opposite. I love him so much. But I need time to convince myself that I am worthy to stand beside such an outstanding man like him. Each time, I can’t help thinking that he deserves so much more than a person like me, so I’m trying to find the confidence to go back to him.”

Hearing my words, Marcus looked down. It did nothing to mask the hurt in his eyes. “No matter what you say, my words still hold true; I’ll wait for you. I pray that in our next life, I’ll be the one to meet you first. Whatever he can give you, I can too.”

I sighed in resignation. I should have known he was not one to give up this easily.

“Marcus, sometimes people focus so much on their desires that they overlook what they already have. I hope you give others and yourself a chance. I don’t want you to miss out on your happiness.

“Now that you know I’m doing fine here, I think it’s time for you to return to K City. I’ve made it very clear that it’s just a matter of time before I reconcile with Ashton. This time

around, we'll bounce back stronger. So stop wasting your time on me. It's not possible between us."

I lifted my ring finger, revealing the ring Ashton had put on me the previous night. Although the diamond lacked in size, its shine was very conspicuous.

Looking at the ring reminded me of the treacherous path it took for us to get here. Throughout our many years of marriage, Ashton and I had our fair share of trials, warmth, and love.

I smiled at the recollection. "I've worn this ring for over a decade. After going through so much, it's still back on my finger. You know, I could've gotten rid of it, but the truth is, I couldn't bear to. This is our wedding ring. Ashton loves me and treats me well. If possible, I will marry him again in my next life."

That dealt the final blow. Marcus looked defeated. "G-Great. All that matters is he treats you well, and you're happy."

He retreated a few steps before turning to see Ashton sitting in the car beside his. Recovering his senses, Marcus said solemnly before heading swiftly back to his car. "I hope you'll always be happy from now."

With that, he drove off.

His words left no room to read between the lines; I decided to take it literally.

I let out a breath. Finally, it was over. Deep down, I was afraid Marcus would continue to haunt me. If that happened, it would have caused a bigger issue.