

Chapter 786

I smiled faintly as I stood by her bed. “Are you intending to chase me out then?”

Hearing my voice, Nora instantly sat up straight, then turned to me. “Ashton is finally willing to release you?”

I grinned and sat beside her. “Just like what you said – we’ll have a lifetime together, so I thought I’d come here and stay the night with you!”

Nora squealed and jumped with joy. “Scarlet, you’re the best! I knew it! You’re the best in this whole wide world!”

I flicked her head gently, trying to calm her down. “How could you determine that in such a short time? Go take a shower so we could sleep early.”

“Let’s shower together!” She narrowed her eyes at me.

I laughed as I pushed her towards the bathroom.

Once she finished shower, she hugged me and lay on the bed, staring blankly at the ceiling.

I knew she was troubled by something. “Are you thinking about Armond?”

She focused her gaze on me and said, “Of course not. There are other things on my mind too, you know.”

“What is it, then?”

She hesitated and sighed, “Aren’t you curious why I was brought to Venria?”

Now that I thought about it, I was. Even though the Oberick family weren’t extremely rich or prestigious back in A City, Channing was still a well-known person. Naturally, he would protect his granddaughter well. So how was Nora brought into Venria, and what’s worse, almost losing her life in the process?

“As a matter of fact, I didn’t know how my parents passed away. Grandpa said they were caught up in a car accident. I was only two months old at that time. If it weren’t for me, Grandpa would’ve left with my parents too,” Nora said emotionlessly.

I wasn’t good at comforting others, so I listened intently.

She leaned against me and continued, “It has always been Grandpa and me for as long as I can remember. There was some money left from my father’s mine. Grandpa used it for investment, so I was never without money. Even though Grandpa loves me a lot, I still want a complete family like the rest.”

Then she looked at me and continued, “Scarlett, I know you understand how I feel.”

I nodded in agreement. Back in R Province, I was envious of Macy. Her parents treated her well, and I had always thought about how my future would be if I found my biological parents one day. Then I realized the reality wasn’t as perfect as I imagined it to be.

After a brief pause, she carried on, “I told you before that I didn’t have many friends. Since young, I was acquainted with a lot of people, and they either hoped that I would buy things for them, or they’re using me for something else. Even if I knew their intentions, I still treated them as my friends because I was scared of being alone.”

She seemed to have a deep fear of being lonely.

Looking at her, I didn’t know what to say, so I just hugged her. “All will be well.”

“Before leaving for Venria, I was acquainted with a girl. When we met for the first time, we hit it off like old friends. She treated me well, and so I treated her like my best friend at that time. But I didn’t expect her to trick me into the mountains. Maybe it was a blessing in disguise since I get to meet you.”

After a while, she said to me, “Scarlett, did you know that I was really touched when you gave me the bracelet? That was the first time I’ve received any gift – a gift that sincere.

“I was wondering if that moment was an accumulation of good luck from the past twenty years of my life.”

I smiled faintly as I held her. “You will have more good luck in the future.”

She nodded. “When are you and Ashton leaving for K City?”

I gasped, “Why did you ask so suddenly?”

“I have thought things through. I’m going to K City with you to make a living. I have decided that I will be wherever you are. My Grandpa is old now, so he wanted me to have someone I could rely on. Ashton is like a brother to me, and naturally, you’re my sister-in-law. Don’t you dare think that you can cut ties with me.”

I laughed, “Alright. No cutting ties. But Nora, who’s going to take care of your Grandpa in A City if you’re leaving for K City?”

She replied, “There are housekeepers and caregivers in the Oberick family. My uncles and aunts could also take care of him. Besides, I will visit him often as well!”

She added after a slight pause, “I’ve always wanted to go to K City for the longest time, but I couldn’t because I was always alone. Therefore this time, I will definitely go with you!”

“Don’t tell me you’re going to K City for Armond’s sake?” After all, the Murphys headquarters were in K City.

She said with a blush, “That was part of the reason but not entirely so.”

The night deepened, and after some more random girl talk, she fell asleep.

The next day, the sky was cloudy as if rain could fall at any moment.

Nora was sleeping soundly. I didn’t want to wake her up, so I cautiously got out of bed and headed for the balcony. I took in the view outside and confirmed that it was raining.

I couldn't help but glance at Nora. The weather was indeed suitable for sleeping in.

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I discreetly exited the bedroom and headed towards Ashton's room. The door to his room was left wide open, and his bed was neatly arranged. There were no signs of the man in that room.

I went downstairs and saw the caregiver preparing breakfast in the kitchen. She turned around when she heard some movement. "Ms. Stovall, you're awake. Breakfast is ready, and they're on the table. Feel free to dig in."

I nodded and didn't see anyone else around. "Did you see Mr. Fuller?"

She grinned, "Mr. Fuller had left in the early morning, saying he had something urgent to attend to in the city. He didn't want to wake you up early, so he asked me to inform you that he will be having dinner with you tonight, so don't be back too late."

I nodded in silence. I presumed that he would be nervous about his project.

After breakfast, I strolled around the yard and saw Channing digging a patch there.

I greeted him as I approached, "Good morning, Mr. Oberick!"

He stopped digging when he saw me. "You're awake. Have you had breakfast?"

I nodded and looked at what he was doing. "Mr. Oberick, are you planning to plant some flowers here?"

He laughed, "Fall is almost here. I want to plant some leek, so I could harvest them in the winter."

Seeing that I was all alone, he asked, "Is Nora still asleep?"

I smiled and answered, "Let her sleep in a while longer. She slept late last night."

He sighed, "She doesn't sleep at night and doesn't wake up in the morning."

His affection could be heard in his tone, despite his grumbling.

It was already late evening when they arrived at the city from Lavelian Village. Armond, who was waiting by the villa's entrance, glared at Nora. He was waiting to have dinner with her.

I returned to the villa as well. Ashton had mentioned in the morning that we would have dinner together. Hence, I figured it would be best if I prepared it myself.

There were many fresh ingredients in the fridge.

After half a day of preparation, three dishes and a soup were done. I glanced at my phone and called Ashton.

He didn't pick up his phone despite me calling him multiple times, so I decided to text him instead.

I looked at the time, and it was almost eight, but I didn't hear any car coming back. Thus, I called him again, but still, no one picked up.

With that, I decided to call Joseph. He picked up the call after the phone rang for a few seconds. "Mrs. Fuller!"

"Joseph, is Ashton with you?"

Joseph seemed to know my reason for calling. "Mr. Fuller is still in the conference room. I'll ask him to return your call once he's finished."

I muttered an agreement and hung up. Staring at the dishes on the table, I sighed.

After waiting for him for another hour, I couldn't stand it, so I picked up my phone to call him again.

At that moment, I heard a car engine sounded from the yard. I jumped up immediately and looked at the cold dishes on the table in despair.

However, I was glad that he was back. Immediately, I went to the door to welcome him with a smile.

Yet, it was only Joseph at the entrance.

I looked behind him, and there was no sign of Ashton. “Joseph, where’s Ashton?”

Joseph passed a box to me and answered, “Mrs. Fuller, Mr. Fuller had a business dinner to attend to, so he couldn’t make it. But he asked me to bring you this. He said it was from a restaurant famous for seafood, and it tastes fresh and tender. Please try it.”

I was dumbstruck as I stared at the hairy crabs on the box’s packaging. “What time will he be back then?”

Joseph shook his head. “I’m not sure about that. You should eat something first.”

I might as well. After I accepted the box of hairy crabs, I went to look for a pair of scissors and a plate. Then, I dug in once I plated the crabs.

Joseph needed to return urgently, and so he left. I went to clean up the study when I was done with dinner.

Not long after Joseph left, a car engine sounded from the yard again. However, this time I wasn’t expecting Ashton.

I got up and headed for the balcony for a glimpse. It turned out to be Nora and Armond. They were back from dinner.

Nora glanced in my direction and saw me on the balcony. “Have you had dinner?”

I nodded. “I did. What about you?”

“We just finished, and we also brought you some desserts. I will bring it over to you later.” Armond passed an exquisite box to her after parking the car.

She headed to my house with the desserts in tow. At the same time, I headed downstairs to open the door for her.

She was dressed in a tan overcoat. “It’s so cold, and you’re only dressed so little?” she asked while studying me.

“I’m fine. It’s not that cold.”

I accepted the dessert and glanced at her. “Matcha cheese. You went to Whitelight lane?”

She nodded. “Try it. Armond said K City has a lot of matcha cheese desserts. Maybe the residents of A City had different tastes, so not a lot of people buy them. I figured you would like them, so I brought some back for you.”

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The taste of the cheese filled my mouth from the very first bite. "It's delicious. Won't you have a bite?"

She shook her head and rubbed her stomach. "I can't eat anymore. I just had steak with Armond earlier. Besides, cheese is super high in calories. I don't want to get fat!"

"You're not fat for your height," I teased.

Nora pursed her lips. "Of course, you would say that since you're lighter than me."

I laughed but did not antagonize her further.

She cast a glance around and realized that Ashton was not present. "Shouldn't Ashton be back by now?"

I nodded. "He has a dinner appointment. He will be back late."

She grunted. "Looks like the wife of the president has to learn to deal with solitude once in a while."

I felt satiated after consuming a block of cheese. Then, I stood up and poured her some water.

"You had steak today, didn't you?" I asked, recalling her earlier remark.

Nora nodded as she squinted at me. "What's up with your arm?"

I followed her gaze and realized to my horror that my arm was covered in dense red rashes.

She pulled my arm, suddenly frightened. "It's all over your face too!"

I was terrified to discover that they were not just on my face, but also on my legs and everywhere else.

My eyes met Nora's. "Is this an allergic reaction?" we said in unison.

"Are you allergic to cheese or matcha?" Nora studied me intently.

I shook my head. I'd always indulged in those but I never had a reaction like this.

"What else have you had?" Nora persisted.

"Hairy crabs!" I cried in realization.

"You're allergic to seafood?"

I shook my head. "No, it was impossible. I had them just yesterday."

I didn't have the time to overthink. Nora dashed out to the yard and shouted, "Armond, Scarlett looks like she's having an allergic reaction. Hurry over and we'll take her to the hospital."

I studied the rashes with fear and could not figure out what I had eaten to cause such a reaction for the life of me.

Nora returned soon after and pulled me out of the villa where Armond was waiting in his car.

As soon as we entered, Armond headed straight for the hospital. Nora appeared frantic. "Should we give Ashton a call?"

I shook my head as he would be occupied by now. "It's fine. This is just a mild allergy. Let's get to the hospital and see what it actually is before contacting Ashton."

I began to worry about the rashes on my face when I felt the rashes itching fiercely.

Though I wasn't beautiful by modern standards, I was at least proud of my face and did my best to present it well. It would be an awful shame indeed if it were to be scarred and pockmarked for life.

We arrived at the hospital in record time. Armond stopped the car in front of the lobby and Nora dragged me out.

"Doctor! Doctor! This is an emergency!" she yelled.

The staff came rushing over at the sound of her voice. Several nurses enquired about my condition and had Nora register on my behalf.

A nurse led me to an office to wait for a doctor.

The doctor on duty examined me and gave the diagnosis that it was indeed an allergic reaction but not a very serious one at that. A jab or two of a general antihistamine ought to do the trick. It was such a relief for me.

I was still unsure about what it was that I was allergic to. "Doctor, is it possible to find out what triggered it?"

Whether or not it was the hairy crabs or the cheese, I had them often and never had a reaction like this before. Why today then?

The doctor finished writing a prescription. "It could be the fact that the crabs and cheese were consumed together, or that one of the compounds had triggered this reaction. If you'd like, I could run some tests and give you a definite answer."

"Yes, please." I nodded. It wouldn't do to have to be cautious about what I eat all the time. If I'm not careful, I might end up here again in a few weeks.

This was a hospital in the city, and as a result, the wards were all occupied. Even my jabs had to be done out in the corridor. To investigate the source of the allergy, the nurse drew some blood and hooked me up to a drip apparatus.

There were more wards along the corridor. As it grew late, many patients fell asleep.

There was no way I could fall asleep, though I tried to close my eyes to rest them. Meanwhile, Nora took care of my bill while Armond looked for a parking spot.

This may not be a first-tier city, but parking was still a hassle.

I heard footsteps along the corridor. A male doctor in a white gown appeared in front of my eyes.

“Did I wake you?” he asked.

I shook my head. “Don’t worry about it, I wasn’t asleep.” The doctor procured a syringe when he saw that my drip was almost empty.

“Is it time to change the saline?” I enquired nervously.

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He shook his head and pinched the tube. “This is a temporary measure,” he said as he emptied the contents of the syringe into my drip.

“Isn’t this administered as a jab?” I inquired suspiciously. Isn’t it normal to inject a patient with antihistamine instead of administering it through the drip?

The doctor adjusted the speed. “It’s saline. The previous batch was too concentrated; this is just to water it down slightly. Don’t worry, it won’t affect anything.”

I wasn't familiar with medical procedures, but even in my ignorance, this explanation felt too far-fetched to me. But my nagging suspicion was unable to identify what was wrong.

Without a concrete reason to raise any objections, I settled down and accepted it without complaint.

The doctor eventually moved to other patients to carry out the same procedure. My suspicions evaporated when I observed his deftness in carrying out his duty. Soon after, I closed my eyes again.

A while later, I could no longer deny feeling that something was wrong. My eyelids felt too heavy to open.

Suspicion and fear clouded my mind. I groped for my hand and pinched it hard. After ascertaining that I was not dreaming, I mustered all my strength to wrench my eyes open.

The sight of the doctor standing menacingly before I had confirmed my fears.

I reached out to push him away, but he suddenly lifted me up and out of the corridor.

As the sedative began to take effect, I reminded myself over and over again to stay awake.

I bit down hard again on my tongue and the pain of it was immense. By this time, I found myself being carried over to the lift.

I recognized the possibility of him taking me away. My first instinct was to struggle to free myself, but I felt completely limp. I wanted to scream for help, but I was too weak to even form any words.

The lift doors opened and he walked in with me. He pressed for a certain floor but I couldn't see what it was.

The only thing that I felt sure of was that he had selected the lowest of the blurry red dots on the lift panel. It was most likely the underground garage.

I dug my nails deep into my palms to maintain my consciousness.

Before long, the lift doors opened once again and we exited. I had thought that he was going to throw me into a car and drive off to a secret location somewhere to be interrogated.

However, the cold that I was thrust into had succeeded in bringing me to full awareness of my surroundings.

The chill of the September air was cold but not to this extent. This was something else; it was sub-zero temperatures that could freeze hell over.

The realization of where I was flashed dully but clearly in my mind. The morgue!

It wasn't just the underground garage that was at the bottom of the hospital. I forgot about the morgue.

Besides, there was no reason for a garage to be at a sub-zero temperature.

I had recovered some of my wits under the extreme cold. The sight that greeted me upon opening my eyes was one of pure terror. It was white everywhere I looked. The corpses that were not yet stored were covered in white sheets.

The man dropped me from his shoulders and went out of my field of vision. I heard the sound of ice blocks being shifted.

Several seconds later, I felt myself being placed into a container that was even colder than my surroundings.

A series of creaks later, I was pushed into an enclosed space.

The remainder of my wits allowed me to conclude that I was placed into one of the drawers.

My innate survival instincts kicked in. As I fought to get myself out of my predicament, the only act I was capable of was to reach out and touch the sides of my prison. The possibility of exerting force or crying out was beyond reach.

The fear of facing death seeped through my entire being. I knew that I would be doomed if nobody were to come to my rescue. And I would have been dead for a long time before anyone could find me.

But who was it that hated me to resort to such a vengeance in this measure?

I considered everybody around me but could draw no reasonable conclusion.

My body was beginning to shiver violently in a valiant attempt at survival, but due to the sedative nature of the drug that was administered to me, it did not produce much of an effect.

The only thing that I felt was everything was slowing down.

This is such a joke.

Out of all the ways I've considered of me meeting my end, this was definitely not one of them.

I had survived the threats that Rebecca had made, Cameron's vicious schemes, and the near-death experiences in Venria.

But at the very end, I would succumb to such a simple and subtle, even elegant way of murder.

I would not have been able to think of this even in my wildest dreams.

I wanted to see Summer. I did not manage to explain to her why I had to leave without saying goodbye. I had not managed to give her one last hug and tell her that she had to grow up and live her life even if I was no longer around.

I had not managed to meet Emery's children and greet Zachary and Cameron as Dad and Mom. I did not get the chance to cook a meal for them, or the opportunity to tell them that I bear them no resentment.

I did not get the chance to tell Ashton that I actually loved him deeply and that I wanted to bear him a child. I did not get to tell him that I was looking forward to a massive wedding celebration with him.

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There were too many things that I had not yet achieved. I did not want to die or to freeze to death.

Under the deep biting cold, I became aware of my own labored breathing and the low electrical hum of the freezer.

I tried once more to call for help, but I was not able to utter a sound. The cold near the top of my head started to seep in slowly but surely. First, it penetrated my scalp, then through my skull, then it started to affect my nerves. They seared with pain and went numb.

It felt like an eternity, or maybe it was only a few minutes, but the act of waiting for death to claim me in the suffocating silence was awful.

I became aware of feeling sleepy and groggy. I suddenly recalled something being said a long time ago by someone. They said that true death came in three forms.

The first was the cessation of breathing. Your soul and body would separate and somehow feel your limbs stiffen up. This was the death of the body.

The second type was being declared dead. When you stopped breathing and lay in bed, someone would be there to declare you dead and state your time of death.

The last type was death in the memories of your loved ones. When your body and mind disintegrate, along with your existence in the world, and all the traces of you being on earth would go with it. Slowly, you would even fade away from the memories of your loved ones, until one day, you cease to even exist in the first place.

At the moment, I felt like I was experiencing the first type of death. The sound of my breath, no, the sound of my heartbeat was steadily weakening. It grew so faint that I could not feel my breath anymore.

Perhaps my time really had come. It was destined to be this very moment.

Just as I felt my eyes closing, perhaps for the final time, I heard and felt a massive collision. It must have hit the container that I was in.

The noise grew more frantic and urgent; the blows became harder and more vicious. When the brilliant white light flooded my eyes, I saw what seemed to be the shape of a tall and slim figure drawing me out of the icy grip of death and holding me in the warm embrace of life.

It was too much to describe; everything flooded my senses and overwhelmed me.

The door flung open and though it was still sub-zero out there, it felt warm to me.

I could now feel my body, close to the point of being frozen solid, being lifted up in a pair of strong arms. The figure that had carried me was radiating heat like an oven.

Warmth had never felt more welcome in my entire life. I huddled closer. A familiar scent flooded my nostrils, allowing me to identify my savior. I tried calling out but to no avail.

What I wanted to say was “Thank you, Ashton.” But I did not manage to.

Because of him, all the terror and tension that had gripped me for the last few hours had dissipated. I shut my eyes tight and drifted off to unconsciousness.

I had a very strange dream. A beautiful woman had an infant in her arms. She walked in the snow for a long time until she was unable to continue. Then, she placed the child down and knelt down in the snow to kiss the baby. She wept as if her heart was breaking.

After a long time, she left the child where it lay and departed on her own. The child, sensing the absence of its mother, cried out pitifully into the night.

I watched the entire scene from afar. Fearful for the child’s safety, I had wanted to take a closer look. However, everything vanished as I approached.

Then, the dream shifted. I was back in my childhood with the old locust tree and the swing that hung from one of its branches. Grandma pushed me as she sang my favorite songs.

Suddenly, Grandma vanished as well. I was plunged in a midst of a crowd and caught sight of a slender figure approaching me whilst he waved.

I walked towards it. Before I could get a closer look, the crowd lurched and I was shoved to the side.

The same dream repeated itself several times. I knew that the figure in the dream was Ashton, but whenever I reached out to try to grab hold of him, he would disappear.

It happened a few times, and I grew more and more desperate with each failure trying to hold on to him. Finally, I reached out into the dark and clawed wildly at the air until I felt a pair of hands holding mine tightly.

“Scarlett.” A voice beside me called out.

I heard it and wanted to answer, but I was unable to speak.

“Scarlett,” they called again. I desperately tried to detect the source of the voice and panted heavily from the effort.

I opened my eyes groggily. The figure next to me was familiar.

I reached out to grab hold of him. Even his warmth was familiar. Once again, my strength failed me, and I felt my hand flopping back down onto the bed.

A second later, my hand was being clutched tightly. “Scarlett, I am here.”

It was Ashton.

His voice soothed me greatly. Soon, I felt the fear begin to vanish and felt much calmer after that.

I didn’t even have the energy to nod. Then, my eyelids drooped again.

“What’s happening? Why isn’t she awake yet?” Ashton’s voice rang up and I could see in my mind how he frowned at the doctor.

“She’s out of the critical phase,” the doctor answered. “There’s nothing wrong with her, she’s just drained of energy over the whole ordeal. Just let her rest and she will wake up when she’s ready.”

I was actually wide awake and aware of most things going on around me but I had no way of opening my eyes, and I still felt weak all over.

I heard some footsteps and figured that someone was departing. After a while, I felt my hand being intertwined in another’s.