

Chapter 791

“Scarlett, you’ve been asleep for two days,” the soft voice said. “Please wake up!”

I wanted to say something and to open my eyes, but I did not succeed.

I felt something moist inside my bone-dry mouth. After some time, my face and limbs were being cleaned gently by a damp towel.

I couldn’t help but fall back asleep again due to my extreme fatigue.

My dreams were incomprehensible and confusing. The next time I opened my eyes, my surroundings were clearer to me than they were though I was still feeling groggy.

Ashton slumped over my bed as he was asleep. His hair looked rather greasy as though he hadn’t showered in days.

“Ashton!” I croaked. My voice was hoarse but I was surprised that I managed to say that.

I smiled at the realization that I was still alive. It feels so good to be alive!

At the sound of his name, Ashton straightened himself up. He looked haggard and unkempt. I reached out to caress his face and felt a cluster of tiny beards poking out of his chin

I chuckled. “Haven’t I just shaved for you? They’ve grown back.”

Ashton clutched my hand tightly and gaze at me with his deep dark eyes. He did not speak for a long time; his eyes welled up with tears of relief.

“You’re awake!” he said with a choking voice after a long while.

I nodded with a smile as I had escaped death yet again.

“It’s so good to see you!” I tugged his hand and held it tight.

Ashton got up and hugged me tightly. He poured me a glass and made sure I finished it. “You’ll get to see me every day from now on,” he said, unable to conceal the joy in his voice.

I felt much better after hydrating myself. I could think clearer and move my body freely now. Not to mention my throat felt a lot more comfortable and moister. “If I could fit you in my pocket, I’ll get to see you every day,” I said, wasting no time in teasing him as soon as I got my voice back.

Ashton brushed my nose gently in response to my mischief. “You’re in a playful mood. It’s good to see you back to your old self.”

He hugged me again and it was tighter than before. I felt squished into his chest.

I let him hold me and savored it. The entire spectrum of emotions surged through me and I felt lucky to be alive just to experience them again.

No matter what happens in this life, I will never leave him again. He was all I could think about during the few minutes in the freezer. As I approached death, even the rhythm of my pulse had chided me for taking his love for me for granted, and that I should not push him away and pick fights with him.

It was my good fortune to have met him in my life.

“Ashton!” I whispered as I held his neck and looked at him.

He grunted and hugged me again. There was an unspeakable joy behind his wearied eyes.

“I love you so very much,” I said. Since the day we met, over our marriage spanning a decade, I have never told him this. If I didn’t say it now, I didn’t know when I would be able to do that.

I was not going to have any regrets on my deathbed again.

Ashton gazed deep into my eyes. He nodded and planted a kiss on my forehead. “I won’t disappoint you.”

I smiled again, just feeling grateful for being alive.

As I placed my head on his chest to savor the peace that came with it, the incidents of that night suddenly returned to haunt me. “What happened that day I went to the hospital?” I asked.

Who the hell wants me dead? The temperature in the freezer would have sealed my fate within two hours.

If Ashton had not appeared in time, I would not have made it out alive.

“I was having dinner with Joe and the rest when Nora called me,” he explained. “They’d found out that you were missing when they arrived at the hospital. We looked through the surveillance and found out that you were taken to the morgue. As there were no cameras down there, locating you took quite a bit of time.”

Ashton’s voice was low and hoarse as if he dreaded reliving the memory of that night. I was unable to imagine how he must have felt when he found me, frozen half to death like fresh seafood.

Or possibly something worse!

“Did you find out who was behind it?” I asked, looking up at him.

Ashton frowned as his gaze grew cold. “The hairy crabs and matcha that you had consumed were laced with sesame. We’re not sure if this was planned by someone intentionally.”

I frowned. I was aware that I was allergic to sesame, but I had never told anyone that, including Ashton. In fact, the only person who knew that I was allergic to sesame was Grandma.

When I grew older, I basically did not touch sesame at all. Occasionally I would have had mild reactions if the food was seasoned with a trace amount of sesame. It wouldn’t be too serious if I have had a tiny bit.

Be that as it may, it was impossible that anyone could have predicted my allergic reactions. The thing that bothered me more was what happened in the hospital.

It was obvious that that man had meant to kill me. Was the whole rigmarole of drugging me and shutting me in a morgue improvised? Or was it planned in advance?

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At that thought, I could not suppress a bitter laugh. "They've thought things through, haven't they? They even had the courtesy to keep my body in one piece."

Ashton grimaced in anger. "Something like this will never happen again."

I snuggled against him, confident that he would be investigating this thoroughly. "If you managed to find out who it was, I'd like to meet the person!"

Ashton grunted. His cold gaze resumed. "Take care of yourself and just leave the rest to me."

I did not feel like going back to sleep now that I was up, maybe it was due to the fact that I had been sleeping so much I felt sick of it. "Not many people would hate me to the point of plotting my murder. The people who would actually dare to carry it out are even scarce."

I couldn't figure out who would be that bold to do such a thing.

Nora entered the ward. Her eyes looked swollen like she had been crying for a long time.

At the sight of me sitting up in bed, she paid no heed to Ashton and ran over to my other side and threw herself onto me. "You're finally awake," she sobbed. "You've been asleep for three whole days! I'd thought that you have left me behind and don't want to take me to K City anymore."

It hurt my still frail body to be embraced by two people at the same time.

It was a good thing that Armond arrived in time to pull Nora off of me. "She just woke up. Are you planning on knocking her out again?" he chided Nora.

"Don't be preposterous!" Nora shoved Armond indignantly. "Scarlett is fine. She'll always be."

She wiped her tears at that. "I'm sorry, I did not know that you are allergic to sesame," she said guiltily. "If I knew that the matcha cheese had that amount of sesame in it, I would rather die than to have caused you to have that reaction!"

I chuckled and patted her hand. "It's not your fault, Nora. It was mine for not noticing in the first place. Anyway, it was an accident!"

Nora still felt to blame. "If you did not have that allergic reaction, we wouldn't have come to the hospital, and you wouldn't be abducted. It's all my fault. If we ever caught the man who did this to you, I'll kill him myself!"

"Have you caught him?" Armond turned to Ashton and asked.

Ashton pursed his lips and cast a meaningful look at Armond.

Nora did not understand. "Couldn't you see what he looked like from the surveillance? Even if he had a mask on, you would have found him by now! It's been three days!"

"There was a switch," Ashton explained. "The man who took Scarlett into the morgue wasn't the same man who had administered the sedative." He frowned, deep in thought. "The man who made it into the morgue made every effort to avoid the cameras."

Armond was silent for a while. "Does the trail of evidence end here, then?"

Ashton said nothing but patted my back gently.

"Forget it," Nora said, in an attempt to keep the conversation positive. "Let's eat before we do anything else. There's still plenty to do in Lavelian Village. We would have to go back there after eating."

I perked up. "Has the project in Lavelian Village commenced?"

"Yes, it has." Armond nodded.

I was still doubtful but did not pursue the matter.

Nora brought some food for me, then she and Armond departed in a rush.

I did not have much of an appetite as I had just woken up. Nora's cooking was delicious, but I could not force myself to eat much.

“Finish up!” Ashton chastised as he saw me giving up after several mouthfuls.

“I’m really not hungry, I don’t feel like eating,” I pleaded.

“I’ll feed you.”

I glared at him. “Did the doctor say when I could be discharged?” I asked, in an attempt to divert the subject.

“A few more days, as you’ve just regained consciousness.”

I could tell from his expression that he was determined to let me stay and rest for a couple more days. At the thought of Lavelian Village, I grew serious. “Ashton, any leads on the case on Lavelian Village?”

I recalled him mentioning that he considered withdrawing his involvement.

“Another obstacle. Don’t you think that I am fulfilling somebody else’s wish by giving up and walking away?”

His meaning slowly dawned on me. “Do you think it was done by the same person?” I asked, my eyes wide as saucers.

The robbery at the base, Nora’s fall, and the numerous attempts on my life. These events appeared unrelated at first glance, but upon closer inspection, they seemed to be interconnected to serve a larger purpose.

The robbery at the base would delay the press conference. Nora's accident would halt the project at Lavelian Village.

If I did not make it out of the morgue alive, Ashton would bring my body back to K City and never step foot in A City ever again. Acceptance of the Lavelian Village project would definitely be out of the question.

Upon arrival at this conclusion, there was still something that I did not understand. "Was everything intended to harm the Murphys or the Fullers?"

Ashton was in no hurry to answer. His gaze fell onto the bowl of soup before me. "Shall I feed you?" he asked quietly.

I ate a few more spoonful. "Alright, I've eaten. Tell me more."

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Ashton rose to his feet without speaking. The doctor came in for a quick check-up. "Mrs. Fuller is completely fine. A few more days of rest and she'll be cleared for discharge."

Ashton nodded. Capitalizing on his attention being elsewhere, I pushed the half-eaten bowl of soup away from me.

After the doctor left, I rose to go to the bathroom. However, my legs were not in use for too long and I toppled over the moment I put some weight on them.

Ashton's reflexes were lightning quick. He reached out and caught hold of me. "What are you doing?" he asked sternly.

"I want to go to the washroom," I answered, trying not to laugh. That was embarrassing.

Ashton lifted me up in his arms and carried me into the bathroom. He then threw me over his shoulder and undid my pants for me.

"Ashton, I can do this on my own," I said hurriedly, pushing him away. "Please wait for me outside." I was hoping he would leave before he saw how red I was.

"What's the matter? I've seen every part of you before, haven't I?" he said with a frown.

How is that the same?

I pushed him again. "It's not the same. Please let me do this on my own. I think I can manage!"

Ashton threw my hands off bossily. "I have been changing your urine bags for the past two days," he said. "You are my wife, I should be taking care of you. I'm sure you would do the same when I'm old and grey. Stop overthinking."

I was speechless. He was right. After being married for so long, there wasn't anything left to hide from one another.

It was one thing when I was comatose, but a whole other thing when I'm completely conscious. I pushed him gently. "That was different but I'm awake now. I can do this on my own. I promise to call you when I'm done, okay?"

Ashton pouted at me. "Be careful then," he said.

I nodded.

I sighed with relief at the sight of his departing back. If not for his timeless good looks and graceful slender build, I would have assumed he was an old grumpy man.

When did he become so meticulous and fussy?

After two days of rest in the hospital, the doctor examined me one more time before declaring that I was fit to go home.

Ashton spent practically all of his time here at the hospital. He had even brought over all of my toiletries. Joseph was tasked with investigating my abduction, so the job of caring for my needs fell to Ashton.

I sat on the edge of the bed and watched him pack my clothes. "Ashton, when you're old and broke, you could apply for a housekeeping job."

"You think I'll go broke?" Ashton placed my folded clothes into the suitcase and asked.

"No," I answered after a moment's pause. With his abilities, he would never be as poor as that.

Ashton placed the toiletries into the basin we paid for during my stay at the hospital. It was used to hold the water to clean my face when I was rendered immobile in bed.

“Do we need to bring that home?” I asked. We didn’t need that at the villa.

Ashton did not reply. It was practically brand new, it would have gone to waste if it was left here at the hospital, but also stored away without use for it if we brought it back.

Besides, Ashton was the type of man who did not concern himself with the nitty gritty aspects of whether or not a basin would come in handy someday.

The janitor smiled at me as she entered to perform her daily cleaning duties.

I’ve come to befriend her during the past couple of days. She appeared to be a mute, as she had always greeted me with a smile and nothing else.

Ashton walked up to her and placed the basin on her tray of tools. In a few gestures, he had expressed his intentions.

The lady nodded vigorously in gratitude. I did not understand much and interrupt them.

We made our way downstairs to the parking lot. As I entered the car, I teased him. “Mr. Fuller, it appears that you are becoming increasingly humble.”

Ashton chuckled lightly as he fastened my seatbelt for me. “If I remained distant and aloof, I would be missing out on the joys of life being around my wife and my children. I want to be a part of that.”

He started the car but kept his grasp on me. “That’s dangerous, Ashton,” I protested.

“Do you not trust my driving skills?” Ashton teased.

I laughed but did not refute him.

As soon as I got better, I began to keep myself occupied again. Ashton took it upon himself to investigate my abduction quietly. As I did not have connections and resources, it was difficult for me to take up that task.

Since I was in charge of the project in Lavelian Village, I had to be there naturally.

After a day's rest at the villa, I packed my belongings and headed for Lavelian Village.

Nora had nothing much to do too. She spent her time either tailing behind Armond or enjoying my company.

There was much to do when the project started. Even Nora lent a helping hand.

After we returned to the hotel at night, Nora climbed into bed and complained, "After working hard for the entire day, I don't even get a room, not to mention not getting paid"

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"Would you like me to bring it up with Mr. Murphy tomorrow?" I teased. "You would enjoy some benefits if you were a member of Murphy Corporation."

Nora rolled her eyes at me. "What would I do with those benefits?" she retorted. "I would prefer to have the title of Mrs. Murphy. Plus, I don't need to be paid as I have plenty of money."

I shrugged without saying anything. "Armond would be done with work by this time, wouldn't he?" Nora asked after some thought.

"I suppose so," I replied.

She brought her clothes in with her to the bathroom. "Don't wait up for me," she said with a wink. "I won't be home tonight!"

We were all adults after all.

Ashton called me a little later. I realized with some horror that I had forgotten to inform him that morning that I would be heading out to Lavelian Village.

"Honey, are you home?" I crooned sweetly when I picked up.

Ashton's mesmerizing laughter was rather pleasing to my ears. "I am almost home. Have you had your dinner?"

I told him that I did. "How about you?" I asked while thinking hard of a way to tell him that I was at Lavelian Village.

"Yes, I have!" he replied.

“It’s good to know that you are taking care of yourself,” I said. “Oh, by the way, I came to Lavelian Village this morning. It’s been really busy, and I’m afraid that I would have to spend the night here.”

He grunted, the joy in his voice diminishing considerably. “I have to spend the night alone, don’t I?” he asked sorrowfully.

This man...

“I had to spend the day alone, too.” I laughed. “Where did you go, by the way? Who were you with?”

I have to admit that this was not the most subtle way of changing the topic of a conversation.

“I was with Joe,” he replied frankly. “Can you come back by tomorrow? We can have dinner together.”

I gave it a thought but decided against it. There was simply too much to do.

“I don’t think I can,” I said apologetically. “Why? Do you have anything going on?”

“I have to return to K City,” he said. “There is something that I have to deal with in the company.”

Ashton was at A City for almost two months. I dreaded to think about what his desk in K City would look like by now. The losses would undoubtedly be heavy.

“When you would be departing?” I asked. It’s a hectic period for both of us; we would have to fend for ourselves for the time being.

“Tomorrow!” he said glumly. “Joseph will remain here. You can ask him for help whenever you need to.”

I nodded.

We spent a little more time flirting over the phone. At this moment, Nora emerged from the bathroom clad in a bathrobe. “Babe,” she said to me. “Have you taken my feelings into consideration before dirty talking your man while I’m still in the room?”

I laughed and ended the call with Ashton. “Do you plan on going out dressed like that?”

It was September and Nora wore a black dress that went halfway up her thighs. She looked sexy and gorgeous, but it was probably too cold to be out in that.

She smiled broadly and did a twirl so I could admire her dress. “Don’t worry about how cold I’ll be. Tell me how hot I look!”

I nodded as she blew dry her hair into curls, applied a little light makeup, and procured a fur coat from her closet. It looked stylish and ravishing, with a hint of goth.

Nora carefully picked out a matching pair of heels to go with the rest of her outfit. “How do I look?” she asked as she watched my expression carefully.

I knew why she took the time into looking all dolled up. “Take care and play safe!” I said.

She giggled. "Don't you worry about me," she said. "At his age, Armond would want a child. If I get knocked up, I will have a legitimate reason to marry him!"

I rolled my eyes at her. "Love should be the primary reason for everything, especially for girls. You should be moving from dating to marriage to having a child one step at a time. You shouldn't rush into having a child under such uncertain circumstances. Actually, we don't even know much about the Murphys, don't we?"

She was taken aback by my seriousness. "I know now, Scarlett." she nodded slowly. "No matter what it is, I will always prioritize my own safety."

With Nora prepared to have a fun night out, I was prepared to put away my things and tuck in for the night.

The following day, Ashton was in a rush back to K City. He only managed to send me a message before boarding.

Nora returned earlier than expected. I opened the door to the sight of her standing unsteadily in front of me. "What's up? You're back early?"

She leaned against me and mumbled, "Armond went to the base, and I can't sleep alone. So I'm back here to sleep with you."

I buried my forehead in my hands exasperatedly. "I'm leaving soon. You should take the day off and rest here if you're tired. Just stay in the whole day, will you?"

I helped her over to the bed, grabbed my purse, and left.

At the AI base, the cops searched the premises for a couple of days and found nothing useful. Armond sent them away in disappointment.

Ashton had plans in place for the continuation of the Lavelian Village project. The available AI technology in K City that we required was transported over for our perusal.