

# When There Is Nothing Left But Love Chapter 721-726

## Chapter 721

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Chapter 722

Only Ashton and I were left in the base; our eyes aligned. He frowned and queried, "Was that necessary?"

I was rather perplexed. "What do you mean?"

He pursed his lips. "Do you think that you can simply just get someone to push me away?"

I pondered for a while before asking, "Then I'll be more cautious in selecting a suitable candidate for you."

"Scarlett!" He was infuriated. "What do you take me for?"

Peeved, I tore his hand apart from mine. "Ashton, it's been so long. I've said all that is needed to be said. What's missing now is just the divorce certificate. Honestly, I really don't care who you end up with; it's none of my business. Thus, there's no reason for me to set you up with any woman!"

Glaring at his angry face, I finished what I wanted to say all in one breath. "Whatever happens between you and Rachel or any woman is none of my business. We could get the divorce certificate now if you so wish. You told me yourself that you're willing to let me go if I really couldn't accept it. Since that's the case, then there's really nothing between you and me anymore. With that said, I hope you will know your boundaries."

After that, I immediately left the base. Leedon, who was getting ready to head to the scenic spot, saw me coming out of the base. "Ms. Stovall, do you want to go to the scenic spot? Let's go together," he suggested.

I walked up to him and replied, "Okay, thank you."

And so, I got up with him on his truck and headed toward the scenic spot.

Sometimes, it actually feels good to live freely, without any worries. In the truck, Leedon and I were talking about the intricacies involving the Murphy Corporation project. He uttered, "We'll be rather busy these few days. You might take a while to get used to it. I'm just giving you a head up so that you can be mentally prepared. Sometimes, we won't be able to finish our work even if we worked until midnight. We'll have to wake up early the next day and pick it up from there."

I was stunned for a while. "It takes at least an hour to get back to the urban areas from here. Going back and forth would be time-consuming."

He nodded and smiled. "Yeah, that's why some of us decided to live here for the time being. However, we won't be so busy tonight. After we are done eating and socializing with Mr. Fuller's customers, we can go straight back home."

The truck stopped at the scenic spot. Leedon then directly took me to the hotels and restaurants there. On the way, he gave me a terse explanation about the place.

As I didn't get much sleep yesterday, I fell into slumber while waiting in the hotel lobby.

Fortunately, Leedon was there to wake me up just in time. "That's enough snoozing. We need to go and escort Mr. Fuller's customers once they arrived."

I nodded and followed him outside the hotel. While we were waiting at the entrance, Ashton and Rachel were slowly striding toward us.

It seemed like what I've said just now had offended Ashton. He didn't even bother to look my way as he approached us.

A while later, a black Bentley stopped in front of the hotel. An old man in his seventies alighted from the car, looking amiable.

“Ashton, how long has it been? I can barely recognize you now!” The old man’s voice was pleasing to the ear.

Ashton smiled and made a hand gesture to invite him inside the hotel. “A lot of things have happened in the past few years. I apologize for not being able to come and visit you during that time.”

Clueless about who that old man was, I asked Leedon, “Do you know him?”

Leedon nodded and answered, “His name is Channing Oberick. He’s a powerful man here in A City. That being said, he’s very humble. He bought a piece of land in Lavelian Village and he often comes here to take in the greeneries. Every other famous person in A City holds him in high regard.”

Oberick?

Curious, I queried, “Are there other people in A City who shares the same family name, Oberick?”

He shook his head. “No, there’s only one family with the name Oberick here. What’s the matter?”

I shook my head. The incident between Nora and Derek at the bar came to my mind.

Come to think of it, the Grandpa mentioned by Nora must be referring to Channing Oberick.

After we entered the hotel lobby, Ashton and Channing walked into a private room in the restaurant. After they sat down, the waiter served them a bowl of soup.

Channing was delighted to see a table full of people. He gazed at Rachel, who was sitting beside Ashton. “Ashton, you should introduce her to me!”

Ashton smiled and responded, "Yes, I do intend to do so. But since we've just sat down, we should take it easy first."

After that, Ashton kept on rambling. Upon hearing the name Rachel Zimmer being mentioned, Channing uttered, "I heard from your Grandpa on the phone before that your wife's family name was Stovall. Why has her family name changed to Zimmer?"

Rachel stood up and smiled. "Mr. Oberick, my family name is Zimmer. You can call me Rachel!"

That still didn't answer Channing's question. Ashton didn't bother explaining to Channing either. He only glanced at me before moving on to introduce the others.

Since Channing was quite old, he didn't notice that I was skipped over during the introductions. After the dishes were served, Ashton and Channing continued with their chit-chat.

## **Chapter 723**

On the other hand, I was lost in my thoughts. Channing mentioned Grandma just now. Maybe he knows her?

Although I had a lot of questions, I squelched the urge to ask them in the end. When will Nora take me to visit Channing privately?

My intention was not to get on his good side. Rather, I was curious about my Grandma's past as I thought she had always lived in R Province.

However, it was strange that she knew George. Not to mention, she always carried a mysterious and exquisite box with her. Seeing as even the Oberick family in A City knew her, it was highly likely that Grandma was not from R Province.

“Scarlett!” Leedon had been calling out to me quite a few times now. He pulled on my arm and said, “Channing is talking to you!”

I paused for a while before gazing at Ashton. His dark eyes were directed at me with his lips pursed.

Channing was holding back his laughter as he glanced at me with his gentle eyes. “This lady here blanked out!”

I immediately got up to bow and apologize. “I didn’t mean to, Mr. Oberick. I’m so sorry!”

Channing burst out laughing. “It’s fine, it’s fine. You young ins prefer a more cheerful atmosphere. I get it! Eating with an old man like me is indeed quite boring.”

My face turned red as the awkwardness consumed me. Before I could explain to Channing, Ashton interrupted and uttered, “She has always been like this. Pay no mind to her, Mr. Oberick.”

Channing glared at me with a smile on his face and replied, “This lady here seems rather familiar to me. I’m not sure where I’ve seen her before.”

“Mr. Oberick, I heard that you are quite fond of tea bowls. I’ve brought a set of tea bowls from K City as a gift to you. Please have a look if you like them or not.”

At that moment, all eyes in the room were drawn to the tea bowls.

Rachel’s tea bowls looked delicate and refined. Any old man with a love for antique tea sets would be very happy to receive them.

Everyone started gathering around the antique tea set and was chatting fervently with each other.



Leedon moved his chair closer to mine and queried, "Are you close to Mr. Fuller?"

I paused for a second before shaking my head. "Why?"

"Nothing. It's just that he seems to be staring at you most of the time!" He grinned. "Mr. Fuller tends to be cold toward others. It's rare to see him direct his attention all on one person. Besides, he already has such a beauty beside him!"

I smiled in response.

While Rachel talked to Channing, she inevitably moved closer to Ashton, who stood in between them. It looked like she was clinging on to the latter.

I took a sip of water and smiled as Rachel and Channing were still having their conversation. Rachel, who was also getting thirsty, drank from the glass of water that was in front of Ashton. A lipstick mark was left on the side of the glass.

Unperturbed by it, Ashton continued talking to Channing.

While the waiter was serving the dishes, everyone was talking to each other happily. Rachel helped Channing to get some food on his plate before uttering, "Mr. Oberick, you must visit K City when you're free. The food made by Aunt Sally is very delicious. You must try it for yourself."

Channing nodded and replied, "Sally refused to even step foot in the kitchen when she was young. It must've been quite hard for her."

My mind blanked out for a second. When did Rachel and Sally get this close?

After leaving K City for so long, it would make sense for me to miss out on minuscule things like this.

Leedon toned down his voice and said, "I've heard before that Mr. Fuller was married, but I never found out who his wife is. Could his wife be Ms. Zimmer here?"

I lowered my head and continued eating my food. "I'm not sure!"

Leedon murmured, "Ms. Zimmer here always acts coldly toward other people except for Mr. Fuller. That being said, she can be quite caring when it comes to the elderly. I think she'll be a great fit for Mr. Fuller."

I remained taciturn and continued munching my food.

Channing probably misunderstood the relationship between Rachel and Ashton as he was exhorting them to live the rest of their lives happily with each other.

Ashton pursed his lips and gazed at me with his cold eyes. Seeing as I was rather calm, he was getting even more irritated. He did nothing to clear Channing's misunderstanding.

Unsurprisingly, Rachel was very happy about the situation. She listened attentively to Channing and agreed to everything he said.

As Channing was busy eating, I got up and went to the bathroom. On my way out of the bathroom, the outdoor swimming pool caught my eye.

I couldn't help walking through the corridor that led to the swimming pool. Since it was an afternoon in August, there were copious amounts of people there. The children were hanging on to their floaties as they were playing in the pool.

There weren't many people in the deep section of the pool except for a few men who looked like they came here as a pastime.

I sat down in the lounge area. I'll wager that the old man hasn't finished his meal yet. Since he has both Rachel and Ashton to accompany him, I think I can just chill out here for a while.

In the meantime, there was a couple, who were both in swimsuits, sitting by the pool. They were probably teenagers who had just started dating each other. Both of them were blushing to see each other in a swimsuit.

## **Chapter 724**

Having wrapped themselves together in a towel, they sat by the pool and didn't go down into the water. The shy girl whispered into the boy's ear, "I don't know how to swim."

The boy chuckled and responded, "Let me teach you!"

After that, he tossed the towel aside and went into the pool first. The pool was 1.5 meters deep. Since the boy was rather tall, the water only reached his chest.

On the other hand, the girl was still scared of going into the pool and glared at the boy. She then uttered timidly, "Why don't you just swim by yourself for a while? Once I'm ready to get in the water, I'll tell you!"

The boy nodded. Being in front of his precious girlfriend, the boy's swimming ability seemed to have improved exponentially. He swam in circles around the pool effortlessly.

Gazing at this scene in front of me, I couldn't help but smile. Ah, youthful love is such bliss. Two pure-hearted people getting together and building their relationship on trust.

Admiring and adoring each other is what the first form of love is.

"What? You snuck out here to feel sorry for yourself?" asked Rachel. With beauty like her around, the men's gaze was all directed toward us.

I smiled and replied, "Why should I feel sorry for myself?"

She sat down beside me and crossed her slim, long legs, which were drawing a lot of attention. "Mr. Oberick took me and Ashton as a couple. Don't you feel sad and left out?"

I raised my eyebrows and smiled. "Nope. No matter what kind of relationship I have with Ashton, it's none of your business. Honestly, I couldn't care less who he ends up with. So, you really don't need to waste your time here trying to spite me."

Having failed to enrage me, she was miffed. "Don't act so high and mighty. Your little tactic to play hard to get, won't get you far. Men will start to be disgusted by you. Do you think I don't know what you're scheming about? By pretending to push Ashton away, you are making his desire for you grow. And just like that, you have him wrapped around your little finger. I must say, your underhanded methods are brilliant!"

Amused, I laughed and glanced at her with my head tilted to one side. "Ms. Zimmer, you really are a genius. Even I, myself had no idea that I was such a cunning and manipulative person. Haha! I might just end up believing your made-up story."

She jeered, "But it's true. If you didn't plot and scheme like a cunning little fox, Ashton wouldn't have taken a liking to you. Your looks and family background are way beneath his standards. To put it bluntly, you're just lucky to have met him a few years before I did. If we have met him at the same time, he unequivocally would've chosen me over you."

She felt gratified as she said that. The more she insulted me, the more pleased she was. "Scarlett, everything about you is plain and dull. You're more suitable to just be with an average joe. Ashton is way out of your league. The fact that you're an orphan alone is enough to justify that."

To be honest, I was enraged after hearing those words. Her intelligence and looks were what I admired her for.

Having suppressed my anger, I feigned a smile. “Ms. Zimmer, truth be told, I actually had some respect for you before. Who doesn’t like a girl who is intelligent, good-looking, and candid like you? But, after hearing what you said just now, I learned that it takes time to get to really know a person.”

“Being intelligent and attractive doesn’t mean you’re a kind person. I’ve learned that after spending more time with you. Honestly, I feel bad for anyone who will have to see your true colors.”

“You...” Furious, her face turned purple. If it weren’t for the men watching her, she would’ve pushed me into the water.

After getting it all out of my chest, I felt way better.

As I was getting ready to leave, she blocked my path and glared at me ferociously. “Scarlett, who are you to judge my character? Do you think that you’re much better than me? You can’t even bear a child now. Who’s more laughable now, huh?”

I stopped and gazed at her. “It seems like you know a lot about me. So nice of you to put in the effort just to learn more about me!”

“Humph! Do you really think that Ashton will be forever fixated on you? Mark my words; I will snatch him from you soon,” she responded.

I nodded in agreement and replied, “Yes, I hope you succeed!”

Her facial expression still looked terrible. She was probably vexed at not being able to unleash the anger fraught within her.

## **Chapter 725**

Uninterested in wasting my time on her, I prepared to get up and leave.

However, Rachel suddenly grabbed me. I frowned and looked at her in irritation. "Do you have something to say, Ms. Zimmer?"

She smiled sinisterly and replied, "Yes, of course. Since you're always so calm about everything, I think it'd be the same when you're facing death too!"

When she was done speaking, she grabbed my hand, and wanted to push me into the pool.

I did not know how to swim. Thus, out of instinct, I staggered away and pinched her in the arm as hard as I could.

She let go of me out of pain. Resultantly, her original plan of pushing me into the pool instead caused her to fall in due to inertia.

Splash! The sound of her falling into the pool was especially pleasant.

Pretty ladies who fell into the water were bound to attract the attention of men. However, it would also attract those who wanted to take advantage of them.

Thus, Rachel only struggled for a short while before someone swam over to hold her, helping her to stabilize herself. The pool was not deep, so as soon as she regained her balance and noticed the man pressed against her chest, Rachel yelled in anger, "Go away!"

The man, who did not have good intentions to begin with, then got angry and pressed her back into the water.

As she struggled, the onlookers merely stood, watching a good show. No one came forward to stop the man.

Shocked, I quickly opened my mouth to speak. Before I could get any sound out, a low voice said, "Let her go!"

The voice was low and strong. Thus, when the man heard it, he was taken aback and abruptly let go of Rachel.

When the man subconsciously moved away, Ashton got in the water and pulled Rachel back up.

She had been wearing a long dress that was made out of thin, translucent material. It was fine when the dress was dry, but now that it was wet, the dress clung to her body and showcased all her curves.

Inevitably, she attracted some vulgar looks from those around her. Once again, she had lost both her dignity and face in front of Ashton, so she started to cry.

Ashton frowned, then took off his clothes and placed them over her shoulders. "Go back to the room and change first."

Rachel grabbed onto his clothes tightly before abruptly turning to me. Disregarding her image, she yelled, "Are you satisfied now, Scarlett? Happy to see me so embarrassed?"

Confused, I frowned.

She cried as she complained, "You're the one who said that Mr. Fuller was someone you're done using and no longer need, and said that it's not worth staying with him. You don't want to treat him well, but I do. So, why are you so overbearing and not even letting others have him despite that? All I did was speak up for him and tell you how much of a good person he was so that you know what a good man you missed out on. Why did you have to push me and humiliate me like this?"

I was shocked speechless for a moment. When did I ever say those things?

What do you mean by I've used Ashton? I think he's not worth it?

I was amazed by this woman's ability to create something out of nothing.

Ashton originally had on a calm expression, but it soon darkened. He stared at me coldly and said with a sneer, "A man you've once used and no longer need? Is that all I am to you?"

I...

Rachel cut me off as I was about to explain myself. "I must admit that Mr. Fuller loves you and only has eyes for you, but you shouldn't crush his heart like that. His sincere feelings for you aren't something that you can just trample on and insult!"

I could not refute so many accusations all at once. Since when did I ever say such a thing? When have I ever trampled on his feelings?

As I tried to hold back my temper, Ashton continued to stare at me angrily. I calmed myself down before I said, "Bring her back to change her clothes."

He did not make any moves and simply continued staring. "So, are you admitting that you said those words?"

I frowned, almost ready to start swearing. "Ashton, is there something wrong with your brain? You seriously believe her just like that!"

"That's why I'm asking whether you said it." He kept on a serious expression as he continued, "As long as you tell me that you didn't, I'll believe you!"

Rachel probably did not expect Ashton to be so rational, for her face instantly paled.

I froze for a moment as well. I had initially wanted to talk it out with him but became conflicted at that moment. I was trying to push him away at first but realized that if I clarified myself then, I was no different from Rachel's accusations of my defensiveness.



“Just send her back!” Since we were going to part ways, there was no point trying to explain anything to him.

As I turned to leave, Ashton grabbed my wrist. He watched me with dark, cold eyes for a while, motionless, before he suddenly laughed. “Good job, Scarlett!”

His voice was exceptionally cold as he spoke through gritted teeth.

## **Chapter 726**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They looked a lot more intimate now.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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