

In Love, Never Say Never Chapter 1526

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The memory of how he'd put me on the spot at the mall resurfaced in my mind, and my expression soured. "What are you doing here? The kids and I were just about to go to sleep."

Abruptly remembering how he'd changed beds without even asking me, I quickly added, "Don't think that there's space for you just because the bed is bigger now. You'll take up Summer's space if you sleep here. If you really want to be a 'good father', then go back to your study and sleep there!"

With that, I whipped around only to meet Audrey's sad, puppy-dog stare.

As if having expected my reaction, she sat by the bedside with watery eyes and looked ready to burst out into tears at any second.

I took a deep breath to steel myself, not waiting for Ashton's response before I caved. "Fine, fine. Stay if you want. I'll take the right side and you take the left side, and the kids will sleep in the middle. Just try not to get too cuddly."

Audrey threw her hands in the air and whooped in excitement, rolling over to lie down in the middle of the bed. She reached out and patted the empty spots to both her sides, calling out loudly, "Greg, Summer! Come on! Time for sleep!"

Upon hearing that, Summer and Gregory both got up from the sofa and headed towards the bed.

I'd expected them to sleep right by where Audrey was telling them to and thus take up most of the center of the bed, separating Ashton and me.

At first, they did exactly that, obediently taking off their shoes and crawling into bed to sleep next to their younger sister.

But as soon as I laid down next to them, Summer got up and moved towards the far right side of the bed.

Audrey instantly noticed this, whining and tugging on Summer's clothes. "No, here! Sleep here with me! Summer!"

Summer, likely drained and jetlagged, didn't budge an inch no matter what Audrey did.

In the end, Audrey had no choice but to get up from her own position as well, stubbornly squeezing in between Gregory and Summer and falling asleep there.

When I eventually opened my eyes, I instantly realized that there was now a sizeable distance between me and Gregory and jerked awake.

Pushing a hand against the bed to prop myself up, I wanted to reach over to correct their sleeping positions before a heavy weight pressed down on my body.

In the blink of an eye, I was suddenly trapped in Ashton's embrace.

"You're crossing the line, Ashton!" I struggled to break free from his arms.

His warm, sleep-addled voice sighed into my ear, "Quiet. The kids are asleep."

I glanced at the kids out of the corner of my eyes. It was true; they'd immediately fallen asleep and were even snoring lightly, but there was still a risk of waking them.

Giving up, I whispered harshly, "Don't even think about trying anything. The kids will be able to see and hear it all."

"Is that so?" He huffed.

One of his arms let go of me, reaching behind him and fumbling around for a bit before pulling out a remote.

Holding it in front of me to make sure that I could see it, he pressed a large, red button on the remote control.

There was a small beep sound, and I felt the bed move under me. The mattress split into two, my side pulling further and further away from Gregory and the kids until I was nearly ten feet away from them.

The surprises didn't end there. I was just about to ask Ashton what was going on when the floor in the gap between our beds opened up, a thick steel wall rising up from the gap. Within seconds, the bedroom was completely split into two separate spaces.

I opened my mouth, but nothing came out.

Dear God, Ashton. Scientists and engineers didn't spend all their time designing this type of modern technology for you to misuse it in this way.

He gently pushed me down onto my bed and lifted himself up to hover over me, the fire in his eyes burning more intensely than it had before. "They won't be able to hear us now," he smirked.

As the saying goes, "absence makes the heart grow fonder", and he seemed determined to prove his fondness for me after being apart for six years.

The sun was already high in the sky when I woke up the next day. The room had returned back to its original layout, with the two beds joined together and the steel wall nowhere to be found. I was also dressed in my pajamas as if everything from last night had all just been a fever dream.

A hand massaging my sore waist, I left the bedroom and walked down a quiet hallway. I looked out of a window and spotted Summer in the distance, having brought her siblings out to the backyard to play.

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The two sisters looked to be having more fun out there while Gregory and the housekeeper were hiding under the shade, completely in their own little world as they fiddled with some miniature laptops like usual.

Hearing a commotion coming from the study, I tore my gaze away and headed there.

I stopped at the doorway. Ashton and John were acting strangely civil with one another as they stared intently at the painting bought from Nathaniel's art gallery yesterday.

The painting was being displayed on an easel in the center of the study. John sat in an armchair off to one side, occasionally sneaking interested glances at the artwork.

Ashton, on the other hand, was standing right in front of the easel. His expression was completely serious and his gaze was sharp as he reached out to feel the texture of the painting, as if he would be able to understand the artist's emotions that way.

It took a while for them to notice my presence, Ashton's eyes softening in mirth when he saw me. "You're awake."

"Mhm." I entered the room, sitting down on a chair beside John. "Why were you so insistent on buying this painting? What's so special about it?"

I eyed John as I spoke, curious about the answer.

"We should take the chance to visit while the older relatives have returned to the country," John randomly said instead, changing the topic. "It'll be easier since everyone's in one place; I don't have to run here and there."

On the surface, his words sounded like he was being considerate of other people, but I could detect a hint of sorrow in them.

After all, he hadn't seen Emma in a long time. He had every right to feel frustrated.

Ashton didn't react much, but I spoke up, "I think that's a good idea. We'll do as you say."

A reunion with Emma and Drew might be just the thing to lift John's spirits and prevent any further friction between him and Ashton.

As expected, my brother quickly sprang into action and grabbed his phone off the table, dialing someone's number as he made to leave the room. "Ask your guy to explain everything to you," he reminded me before walking out.

Does he think Ashton doesn't deserve to be called by his name?

I looked exasperatedly towards Ashton, who didn't seem at all perturbed. The corners of his lips quirked up as he helped me to my feet and led me to stand in front of the painting.

He gently lifted my right hand and guided it to touch the surface of the canvas. The rough, uneven texture of the dried oil paints under my fingertips added yet another layer of vibrancy to the artwork.

Perhaps it was because I lacked an artistic intuition, but I couldn't feel any emotions rise within me even while observing the painting at such a close distance. After a short pause, I awkwardly pulled my hand back. "I'd rather you just tell me outright. I don't have any talents in art, so I have no idea what you're getting at."

His eyes narrowed slightly. He turned around and picked up a single banknote, mysteriously pressing it into my hands.

"Am I supposed to absorb some sort of power from your wealth?" I joked. "Is this going to help open up my third eye or something?"

"Possibly," he answered. "Feel it thoroughly, and then maybe you'll understand the profoundness of this painting."

Is he pulling my leg? Without thinking twice, I crumpled up the banknote into a ball in an act of defiance, acting as if I was going to chuck it at him.

But the moment my fingers properly closed around the ball of paper in my hand, a sense of *deja vu* came over me. My movements froze mid-air, and I slowly unclenched my hand to take a closer look at the note.

Is this a coincidence?

The texture of the banknote was the exact same as the texture of Nathaniel's oil painting.

"Tell me what's on your mind," Ashton drawled out.

I snapped awake from my daze, reaching out and touching the oil painting again to make sure that I wasn't hallucinating. "Are you trying to say that the canvas used for this painting is the same paper used to print this note?"

Anyone who had studied law before knew that the entire process of making banknotes, from designing to printing to being made available for public use, was a very strictly monitored process. No matter how high your position was or how much influence you had, no one was entitled to privately own the original material for these banknotes.

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"Maybe it's a total coincidence," I rambled on. "There's so many types of paper in the world. Maybe they just feel similar."

He laughed out loud. "I haven't even gotten started on the many possibilities, but you're already jumping to Nathaniel's defense. Are you really trying to patch up our relationship with the Hall family for me?"

"Not exactly." I walked over and sat back down, placing the banknote on the desk. "This is a minor problem; we don't need to make a mountain out of a molehill. All I want is to get our plans over and done with so that our family can spend the rest of our days happily. There's nothing wrong with being a little selfish and keeping out of other people's business as long as it doesn't involve the safety of our family."

"I'm just concerned that if the country is thrown into danger, it'll be hard to ensure the safety of our family as well," he said lightly, masking any and all emotions.

It wasn't that I didn't understand the point of view he was speaking from. Any other person with such a high-ranking position like him would find it hard to stay neutral in this sort of situation, and the Fuller Corporation was currently the nation's largest chain of estate brands. After becoming a billionaire, Ashton had gotten involved in an increasing number of other industries and countless deals regarding money. He only had so many chances to turn a blind eye.

John soon returned, leaning against the doorway as he gave us both a meaningful stare. "Hook, line, and sinker."

At that exact moment, Ashton's phone started ringing. It had to be Nathaniel.

But when he picked up his phone and checked the screen, Simone's name was clearly displayed as the caller.

He answered the call and put his phone on loudspeaker before casually saying, "Hello?"

"Ashton! How could you not inform us that your in-laws had come back? You're lucky your dad has connections and managed to get someone to go pick them up, or else they might think that we were being impolite! But never mind about that; hurry up and bring the kids over, and let's all have a reunion dinner!"

There was a lot of background noise coming out from the speaker. It sounded as if the two families were getting along quite well.

And with that, the call ended.

We all exchanged confused glances with each other and at the phone.

Had we guessed wrong? What if Nathaniel wasn't the one trying to cause us harm, but the Hall parents who had been watching over the whole situation since the beginning?

Ashton quickly gave us our answer.

He slipped the phone back in his suit jacket pocket, buttoning it back up. "Using other people to do your bidding prevents your own hands from getting dirty."

He left the study, and John followed him out shortly after. I had no other choice but to trail behind them, the only one left dazed and confused.

I had gotten into the car when the realization suddenly dawned upon me: Nathaniel had woven Mr. and Mrs. Hall into his scheme! What a manipulative, calculative asshole.

What on earth does Nathaniel want?

There was no time to wonder about that. They were all enemies, and there was no guarantee that Mr. and Mrs. Hall would be easier to handle than Nathaniel.

Ashton appeared extremely calm and composed, keeping his head held high as he gripped my hand in his. "It doesn't matter who we have to deal with first. Let's just be grateful that Nathaniel made the decision for me."

No one could have expected that a reunion after six years would turn out this way.

At the Hall residence, everyone was sitting on the couches in the living room, casually chatting with each other.

Even though I had seen them through video calls before, Cameron was still excited when she laid her eyes upon me. She nearly got to her feet and came over to us, but Zachary held her back, effectively preventing our planned "emotional reunion scene" from happening.

Ashton held my hand as we walked over towards them instead, bowing his head humbly. "It's been a while, dad and mom. Uncle Louis, too."

The "dad and mom" he was referring to was Zachary and Cameron respectively, completely ignoring Nicolas and Simone beside them.

I'd expected an immediate conflict to occur, but Nicolas surprisingly took everything in stride as he grinned at us. "It's good to see you back!" he bellowed, patting the empty spaces next to him on the couch. "Dinner is starting shortly after, so have a seat."

"Where are the kids? Did you bring them?" Simone looked around for Audrey and Gregory, glancing at the entrance and then us.

I wanted to make up some excuse, but Ashton beat me to the punch. "There's no need to bring the children into the adults' matters."

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There was no beating around the bush. He wanted to have a proper discussion.

When Ashton brought me home last time, he'd made sure that Nicolas was aware of his intentions. Nothing much had happened to either side recently except for that incident with the researcher that Nicolas had hired.

The faked calm atmosphere from before instantly turned tense.

We were the guests, so naturally, Nicolas was in a much more awkward position as the host of this little get-together.

But he maintained his kind façade, chuckling, "Their arrival was so sudden, and you have children at your house, so we were worried that they might not feel comfortable there. I've already invited them to sleep at our place during their stay here."

"There's no need for that," Ashton cut in. "The presidential suite at The Jade is permanently reserved for me. That should be more than enough to accommodate them."

The corner of Nicolas' mouth quirked up slightly in contempt as his eyebrows furrowed together. It was obvious to anyone that he didn't think highly of Ashton.

After a brief pause, he spoke up. "Young people these days. Your children have already grown up, and yet you still haven't learned to respect your elders? The trip here from M Country was more than ten hours long; do you want to see them go through even more trouble? Besides, your parents-in-law live so far apart from us that we'll need to make sure to keep in contact with each other from now on. It's decided that they're staying here. I'll take good care of your wife's family, so don't worry too much."

"And what if I won't let them stay here?" Ashton asked, his tone sharp and dangerous.

"That's up to you," Nicolas shrugged. "If you're able to take them out of here, then I can't say much. Although, I will remind you: these fellows here are quite old and frail. If anything happens when you leave with them, don't say I didn't warn you."

"Are you implying that you'll make them stay here by force?" I had grown sick of his mask of kindness.

Chanaea was no place for him to be dogmatic.

Nicolas gave me a sidelong glance, the disdain in his eyes from before still there. "As Ashton's wife, you should at least call me 'father'. Did the Stovall family nor the Moore family teach you such basic manners? Or did you forget to respect your elders after a six-year-long nap, Scarlett?"

He didn't need to elaborate any further for me to realize that he already knew my true identity.

Ashton's efforts to make the Hall family think that I was nothing more than another expendable replacement for Scarlett had all gone to waste.

That single word had been enough of a warning.

He was determined that he would win against Louis because he knew that I was Scarlett, and he knew that Louis, Cameron, and Zachary were the best bargaining chips he had against Ashton and me.

Although, a small part of me felt fortunate that Nicolas wasn't targeting my three children instead.

The tension in the air was so thick you could have cut it with a knife. If anyone said one wrong word, it might trigger a full-on screaming match.

Just then, the housekeeper entered the living room and bowed. "Dinner is ready, Mr. Hall, Mrs. Hall."

The imminent crisis was instantly averted.

Each keeping their own emotions and burdens to themselves, everyone slowly gathered around the dinner table.

Ashton and I both didn't speak during the entire meal.

As for Cameron and Zachary, they'd already agreed beforehand that if Nathaniel wanted to take them away by force, they would not resist. Naturally, that plan had not changed, even if the person making them stay was Nicolas instead of Nathaniel.

The Hall couple seemed completely fine on the surface, starting and continuing one topic after the other just as they'd perfected before. Cameron and Zachary also participated in the conversation, effortlessly picking up wherever the other couple would leave off.

In the end, Cameron could only cling onto my arm as we stood by the roadside right before we were about to leave. She went on a long, emotional tangent, following the script accordingly.

Ashton looked back over his shoulder as he was opened the car door, coldly warning Nicolas, "I hope you'll follow through with your promise and treat Letty's family well. If not, I will bring down the entire Fuller Corporation with me to my grave."

We came as three people, and we returned as three people.

Even though this was all a part of Ashton's plan, I couldn't help but feel anxiety prick at my heart as I watched Louis' and everyone else's silhouettes slowly grow smaller and smaller on the horizon.

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Noticing my unease, Ashton reached out and pulled me into his arms, handing me an anti-anxiety pill. "Your family will not be harmed in any way. I promise you that."

Ashton was not someone who made promises lightly, let alone make a promise about something he had no confidence in. Knowing that helped ease some of my stress.

"Let's not get too ahead of ourselves," John glanced at us through the reflection of the car mirror. "Looks like we have a long night ahead of us."

The sentence had barely left his mouth when lightning struck outside. The trees on both sides of the road were shaking violently due to the strong wind as the deafening sounds of thunder filled the electric air.

This was not going to be a normal night.

After arriving home, I quickly washed up and put the kids to sleep before putting on a warm coat, heading downstairs to the living room.

John and Ashton were both already there. The former was resting his chin in one hand as he sat on the sofa with a gloomy expression, while the latter's back was turned to me as he stood in front of the floor-to-ceiling window. Every time there was lightning outside, the sudden flash of brightness would cast a striking, lonely shadow of Ashton on the floor.

So they haven't gotten any updates yet.

Waiting was always the hardest part of doing anything.

If all went well, Ashton's men would find Nicolas' secret hideout tonight and ambush it.

If not, a sleepless night like this one would likely be our daily routine for many days to come.

Nothing happened for the entire night. My body was starting to display signs of fatigue, but my brain was still fully alert.

The darkness outside eventually turned into light, and the rain turned from a heavy downpour into a faint drizzle.

John, unable to sit still, abruptly got to his feet and pulled his coat on. "I'm going to pull the Hall residence apart brick by brick if it's the last thing I do," he declared, heading for the door.

This was what we'd agreed on when putting together this plan: if an accident happened, we would go all out and not hold anything back anymore.

But that was merely the backup plan. If we really did take matters into our own hands now, Nicolas might team up with the police and we would end up being the ones at a disadvantage. That's why we wanted to avoid taking last-resort measures as much as possible.

"Let's wait for a while longer," I called out, stopping John in his tracks and glancing at the clock. "There's still half an hour left to the time limit we gave them. Maybe there was a delay because of the heavy rain."

"I don't have the patience for that," John grumbled but stayed where he was. He seemed deep in thought for a second before finally looking at Ashton, letting him make the final decision. "You came up with this idea. You tell me: are we still going to sit around doing nothing?"

He wasn't explicitly blaming Ashton, but I could hear an undercurrent of frustration.

I doubt he'd meant to direct his anger at Ashton; after all, our relatives were in danger, and we were all growing desperate.

I trusted that this version of Ashton whom I'd reconnected with after six years was no longer the man from before: a cold, nearly robotic person who was willing to sacrifice anyone and anything in

order to achieve his ambitions. John's impression of him, however, was still stuck in the past.

I opened my mouth in an attempt to defend Ashton when I suddenly heard his deep voice speak up from behind me: "I'll go with you."

The time limit had been set in place by us to ensure that we'd be able to bring our relatives back home safely by a certain time, even if the plan had failed. Before the time limit was over, any action we took that the Halls might notice would risk hurting the very people we were trying to save, thus setting us back.

But Ashton had just agreed to go out and take that risk with John.

He glanced over at me, picking up a thick blanket and draping it over my shoulders. "Go upstairs and try to sleep," he whispered, his voice soft and husky. "I promise that I'll bring back your parents and Uncle Louis home safely."

Parting with a reassuring smile, he let go of me and walked towards the door.

Even John was surprised by Ashton's response, frozen in shock for a second before quickly following on his heels.

The two of them passed by me and headed for the staircase. At that exact moment, the ringing of the phone broke the long, tense silence of the past few hours.