

In Love, Never Say Never Chapter 1516

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As expected, the art gallery was packed with guests. We seemed to be a little out of place, being the only ones who showed up with the whole family.

Nathaniel was busy entertaining his other guests, so we decided to look around the gallery ourselves.

The gallery adopted the Epea architectural style from the last century. Its lobby with vaulted ceiling introduced a historic charm to the place. Under such an atmosphere, the oil paintings on the wall seemed to be veiled by a sense of mystery.

Standing in the middle of the lobby, John fixed his eyes on the Mona Lisa's smile and gauged its authenticity. "Do you guys think it's authentic or fake?"

"I suppose it's authentic," I blurted out. "Those who show up today are all prominent figures. Besides, Nathaniel is rich. I don't think he would display a reproduction in his gallery."

"What do you think?" John asked Ashton.

"Well, it can be authentic, and it can be fake. Actually, the oil paintings themselves have no value. They only gain popularity and rise in value because they are much sought after. To some extent, it is an excellent marketing tactic by attaching the artists' feelings and life experiences to the artworks."

"I'm not asking you about business. I'm asking you if the painting is authentic." John grew serious as he put his hands in his pockets.

Ashton curled his lips into a cold smile. He stooped down to pick Audrey up and then replied nonchalantly, "Well, that depends on how many people believe in its authenticity."

With that, he left with Audrey to look at the other paintings, leaving John and me behind.

Both of us shared a look and unanimously shrugged in resignation.

Ashton's words indeed made sense. The art industry was not as simple as it seemed. It was a high-risk investment, just like stone gambling and stock investment, which could make a person go bankrupt and become debt-ridden.

Since Nathaniel could set up such a grand art gallery, he must be one of the few who got to lay down the rules in the industry. Hence, it was not surprising that he could make huge profits.

After a few minutes, the excitement when we first stepped foot in the gallery faded away. After all, we were not art enthusiasts.

In the end, Ashton brought the energetic Audrey outside the villa as the latter might prefer being out in the nature.

Initially, John was keeping me company. Later, he went outside to answer a call from M Country to avoid disturbing the others in the gallery.

Soon, I grew tired after standing for a while. As I decided to find a place to rest, Nathaniel's voice rang out, "Scarlett, do you think this painting is portraying the ebb or flood?"

I straightened up upon hearing his voice. Soon, I realized he was talking about the picture in front of me.

It was a beautiful piece of art featuring the sun and breaking waves, a distant view from the seaside. At first glance, one couldn't really tell if they were ebb or flood tide since it resembled both.

After thinking for a while, I answered, "I think it's flood tide. This is a painting of the sea when the sea level rises during sunset. Although the sun still looks reddish, it is sinking below the horizon."

Nathaniel cast his eyes downward while curling his lips into a faint smile. "Well, I think it's ebb tide. During sunrise, the seagulls fly, and the tides recede and move away from the oceanfront. One can imagine how magnificent such a scene is. When we take a step back and make a concession in life, we can get a wider field of view of the peaceful scenery."

It was not surprising that Nathaniel could make an innuendo with a random oil painting. After all, he was a guileful one who had been hatching a plot for all these years.

So, does he mean he wanted to make peace with us?

Just as Nathaniel finished saying that, John was back. The two nodded at each other.

With a troubled expression, John brought me a piece of news, "Uncle Louis is back in the country with Zachary and Cameron."

Feeling confused, I asked, "Why did they suddenly come back? They're not young anymore. How could they stand the tedious journey? Why didn't you dissuade them from flying?"

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With that, I observed Nathaniel's reaction from the corner of my eye and as expected, he took the bait.

Nathaniel joined in the conversation with a smile. "You mean my in-laws will be returning to the country? That's great. I haven't seen them in years. When will they arrive? I'll arrange for both families to have a feast together."

"That's not necessary," John refused flatly, making no effort to conceal his animosity. "After Ashton and Gregory follow us back to M Country, there is no reason for both families to keep in touch, so drop the act."

Although I had expected this, I still inhaled sharply when those words left John's lips.

John was always hostile toward anyone who wasn't family. After such a strong refusal, the atmosphere abruptly turned tense. Even the guests around started casting curious glances at us, probably concerned about Nathaniel since he was the host of this art exhibition.

On the contrary, Nathaniel was much calmer than the onlookers.

Despite being publicly humiliated by John, he smiled broadly and replied, "My apologies. That was rude of me. Indeed, you're straightforward in a refreshing way and I admire you for that, John. But as the younger generation, it's necessary for me to play host as a show of respect, so I'm afraid I'll have to insist. When the elders have settled down, I'll personally visit to extend my invitation."

Without waiting for a response, he looked past John and nodded in greeting to someone behind. "Sorry, a few friends of mine have arrived. Please excuse me."

Subsequently, he strode toward the guests by the entrance and smoothly started a cordial conversation with them.

John stuffed both hands into his trouser pockets and stared after him. After a while, he said frostily, "Just look at him. He's the perfect definition of a wolf in sheep's clothing. Who could've guessed that he's a scumbag who'd resort to underhanded means all to achieve his goal?"

I didn't answer but steered the topic away instead. "Is everything in place?"

John was momentarily stunned, then snapped back to his senses and glanced at me. When a waiter passed by, he reached out to grab a glass of champagne. After taking a sip, he replied languidly, "Don't worry. If that guy found out, he wouldn't be behaving like this right now."

"Good." I nodded. Although it was a foolproof plan, it involved the safety of our elders, so I still felt uneasy about it.

I felt a pang in my heart. They should be living their retired lives in peace, but instead, they had to travel across the sea for us.

But for the sake of the bigger picture and everyone's safety in the long run, we had no choice but to take this risk.

About ten minutes later, Ashton came back with Audrey and asked as soon as he came to a stop beside me, "Did any of the works capture your interest?"

“Huh?” I was bewildered. Aren’t we only here as a formality? Do we have to spend?

Ashton ignored my confusion and turned to look at the painting of a sunset by the beach next to him. “Let’s take this one.”

Before I could respond, he turned back to me and said matter-of-factly, “I like it. Buy it for me, Honey.”

Not accustomed to this, I blinked dumbly as a shiver ran down my spine.

John immediately gave an exaggerated shudder and snickered. “You’re giving me goosebumps all over. Please be mindful of your behavior in public.”

Ashton shot him a flat stare, then held his palm out to me. “I need money, Honey.”

This form of address was really getting to me. Afraid that we would draw unwanted attention to ourselves, I swiftly took out a credit card from my bag and handed it to him.

This card was given to me by John back at the hotel and was said to be without credit limits. However, I had never used it, so I wasn’t sure if it could be paying for such a famous and priceless piece of art.

Ashton didn’t seem to care. After taking the card, he walked toward the staff a short distance away who was in charge of recording the sales and purchases of the works, signaling that he wanted to buy the sunset by the sea painting.

The process was rather smooth. The transaction was complete after he signed the sales contract and swiped the card. Later on, the painting would be sent to the house.

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After making the payment, Ashton returned the card to me and expressed his intention to leave.

As Nathaniel was occupied by guests trying to flatter him, Ashton took the opportunity to lead us out through the side door.

The moment Audrey was buckled up inside the car, Nathaniel rushed over and called out, "Ashton, Scarlett, wait."

"What do you want?" Ashton turned around and asked blandly.

Nathaniel smiled faintly and shifted sideways to allow the assistant behind him to step forward and present the oil painting that was already wrapped in kraft paper.

"My staff are inexperienced. Since you like this painting, just take it with you. You don't need to pay a single cent. I'll arrange someone to follow behind your car and deliver the painting to your house, then find a suitable spot to frame it up."

Having said that, one of the assistants brought a cheque forward and respectfully handed it to Ashton with both hands.

There was nothing odd about bestowing gifts to your own family. In fact, it could strengthen the bond between them, but there was no such bond between us and Nathaniel, to begin with.

Ashton stared unblinkingly at him and parted his lips slightly. "Even brothers need to keep family and business separate. Besides, I don't like taking advantage of others."

After that, he swiveled around and got into the car, taking the seat next to Audrey without once looking back. John replicated his actions, pulling open the front passenger door and sliding in. Hence, the atmosphere turned rather awkward.

I was left with no choice but to patiently lighten the situation. "They don't have anything against you. It's just how they are. Don't take it to heart, Nathaniel."

"Of course." Nathaniel didn't seem angry at all. Then, he changed the topic. "Anyway, make sure Ashton enjoys his vacation. I'll see him at the company."

At the mention of the company, my expression froze slightly, but seeing that he had no intention to continue speaking, I pursed my lips into a smile and boarded the car.

Even after the car roared to life, Nathaniel's smile did not falter as he stood in place and saw us off. However, it was a superficial smile that concealed his scheming ways.

After the car drove a distance away, Ashton's voice filled the car. "What did Nathaniel say to you just now?"

I was coincidentally trying to figure out the deeper meaning in Nathaniel's words. A brief pause later, I relayed, "He said to return to the company after your vacation is over."

John interjected from the front seat, "He didn't even come forward to stop you from resigning before. Then he visited late at night, but it was about his own art exhibition. He didn't show any concern for the company, but look, he's finally showing his true colors."

He wasn't deliberately making a jab at Nathaniel, but his actions in the past two days were too phony. One second he pretended to be unconcerned about the grudges between the Hall family and Ashton, and the next, he was making insinuations through the oil painting and the art exhibition. Unbeknownst to him, it was all merely a clown act to us.

Ashton didn't display much of a reaction. He only lowered his gaze, as though immersed deep in thought.

His subtle mannerisms were all too familiar to me. I could tell at a glance that he was already formulating a plan in his mind. But as usual, he would keep everything to himself and carry the plan out in secret. In the end, we would only get to know the outcome and not the process.

This seemed to be a habit he had developed when he dedicated his life to avenging his parents over twenty years ago. After falling in love, he gradually changed his ways, but after experiencing amnesia and breaking out of the hypnosis placed on him, his temper and habits spiraled out of control and everything went back to square one.

But I knew that change couldn't be rushed. Reaching out to gently nudge his arm, I took the initiative to ask, "What have you thought of?"

Ashton turned his head to look at me as surprise flashed across his eyes, but it vanished as soon as it appeared. In a calm voice, he explained, "Let's see it to the end. Since Nathaniel is so keen on becoming a successful hunter, then let's work even harder to play the role of a trapped prey and return to the company because we're left with no choice."

His thoughts coincided with mine. It seemed like the hypnosis didn't cause him to lose the tacit understanding he shared with me for more than a decade.

I failed to stifle the smile on my face and slid my hand toward Ashton's to interlace our fingers.

"Oh God, save me." Upon noticing this from the front passenger seat, John held his forehead in agony. "Please get me away from this place this instant. I'm going to die from all this public display of affection."

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At her age, Audrey couldn't understand her uncle's joke. Tilting her head, she asked with concern, "Uncle John, are you not feeling well? Me too. Just follow me, Uncle John!" She proceeded to demonstrate a breathing exercise. "Breathe out all the bad energy and you'll be as good as new!"

Due to my previous experience with Summer, I was worried that Audrey had come down with some sort of illness. "Are you not feeling well, Audrey? Tell me where it hurts," I asked anxiously.

Audrey shook her head first and peered at me innocently. "No. I just don't like the smell of that man's place."

I immediately realized that she was talking about Nathaniel's art gallery. Indeed, oil paint gave off an unusual smell, but it was already much better after drying up. The paintings had also undergone special care and maintenance. Hence, the smell usually

wouldn't affect its viewers. I never expected Audrey's nose to be so sensitive.

No wonder Ashton brought her outside within a few minutes of exploring the gallery. He probably noticed Audrey's discomfort.

My eyes snapped to Ashton, to which he calmly explained, "She's allergic to oil paint, but she didn't come in direct contact with it, so she's fine."

I was taken aback for a moment, not expecting him to be so attentive when it came to matters regarding our child.

But in the next second, I noticed that something didn't add up. If Audrey is allergic, then why did he buy that painting?

As if reading my mind, Ashton added, "I would never spend my wife's money if it wasn't for a good reason. You'll understand when we get back."

Since he put it this way and Audrey was fine, I didn't inquire further.

Immediately afterward, Ashton instructed Joseph, "Head to The Jade first. We'll go back after eating."

Audrey absolutely loved food. Thus, she immediately bubbled with excitement. "Yay! I wanna eat lots and lots of cakes!"

At the mention of cakes, she turned to look at me with puppy dog eyes. "Mommy, does that mean Greg has to eat alone?"

It was just a meal. It was good for boys to learn to be independent from a young age. Besides, the school wasn't on the way.

Just as I was about to explain to Audrey, Ashton stated his decision, "Pick Gregory up from school first."

"Thanks, Daddy! You're the best! Love you!" Audrey clapped her hands with joy.

After passing an intersection, Joseph replied, "Yes, sir." Then, he swiftly switched to another lane and drove in the direction of Gregory's school.

Glancing at Ashton again, I noticed the gentle look on his face that was bordering on fatuous. Needless to say, this look was only reserved for his precious daughter.

Never before had he shown such unconditional indulgence to anyone, not even me.

Indeed, this was the magical bond of blood ties. A daughter would always be the apple of her father's eye.

Thinking about this, I couldn't help but feel slightly despondent.

John told me before that Summer recovered very well under Jared's care. Because of her great aptitude for mathematics, she was accepted into a program for gifted children in a well-known university in M Country and Jared had constantly stayed by her side to take care of her.

Although she was a genius in her own right, she was still a teenager after all. Without the warmth of her family, she undoubtedly missed out on many happy moments.

I had been absent for six years of her life. At present, the crisis was still unresolved. I didn't know when I could finally be a part of her life again. At the thought of this, I struggled to breathe through the pain of failing Macy.

I could only hope that Ashton was right and Jared had truly turned over a new leaf.

If he was merely bidding his time to exact revenge, she wouldn't be able to handle that kind of betrayal.

...

An hour later, we arrived at The Jade.

Emery seemed to be expecting us as she was already waiting by the entrance when we got there. As soon as Audrey hopped out of

the car, Emery walked forward with a wide smile and reached out to hug her. "You're finally here. Come, give me a hug!"

Audrey frequently spoke to Emery on video calls, so they weren't strangers to each other. Hence, she allowed her aunt to hug her.

After greeting everyone, she turned around and led us in.

Getting too carried away often resulted in accidents. When we passed through the lobby, a waiter happened to be escorting some guests away. Emery was so focused on talking to Audrey that she almost ran into them.

Luckily, Ashton had quick reflexes, stepping forward at lightning speed to block the similarly oblivious waiter. Only then did I release a breath of relief.

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The waiter was shocked when he saw Ashton's face and apologized profusely. "I'm so sorry, Mr. Fuller and Ms. Moore. I didn't see where I was going. Are the two of you alright?"

Emery only realized the situation after a beat and immediately chided the waiter with a stern expression. "Didn't the manager make sure that you passed basic training? If you run into a guest, can you afford to bear the consequences?"

This was her own business after all and there were still guests waiting beside them. Hence, Emery held back her anger and said, "Alright, send our guests off first, then bring a good bottle of wine over later."

"Yes, I'll go right away!" The waiter didn't dare to meet Ashton's gaze at all, lowering his head while he spoke and hastily leading the guests away.

Ashton stood there with a face devoid of expression, but the moment the waiter left with the guests, he lifted his hand to dust off the spot he was bumped into.

I initially thought he wouldn't pursue this matter, but Emery frowned and immediately called over the front desk manager.

"Transfer the employee from just now to logistics. He's not allowed to come to the lobby anymore."

Of course, the manager didn't care much about a small fry's welfare. He quickly nodded and bowed respectfully. "Yes, I'll arrange it right away."

"Good." Emery nodded. Seeing that Ashton gave no reaction, she decided to leave things at that.

Only then did I realize that Ashton was seething in silence, waiting for Emery to suggest a solution. After all, The Jade belonged to her.

The outcome was already considered merciful. If it were in the past, that waiter's fate would be much worse.

I guess this was the life of an insignificant person. If he failed to do what was required of him, he didn't deserve his position and could only face the consequences. Not to mention, the one he offended was a somewhat paranoid perfectionist such as Ashton.

Subsequently, the manager guided us further in.

We walked along a hallway and reached a private room. Emery stepped aside to give way to us.

Baffled, I linked arms with Ashton and walked into the room. Upon seeing the people inside, I stood paralyzed to the spot.

The girl at the table was wearing a student uniform with her hair swept in a high ponytail and her head already reached the shoulder of the man beside her. There was a layer of mist in her eyes, but I could see that she had blossomed into a graceful young lady.

At that moment, I thought I was seeing Macy standing there while smiling at me with joy.

Pressure built behind my nose as tears stung my eyes. I subconsciously let go of Ashton's arm and shuffled closer to that familiar figure. "Macy?"

"Mommy..."

The girl's clear voice reminded me of the sound of bells. Perhaps it had been too long, but I couldn't seem to recall Macy's voice. At that moment, I only felt like I was meeting someone I knew a lifetime ago.

Dazed, I slowed in my footsteps.

However, the girl couldn't seem to wait anymore, running toward me with tears in her eyes. Before I could react, I was already enveloped in a warm embrace.

"Mommy, I missed you so much!"

I finally snapped out of my daze. This girl wasn't Macy; she was Summer.

She looked so much like her mother that I found it inconceivable.

I slowly hugged her back and parted my lips to exhale a long breath, holding down the urge to cry. Then, I patted her on the back and whispered, "Thank God you're alright. Thank God..."

Many times, when missing her kept me up throughout the night, I would think about all the things I wanted to say to her. However, I found myself bereft of speech upon finally seeing her again. Instead, all those words seemed to be channeled into my actions and the silent tears rolling down my cheeks. At that moment, it seemed like nothing I said would be enough to alleviate the pain that came with six years of separation.

After what seemed like an eternity, a deep male voice broke through the silence.

"Let's sit down first and talk."

Following the source of the voice, it took me two seconds to recognize the man as Jared.

He kept the same hairstyle he had six years ago. Genuine warmth and humility shone in his slightly squinted eyes. The only difference was that the strands of hair curled at his temples were already white, making the dark stubble on his chin look a bit fake.

Perhaps it was.

Time was enough to resolve all grudges.

I could no longer remember which great man said this, but when our eyes met, it felt like many things from the past had faded away. We nodded to each other in greeting, but we both knew who it was really for.