

In Love, Never Say Never Chapter 1626

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“Yes.”

I glanced at Shaun, barely able to hide my surprise. He had been standing silently behind Gregory all this while, and if I had not turned around earlier, I might have questioned my hearing. Shaun had, without a doubt, drawn the analogy of the dolls calmly.

Despite the glaring lack of scientific evidence backing his claims, it was more than enough to convince Audrey.

Children of the same age had an inexplicable way of understanding one another. Both Gregory and Shaun had the same uncanny way of getting through to Audrey where adults could not.

There was virtue in keeping things simple, especially when it came to reasoning with children.

Children viewed the world through a simple lens, and they tended to categorize things into neat blacks and whites. They were acceptable of boundaries their parents drew; yet, raising them in an overly-sheltered environment could inadvertently backfire and impede their development.

I relaxed slightly as these thoughts crossed my mind. The sight of Nora’s eerily-similar face no longer frightened me as much as it did.

Shaun’s words completely helped us out of the situation. Thus, Nathaniel and Nora had no excuse to keep us from leaving anymore.

I had no desire to stay in this wretched place any longer.

Ashton silently made a move to lead the kids away. Nora, however, was not about to let Shaun getaway after ruining her plans, and she grabbed him before he could approach us.

She planted her hands on Shaun's shoulder menacingly and scrutinized him. She cooed like an excessively-friendly elder, "Which family are you from?"

Shaun glanced at her calmly before looking at Ashton and me. He said, "Mr. and Mrs. Fuller adopted me. I'm their adopted son."

"Is it?" With her gaze locked on Shaun, Nora continued, "Your family has finally reunited after a long time. I thought you'd be dying to shower your biological kids with love before taking in an unwanted orphan."

She paused slightly, but not long enough for any of us to rebuke her. "Fate has brought this kid into our acquaintance. It's fortuitous that Nat and I don't have children. Why don't we adopt him instead? We can share your burdens of childcare."

I was about to reject her offer when Ashton's voice rang out. "I can afford to care for as many kids as I please. There's no need to trouble outsiders at all."

He lowered his gaze and glanced at Shaun. "Why are you standing there? Do you really want to stay here?"

Shaun caught his meaning immediately and plucked off Nora's hands from his shoulders. He walked toward us determinedly, making his stance toward her offer crystal clear.

He did not even need to say a thing to convey his decision.

I mussed his hair fondly in approval.

"We'll get going, then. You don't have to send us out," I declared.

I nodded at the couple in farewell and ushered the kids out the door, Ashton following closely behind.

Once we were safely in the car, the children began fooling around in the backseat.

Audrey was so excited that even Gregory struggled to keep her in her seat.

"I'm starving! I can't wait to eat the cake when I get home! Greg, Shaun, you can't eat my share!"

Gregory replied in resignation, "Whatever you want."

Shaun remained silent.

"Mommy, did Daddy really make the cake? Daddy's the best! Isn't Daddy Superman?"

I answered her patiently, "Of course, Daddy made it himself! Daddy isn't Superman, though. Superman is too busy saving the world than to spend time with us."

"Mommy, does Daddy know how to make lollipops too? Those super huge ones!"

"I- erm, why don't you ask Daddy?"

Audrey's questions came flooding out like a dam that had burst.

"Daddy, do you know how to do it?" In her excitement, she had leaned forward between the two front seats in the car.

I thought Ashton would appease her like he usually did. To my surprise, he pulled up to the curb.

Despite his safe stop, the car still shook slightly from the sudden motion. Audrey wobbled on her feet and would have fallen over if I had not caught her.

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I was getting perplexed at Ashton's poor driving technique when the man in question said sternly, "Audrey, do you not want to eat cake tonight?"

Ashton's anger was palpable, and the temperature in the car seemed to drop several degrees.

Even Audrey knew not to behave in her usual daring manner in the face of her father's anger. She retreated to the backseat and mumbled, "I do..."

Ashton met her gaze through the rearview mirror and demanded, "Then, why were you jumping around in the back when Daddy was driving? You even leaned forward to disturb me while I was driving. What if you got injured? Do you think that was the right thing to do?"

Audrey shook her head blankly and said uncertainly, "No."

"Don't be so stern. You're going to scare the kids," I whispered to him.

Instead, Ashton seemed to ignore my words as he asked Audrey, "Then, what should you do?" Evidently, no one could sway him when he got down to business, not even his wife.

Audrey was not as naive and fragile as she looked, after all. She pondered his words for a moment before returning to her seat and obediently strapping herself in.

Only then did Ashton start the engine of the car and continue driving.

The rest of the drive passed by uneventfully.

I half expected my princess to throw a tantrum once we got home. She foiled my expectations by speeding into the house excitedly as if she had forgotten the unpleasant incident in the car.

When we walked into the living room, we saw Audrey coming out of the kitchen with Ashton's bunny-shaped cake in hand, which was missing a corner. The buttercream around her mouth tipped us off about what had happened.

She walked toward the dining table as she called out to Gregory and Shaun, "Greg, Shaun, come and eat the cake! Daddy's cake is so yummy! I love it!"

Gregory's sweet tooth had him running toward Audrey at her invitation.

Shaun walked over to her obediently and waited for her to "fairly" distribute the cake.

Curious about how Ashton's virgin attempt at making dessert went, I joined the trio at the dining table.

I saw Audrey passing one-thirds of the cake to Gregory and Shaun while she kept the rest for herself, a silly grin on her face.

The sight brought a wry smile to my face, and I pinched her nose lightly as I teased, "You greedy girl! You'll wet the bed if you eat everything alone!"

"Nuh-uh!" Audrey tilted her nose in defiance and retorted, "I won't!"

I smiled at her antics and decided to prank her by taking her share of the cake. "Won't you let Mommy have a bite?"

With that, I pretended to swallow the cake in one go.

Audrey pouted, though she did not refuse my request. Tears welled in her eyes.

How could I bear to tease her when she seemed this upset? I immediately put the cake in her hands and coaxed her, "There, there, Mommy's just kidding. I don't eat desserts. Here, have your cake!"

I stroked her soft hair comfortingly until she calmed down.

Ashton tut-tutted at my somewhat incompetent way of handling our children's emotions. From where he stood on the staircase, he tossed out. "You're a mom now. Which mom fights with her kid over food? If you want to try it so much, I'll make one just for you."

"Hey, you offered to do that yourself. I didn't ask for it!" I shamelessly took him up on his offer, my self-control hanging by a thread after watching the children gobble down the cake.

If I knew Ashton was talented at making desserts, I should've snuck a few bites before leaving the house!

He smiled at me lovingly before walking into the kitchen. Rolling up his sleeves, he said, "Of course, my wife didn't ask for this, but I'd love to make dessert for her. I want to feed you and the kids the most amazing delicacies day after day. From now on, I'm going to focus on being a househusband!"

I snorted at his bold declaration, though I held myself back from playing along too much. His ego did not need that much inflating, anyway. "That's a deal! Gregory, Audrey, did you hear that? Daddy's going to cook a lot of good food for us every day!"

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Audrey and Gregory were ecstatic. "I heard that!"

"Me too! Daddy's the best!"

Everything seemed like it was finally falling in place, and our life would become peaceful once more.

My hopes were shattered two days later. That afternoon, Joseph entered our house with an anxious expression on his face, tipping me off that I had been too naive about our situation.

"Go on. What's wrong?" I was not in the greatest of moods at his arrival. My frustration grew at the problems that never seemed to leave us alone.

Sometimes, I wondered why people preferred havoc and chaos over a peaceful life.

"Nora met Shaun alone."

Surprised, I asked, "Alone?"

"Yes." Joseph nodded before continuing, "They even made sure to keep Ms. Audrey in the dark."

“That’s...” I trailed off, sighing at Shaun’s change of heart.

I had been relieved at his choice at the Hall residence, yet three days was all it took for Shaun to change his mind.

I guess children are less impervious to temptation.

I now realized that Ashton’s earlier concerns were not wholly unfounded. Perhaps Shaun had never forgotten how he was abused at the hands of his previous adoptive parents, and he now saw an opportunity to exact revenge for his suffering.

Ashton remained calm in the face of Joseph’s news. Rather expressionlessly, he flipped through the newspaper in his hand and sent Joseph off. “All right. You may leave now.”

I watched Joseph’s departing figure and pursed my lips in thought. Sometime later, I turned to Ashton and stated, “You don’t seem surprised by the news.”

“Should I experience a meltdown, then?” He looked as unruffled as before. The ghost of a smile appeared on his face as his eyes pored through the financial news as if it was some piece of juicy gossip. “If I were in Nora’s shoes, I wouldn’t let go of this opportunity either.”

I shrugged and offered weakly, “But Shaun said no to them in the beginning.” Frankly, I was curious to understand how Ashton viewed Nora and Shaun’s covert acquaintance.

“So?” Ashton folded his newspaper and met my gaze. “To a businessman, anything can lead to a deal. The only obstacle is price and timing. Once the stars have aligned, anything is possible. Don’t you agree?”

I grudgingly admitted the logic in his words, and I saw no point in arguing with him.

Instead, I forced a laugh and teased half-heartedly, “The people in the village are the ones scheming for profit. Shaun is just a kid, and we’ve given him a home. Things might not turn out as poorly as you expect.”

“Let’s make a bet.” Ashton shifted into a cross-legged position and placed the folded newspaper across his knees. “I bet that he’ll disappoint you in the future.”

Shrugging, I accepted his bet. “Why not? Still, we can’t really let him pass on news about our family to Nora. Isn’t there a way for us to test him?”

“We’re in no rush for that.” He lowered his gaze slightly. Suddenly, his body stiffened as if he recalled something. Ashton tossed the newspaper on the table and straightened himself. Then, he turned to face me and adjusted his expression before stating somberly, “The results came out. Marcus’ condition is critical.”

He paused for a while before adding, “I still have a lot of sway in the matter. I’ll be in full support of whatever decision you make.”

Despite Ashton’s upsetting news, I felt a lot calmer than when we were in the hospital. Perhaps it was because I was not in the presence of a thin and sallow patient.

“Is there hope?” I asked.

Ashton replied, “I’ve contacted the best experts in the world, and they’ll arrive in K City in the next couple of days.”

I nodded, confident in his abilities to handle such matters perfectly. I saw no need to question him further on the relevant details.

Camelia’s advice suddenly surfaced in my mind, and I could no longer dismiss it as an exaggeration. “Will you come to the hospital with me tonight? I think a terminal patient needs encouragement more than anything else.”

I seemed unusually serene and rational in the face of Marcus’ deteriorating health. For the briefest moment, I imagined myself to be no different from the doctors who had grown numb to matters of life and death.

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Ashton agreed to my request immediately. "Of course." He left the couch and went upstairs. "I'll make the arrangements."

For both our sake, we kept our conversation to a minimum.

Ashton was only human, after all. It was unreasonable and cruel of me to have him accompany the woman he loved while she grieved over another man.

Hiding my true feelings in front of Ashton took a considerable amount of effort because I had always felt comfortable in my own skin around him. In contrast, my interactions with Marcus were always ambiguous. Eventually, I developed an appreciation for the freedom I had in expressing my emotions around Ashton.

Ashton changed into a set of casual wear I had chosen for him in the past before we left for the hospital. The attire dimmed his usual imposing demeanor, and he looked a lot more relaxed and approachable.

I could not help but tease his appearance. "Are you sure you want to dress like a harmless man to face your love rival?"

"Am I?" Barely batting an eyelid at my joke, Ashton walked toward me and slung an arm around my shoulder, leading us out of the house. He added cheekily, "Haven't you noticed that we're wearing a matching couple's outfit?"

I lowered my gaze and realized the truth in his words. The laugh that was about to burst out of me suddenly caught in my throat.

Jealousy was natural during a meeting between love rivals, yet I worried if the sight of a couple's outfit might trigger Marcus and worsen his condition instead.

Absorbed in my thoughts, I felt a hand squeezing my shoulder. Ashton said casually, "I'm not so petty that I would rub my victory in a patient's face. Marcus would never wish to see me. I wouldn't be surprised if hearing my name shortens his lifespan by a few days. So, you're visiting him alone."

I pursed my lips, unsure of what to say.

Ashton had more to say. "But, I'm not that generous either, so I need other ways to manage my feelings. Putting on this couple's outfit reassures me of our feelings for one another."

His nonchalant tone made it seem like he was talking about someone else, yet I knew better than anyone else how outrageous Ashton behaved when he was jealous.

He was holding in his instinctive actions for my sake.

Love often meant doing things one sometimes despised for the happiness of one's partner.

A phrase in the Bible suddenly came to mind—love is patient. Ashton's behavior right now was the living embodiment of that sentence.

I barely had time to feel touched by his actions when he shoved me into the car.

We made our way through the hospital and came to the corridor outside Marcus' ward. Camelia and her child sat on a bench outside the ward. They looked so lost it seemed like their souls had left their bodies, leaving behind two empty shells.

I did not think it was possible, but they seemed even more haggard than before.

It was no exaggeration to say that one's illness could cripple the foundation of an entire family.

Camelia seemed astonished to see us, and a smile soon blossomed on her pale face. She stood up with her child to convey their gratitude at our visit.

We exchanged glances silently before I entered the soul-sucking ward alone.

Surprisingly, Marcus was awake. I knew he heard my footsteps, yet he did not turn around and eked out weakly, "Not again. If you

really love me and want me to live a few more days, take the kid with you and marry someone else. Don't appear in my life again."

He sounded sickly and exhausted. The mean words Marcus had uttered lost their edge as they came out in spurts between his efforts to huff and catch his breath.

My gut told me that this was not the first time he had said such nasty things in a bid to push away Camelia and their son so he would not burden them with his illness.

Or perhaps his pride would not permit him to become the subject of pity.

I bit down on my lip as tears streamed down my face. Despite my best efforts to stop myself from crying out loud, some sniffles escaped me.

The ward descended into silence after Marcus' words, and he gradually turned his head to face me as he noticed that something was amiss.

Our gazes met, and I could tell that my appearance was torture to him.

I spoke as softly as I could while ensuring that Marcus could hear my every word. "If you don't want to see me under such circumstances, I can leave."

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I could empathize with Marcus if he refused to be seen by someone he loved in a state ravaged by illness. His emotions were my priority, and I would respect any decision he made.

Marcus stared at me quietly for a long time until it felt like the time and space around us were frozen. His pupils barely moved, and he did not seem angered by my presence. Only the arrhythmic beating of his heart assured me that he was still alive.

I took his silence as tactful rejection. Maybe Marcus was not prepared to see me yet.

Mustering a smile on my face, I nodded my head a fraction to let him know that I was not upset by his decision.

I had just turned around to leave when he said, "I knew you would come. Please take a seat." I knew you would come. Please, sit.

The words rang in my head as I took a deep breath to push down the urge to burst into tears. I composed myself before returning to his bedside and taking a seat.

"How do you feel today? Better?" This sort of small talk felt rather cliché to me, yet it always seemed like the most natural thing to do.

"What would you like to hear? That I'm feeling great, or no?" Each word seemed to sap Marcus' energy, though he stubbornly maintained that self-deprecating expression on his face.

Who are you trying to impress?

I smiled as I tucked the blankets around him and teased, "You shouldn't concern yourself with my feelings at this point. You're the patient here. So tell me how you really feel."

Life felt like one of Shakespeare's ironic comedies. It was the most trivial of matters that often courted the harshest criticisms and the most heartless words.

Yet, when it came time to knock on death's door, one would wear a perpetual smile and assure everyone that everything was fine. It was as if living in denial could change one's fate, even though it was no more than an act of self-deception.

The facade intensified as one inched closer to imminent death. In a sense, lying was the only way to pull through the agonizing journey toward the end.

"I feel crappy," came his loud answer. It seemed to exhaust him as he added weakly, "I feel terrible, and everything hurts. It's so unfair."

I knew he was being harsh to vent his anger, yet I could not suppress the sorrow that rose in me. My hands paused in their motion, and I avoided his gaze.

“What are you scared of?” Marcus was heaving as he said this, and his warm breath fogged up his ventilator.

I tried my best not to reveal my emotions and shook my head. Instead, I coaxed him, “Nothing. You shouldn’t be scared, either. I’ve tracked down the best doctors in the world, and they’ll figure something out. You’re Marcus White, for God’s sake. You’ve cheated death more times than I can remember, and you won’t go down so easily.”

I paused for a moment before lifting my gaze. Nudging his elbow, I added, “Be a man and put up a fight.”

He lowered his gaze slowly until it landed on the spot where I had touched him. The expression in his eyes did not change as he silently contemplated my words. A while later, he uttered, “Marry me, and I’ll hang on. Otherwise, dying now doesn’t make a difference to me.”

“Don’t be childish.” I sighed and continued apologetically, “You were there at my wedding. Marcus, I’m living well, and I’m happy. Please stop being so stubborn and let go of your obsession. There’s someone out there whose heart has always belonged to you but you haven’t seen it yet.”

Marcus’ gaze grew hazy, and it was impossible to discern if he had lost focus or was paying attention to my words.

“I won’t talk about this anymore if you don’t want to listen to it. I’ll be here every day to visit you and take care of you. Everything will be fine. Don’t overthink things—”

“I want to marry you.” Marcus raised his voice suddenly.

Shocked, I lifted my head and met his stubborn gaze.

He said coldly, “You can’t refuse me. I ended up like this because of you. In a bid to control Ashton, the Halls initially planned to skip in vivo trials and use you as their guinea pig for their

radiation trials. I offered to take your place instead, and this is the aftermath of their experiment.”

Marcus began cackling pitifully after that, and despite the absurdity of his words, I could not find it in myself to hate him.