

When There Is Nothing Left But Love Chapter 1518-1522

Chapter 1518

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."

Chapter 1519

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.

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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.

Chapter 1520

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.

Chapter 1521

After taking our seats, Summer explained that Ashton was the one who arranged for them to return to the country. They had originally planned to come back with the elders, but due to having other plans, they arrived earlier but Ashton didn't tell me because he wanted to give me a surprise.

I had to admit, he achieved his goal.

I wanted to thank him properly, but Summer clung to me and prattled on, "Mommy, do you know? I feel like I'm the happiest person in the world now. Mr. Cress said that you were sick like me too and went to a place where no one could find you. Dad couldn't handle your departure, that's why he left us. I was sad for a very long time but believed that you'd come back someday. And now you have! I knew that you would never abandon Audrey and me."

As Summer spoke, she clung to me like she used to when she was younger, making her look like an overgrown child.

My lips curved into a smile and I gently rubbed the crown of her head with mixed emotions in my heart.

Perhaps to Summer, the “truth” that everyone so carefully maintained around her had become the best part of her life.

As long as the lie was built out of love and belief, it could protect a child’s growth.

It had been six years since Summer and Gregory saw each other. She had grown up into a cheerful person and was especially fond of her quiet and elegant little brother, constantly teasing him when she got the chance.

It seemed like absence indeed made the heart grow fonder because upon entering the private room, Audrey had hung around Summer and completely ignored Ashton.

As a result, the table was divided. My side was a lively long-lost reunion, while John and Ashton’s was quiet and lonely.

Summer’s attention was fully focused on Gregory. “Hey Greg, do you remember me? I’m Summer. Your big sister.”

Gregory shook his head. “No, but I’ll remember from now on.”

Audrey cut in right then with an expectant look on her face. “Summer, did you miss me?”

“Of course I did! I thought about you every single morning when I woke up,” Summer answered without missing a beat, then pinched Audrey’s chubby cheek before turning back to tease Gregory. “Greg, you’re so cute. I’m sure there are plenty of girls who give you love letters in school, huh? How many have you received? Tell me, hmm?”

Gregory fell silent for a moment before speaking. “I don’t like girls.”

“Huh?” Summer grew up in an open-minded environment after all. Hence, she smirked and continued probing, “Do you mean you like boys, then?”

“No,” Gregory immediately denied. “Children are too noisy. I don’t like all of them.”

Summer’s reaction was exactly the same as mine back then. She froze for a moment as astonishment flashed across her face. Then, amusement filled her eyes, probably thinking that she had underestimated this six-year-old brother of hers.

Gregory wasn’t insulted by Summer’s expression, but perhaps it was to take care of his feelings, Summer stopped interrogating him. During the meal, she made sure to treat Audrey and Gregory equally.

Although Gregory didn’t display any particular affection, I knew that it was only because he wasn’t used to being the one who needed protection.

This boy resembled Ashton in this regard. Due to his pride, it would take him some time to adapt to this sudden change of roles.

I didn’t eat much during the meal, but it wasn’t because I didn’t have an appetite. Instead, looking at Summer just filled every cell in my body with so much happiness.

She had become such a radiant and kind girl who effortlessly took care of other people’s feelings. It seemed like she had inherited at least half of Macy’s genes. Every time I stared a second too long, I would mistake her as Macy and feel like she was beside me again. Subsequently, I would take a few extra glances at her, which completely distracted me from the delicious food spread out on the table.

We stayed at The Jade until three in the afternoon before finally leaving.

It was rare for the whole family to gather. Hence, I was more than eager to return home and spend the rest of the day enjoying life as a family.

However, after getting into the car, Ashton took the liberty of changing our schedule. "Go to the largest shopping mall in the city."

Chapter 1522

"Aren't we going home?" I asked.

"No." Ashton elaborated with a neutral expression, "Let Summer and Audrey shop for new clothes. Children enjoy the process of selecting clothes in malls."

Finding his words reasonable, I didn't object and went to the mall with them.

Audrey was the happiest one. As soon as we entered a high-end clothing store, she tugged John along with her and expertly maneuvered her way to the princess section, wanting to try on every dress there.

Ashton followed behind silently and explained in a justified manner, "I just don't trust John's fashion sense."

He's obviously jealous.

No one exposed him despite it being clear as day. With knowing smiles on our faces, we watched the three of them walk further in.

Come to think of it, I was quite rusty in selecting clothes. Being brought her so abruptly and without Ashton by my side, I lost my confidence. The last time I picked clothes for Summer was six years ago, and a lot could change in that amount of time. Would my taste still suit hers?

While I was doubting myself, someone linked arms with me. Turning around, I saw that it was Summer. As she leaned against me affectionately, she set her sights on the women's clothing section a distance away. "Mommy, let's go over there. I saw something I like."

I breathed a sigh of relief and walked over arm in arm.

Meanwhile, Jared and Joseph watched us from afar. At first glance, one would think that they were mannequins. Hence, the two of them drew quite a lot of attention.

Summer had good taste. The two outfits she casually threw on accentuated the vibrancy of a girl her age.

While waiting for her to try more clothes, I tried choosing a modest one for her.

Right then, I noticed that Gregory was in low spirits.

I speculated that he was probably upset because he felt left out, so I asked gently, "Gregory, boys must be more tolerant when it comes to girls. Once your sister is done, I'll accompany you to buy some clothes, okay?"

Gregory's face showed no emotion when he raised his gaze to me and shook his head. "It's okay, Mommy. My clothes are custom-made and will be regularly delivered to our house. My wardrobe is already full of clothes. I don't need new ones."

Although his tone was neutral, I still sensed the subtle change in him.

Arching my lips into a smile, I caressed his hair and said, "I need to use the washroom. Accompany your sister here and don't go anywhere. Can you do that?"

"Yes!" Gregory affirmed and he subconsciously straightened his body and snapped his feet together, looking like a miniature soldier.

Ashton was probably the one who trained him to do this.

This boy had been with him for six years and developed well in all aspects except emotionally. Just like his father, he kept everything in his heart.

Feeling reassured by the confident gleam in his eyes, I got up and left.

When I passed by the girl's clothing area, I discovered Ashton and John in a stand-off with each other.

"...Listen to me, Audrey. This princess dress suits you the best. You'll become the prettiest princess after putting it on," John persuaded.

"There's nothing special about it, but this one is different. It's low profile and modest, which highlights a little girl's innocence. Are you sure you don't want to take Daddy's advice, Audrey?"

Goodness gracious. Two grown men coming together to make life difficult for a six-year-old child?

I was about to go in and rescue Audrey, but in the next second, I realized that I was worrying over nothing.

"You should just focus on taking care of your son. What do you know about what little girl like?"

“If I’m not mistaken, you only have a son. Do you think you have more experience than someone who has a daughter?”

“Stop!” Audrey’s shrill voice halted their verbal war. She stepped forward to grab the dress in John’s hand, then turned around to grab the attire Ashton selected for her. With a disapproving yet cute frown on her face, she chided, “Stop fighting. I like both Uncle John and Daddy, so the two of you must behave. Aunt Emma said that we’re not supposed to speak loudly in public!”

Ashton and John exchanged glances and instantly clamped their mouths shut.

Audrey looked at the two of them and nodded with satisfaction. “That’s better. I’m going to try these on now. Wait here for me, okay?” she drew out her question as though she was the adult and they were the children.

“Okay,” they answered in unison.